7/6

POLITY

Vol. 4 No. 1 ISSN 1391-822X Rs. 50

- 2 JUN 2007

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

CONFLICT, WAR AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

The escalating war between the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE has once again highlighted the corrosive impact of the conflict on the country's institutions of democratic governance.

As we have seen repeatedly since the early 1980s, human rights and democracy are among the first victims of war. When the war is conducted under emergency regulations and special anti-terrorism laws, the normal democratic rights get suspended. Despite the self-censorship that some media institutions may willingly impose on themselves often out of the sense of patriotic duty, media freedom too is among the first casualties of war. Human rights violations and humanitarian emergencies become regular occurrences in civil war situations. Sri Lanka is back at the cycle of war and violence that continue to produce these horrendous consequences.

Meanwhile, the government and most of the media seems to view the erosion of human rights and the democratic process as normal and necessary in the fight against the LTTE. This is a grave mistake. In the early 1980s when the UNP government got itself enmeshed in the first phase of the war with Tamil militant groups, there was a little or no concern for the political consequences of the government's military policies. The same attitude continued under President Premadasa in the late 1980s when the state dealt with the JVP insurgency. As Professor Wiswa Warnapala, a Minister of the current cabinet, said in a scholarly book on that period, the UNP government thought that the infusion of authoritarian practices into the democratic institutions was the best way to deal with the militancy.

Scholars who have analyzed Sri Lanka's political change in the period of war and violence have pointed out how a distinct process of institutional decay, accompanied by a tendency towards illiberal governance, had set in motion. Sri Lanka seems to be moving in the direction of repeating the same experience under the new conditions of war. Those who run the government and ideologically defend these illiberal tendencies do not seem to mind this new shift towards institutional decay. They argue that patriotism should override democracy and national sovereignty should not be weakened by the considerations of the rule of law, the due process and human rights. Some political groups have even gone to the extent of branding the emphasis on human rights a Western conspiracy. These claims only rationalize an essentially negative development in the politics of Sri Lanka today, namely the continuing decay in the democratic institutions and practices in governance.

Fighting a secessionist war within a framework of democratic norms and practices, while protecting democratic institutions, is not an easy exercise. Yet, that precisely is the challenge that a mature ruling class will undertake without a complaint. If Sri Lanka's present regime is to learn a lesson from the past, illiberal governance is a self-defeating option. Illiberal governance co-exists with the militarization of state-society relations, criminalization of dissent and opposition, normalization of violence, the rise of a culture of impunity and the use of sanctioned violence in regulating politics. Similarly, when war and violence is made into an instrument in governance, institutions are pushed to the background, setting in motion a new wave of crises. As Sri Lanka experiences in the 1980s and the early 1990s, exiting from such a crisis could incur a huge cost.

It is a pity that Sri Lankan political elites have lost its memory of the crisis in the eighties. They seem to be re-inventing that crisis, perhaps with a greater magnitude, with a great deal self-satisfaction. Those who still retain the memory can only warn of the making of a greater crisis. **P**

POLITY

Vol. 4 No. 1
January-March 2007

Editors
Jayadeva Uyangoda
Kumari Jayawardena

Executive Editor and Circulation Manager
Rasika Chandrasekera

Editorial Assistant
Chandrika Widanapathirana

POLITY
No. 12, Sulaiman Terrace
Colombo 5, Sri Lanka.
Telephone: 2501339, 2504623
Tel/Fax: 2586400
E-mail: ssa@eureka.lk
website: www.ssalanka.org

Annual subscriptions:

Sri Lanka	**Rs. 600**
By Airmail:	
South Asia/Middle East	**US $ 28**
SE Asia/Far East	**US $ 28**
Europe/Africa	**US $ 30**
Americas/Pacific countries	**US $ 40**

(Please note the revised subscription rates. Cheques in favour of *Pravada* Publications)

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

TOWARDS A NORTH-EASTERN CONSENSUS

Devanesan Nesiah

Introduction

Much attention is correctly paid to securing a Southern consensus on the National Question: but very little to securing a North-Eastern consensus. The latter is just as critical to finding a solution to the ethnic conflict.

Is there a rationale for treating the North-East as an integral unit? If the North-East is to be an autonomous region, with or without semi-autonomous sub-regions, its governance should be so structured as to be responsive to the concerns of all the peoples of the region. Is an arrangement possible that would evoke the loyalty and secure the cooperation of all sections of the population? Alternatively, if the region is to be broken up, what are the options and what would be the consequences?

Whatever the solution to the National Question, it needs to begin with a North-Eastern consensus. What are the main obstacles to reaching it? Is it possible, or desirable even if possible, for the units of devolution to be mono-ethnic? What are the diverse interests and fears of the Tamil, Muslim, Sinhalese peoples of the region? Are there critical regional differences within the North-East? What are the prospects of reconciling the various concerns and aspirations?

This paper traces the political developments and salient interests of the peoples of the region since independence, highlighting the critical points of special relevance and the changes in the concerns and priorities over time. The paper also attempts to identify the common elements in the aspirations of the peoples of the North-East as well as the differences. Various proposed reforms are analysed in relation to these issues.

It would be presumptuous to prescribe a solution; that needs to emerge from negotiations among the leaders of the region, as a step toward negotiations with the centre. A basic premise of this paper is that such a process is both possible and necessary, and that it must involve the LTTE as well as Muslim and Sinhalese leaders of the region, just as the resolution of the National Question would also involve the leaders of the PA and UNP. What this paper seeks is to identify in very broad terms some of the more important concerns and aspirations, some of the difficulties hindering progress, and to analyse a few of the options in addressing these.

Politics of Ethnic Identity

The identities of the major ethnic communities of Sri Lanka developed and crystallized under British rule in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In the context of the political imperatives of the post-independence period, changes have occurred and are continuing. For example, from colonial times up to and including the 1971 census, Kandyan and Low-country Sinhalese were classified as distinct ethnic groups. For the first time the 1981 census merged the two classifications into one, viz. Sinhalese. The Kandyan-Low Country distinction had been recognized in administering the country up to independence and into the 1950s. Revenue Divisions were classified as Kandyan, Low-Country or Tamil, and served by three ethnically distinct cadres of Divisional Revenue Officers, viz. Kandyan, Low-Country and Tamil (the latter including Muslim and, presumably, Indian Tamil). In recent decades the official distinction between Kandyan and Low-Country Sinhalese appears to have disappeared but the distinctions between Sri Lankan Tamil, Sri Lankan Moor and Indian Tamil are now sharp; in fact, the Tamil-Muslim divide is widening.

At present, the Sri Lankan Moors and the Indian Tamils are regarded as ethnically distinct from the Sri Lankan Tamils. In Tamil Nadu the Muslims are regarded as Tamil (e.g. President APJ Kalam is categorized as Muslim Tamil) but, for various reasons that are not relevant for our purpose, it is not so here, and I think the Tamil-Muslim distinction is likely to continue. In the case of the Indian Tamils my expectation is that they and the Sri Lankan Tamils will eventually merge, but the issue cannot be forced. However, the three ethnic groups are linked by a common language, viz. Tamil, and by the fact that they have suffered much ethnic discrimination.

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

Post-Independence Political Developments

The roots of the ethnic conflict reach back almost to the time of independence when legislation was passed effectively denying citizenship and voting rights to virtually all Indian Tamils. Most Sri Lankan Tamil and Muslim MPs were complicit in that initiative, whereas Sinhalese Marxists stood by the Indian Tamils. Clearly, Sri Lankan Tamils and Muslims felt little affinity to the Indian Tamils who felt greatly betrayed, particularly by Sri Lankan Tamils. Any solution to the National Question must provide for the full emancipation of the Indian Tamils wherever they live.

In 1956, when Sinhala was made the sole official language, resistance had been weakened by the disempowerment of Indian Tamils who remained unrepresented in Parliament for two and half decades. Most Muslim MPs from outside the North-East voted for Sinhala as the only official language even though they too were Tamil speaking. This generated significant anti-Muslim feeling among Tamils. Then followed a belated move by the leadership of the Federal Party to forge a Tamil–speaking alliance. Several Muslims contested Eastern parliamentary electorates as Federal Party candidates and some were elected. But for various reasons including 'divide and rule' policies of the state, the alliance gradually unraveled.

The Muslims of the North-East have been as much concerned as the Sri Lankan Tamils about certain all-island issues such as language of administration, and regional issues such as territory (colonization), autonomy and control of local resources, but these concerns were not adequately articulated by the South–based national Muslim leaders. It was in the 1980s that the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress was formed with MHM Ashroff as the leader. For the first time, there was a Muslim political party based in the North-East with a charismatic leader from the same region. But it came much too late and, in the meantime, the conflict had developed on Sinhala-Tamil binary lines and the civil war as a revolt of the LTTE (initially together with other militant groups) against the state. Peace talks between the state (under President Premadasa) and the LTTE began and were aborted. When they resumed (an initiative of President Kumaratunge), they continued as two-party talks. Subsequent talks were also binary.

Unit of Devolution in the North-East

I will not go into the question of why separate North-Eastern and Southern consensuses could greatly facilitate reaching a national consensus or of why multi-party negotiations with everyone sitting at the same table from the outset may be less likely to succeed than beginning with two or three–party negotiations and finding ways to progressively take in the concerns of other stakeholders, who could be brought into the negotiations in diverse ways. I will first focus on the Unit of devolution within the North-East, and then go on to make some tentative suggestions in respect of the unit of devolution in the South.

There are critical differences between Sri Lankan Tamils, Muslims and Indian Tamils in their history and political aspirations, especially in relation to territorial focus. As per figures collected in mid-2006 (Vigneswaran, 2006) from the respective District Secretariats, the total Tamil population of the North-East is 1,980,400. The Sri Lankan Tamil population outside the North-East (vide the census of 2001) is 620,000. We may conclude that about 75% of the Sri Lankan Tamil population are resident in the North-East. Even amongst the 620,000 resident elsewhere, and the 800,000 externally displaced, the overwhelming majority would trace their origins to and identify with the North-East irrespective of whether they plan to return there.

In the case of Indian Tamils, the majority may have descended from those who worked in the hill-country plantations, but few owned land or were permanently settled in those localities, and even fewer may regard any of those localities as their place of origin.

No arrangement for the North-East can work unless it has the endorsement of the Muslims of the North-East. In the case of Sri Lankan Moors, the territorial focus is widely dispersed, covering almost the entirety of Sri Lanka. Only a third of the Sri Lankan Moor population are resident in the North-East, and only a minor fraction of that one third of that population would be caught up in any contiguous Muslim majority South-East region carved out of Ampara district. Large concentrations of Sri Lankan Moor populations such as in Kathankudy, Kinniya and Eravur in the East, and Musali and Erukalampitty in the North, would be excluded. Overall, only about $1/8^{th}$ of the Sri Lankan Moor population would be resident in the proposed South-East region.

An alternative arrangement, based on the 'Pondicherry Model,' of an autonomous Muslim entity composed of non-contiguous, virtually mono-ethnic mini-units, is conceivable but would be difficult to administer, especially in times of ethnic tension when movement across unit boundaries could become problematic. Exclusive mono-ethnic units may not

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

be conducive to inter-ethnic harmony. A vital feature contributing to the viability of Pondicherry is that there is neither any ethnic disconnect between the scattered mini-units comprising Pondicherry and the regions in which they are embedded, nor any history of political conflict. The rationale for Pondicherry in South India is to facilitate preservation of certain historic and linguistic (French) traditions and culturally enrich the entire region. In contrast, discontinuous mini-units in the North-East demarcated exclusively on ethnic lines and in response to ethnic conflict may perpetuate and even accentuate the conflict; the exercise may turn out to be counter–productive in terms of security, political harmony and socio-economic interaction and welfare.

Whereas Tamil opinion (including that of Eastern Tamils) is overwhelmingly for merger, many Muslims in the East may welcome the de-merger of the North and East. Initially there was a sizable number of Muslim youth, especially from the East, who were amongst the Tamil militants, but LTTE–led violence against Northern and Eastern Muslims in the 1990s led to many of them leaving the movement in disgust. In the light of their bitter experience it is not surprising that Eastern Muslims, while fearful of oppressive Sinhalese majoritarianism, are equally or even more fearful of oppressive Tamil regional dominance. But the Northern Muslims, already victims of total ethnic cleansing only minimally reversed, would be completely isolated and further weakened by de-merger. Tamils and Muslims in the East, while apprehensive of Jaffna domination, also have cause to fear de-merger facilitating accelerated Sinhalese colonization combined with ethnic cleansing of Tamils and Muslims.

The proportion of Muslims in the combined North-East region (about 18%) is roughly equal to the proportion of Tamils in the entire island. Just as Tamils need to have a major say in the settlement of the National Question, the Muslims need to have a major say in the settlement of the North-East Question.The initiative and the primary responsibility to secure North-Eastern Muslim backing as well as the acquiescence of the Eastern Sinhalese to settle the North-East Question lies with the Tamil leadership. Any formula worked out would need the endorsement of the LTTE (which controls and administers considerable areas of the North-East including the entirety of Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu districts) before it acquires irresistible legitimacy as the North-East consensus–a precondition for an all-island national consensus.

The Sinhalese population of the North-East is largely concentrated in certain localities, some of which adjoin neighbouring Sinhalese majority provinces. They could either opt to have those localities attached (subject to the requirement of contiguity) to those adjoining provinces or opt to remain part of the North-East, in which case it is essential that their concerns are adequately covered in working out the administrative structure for the North-East. They will enrich the cultural diversity of the North-East.

For a region to be a viable unit of devolution, it needs to be not only of significant size but also to be seen as the home of all those who reside in it. Thus the North-East region, if seen as essentially a Tamil homeland, may not be a viable unit of devolution. The scheme of governance of the region needs to be more inclusive and so structured that the Muslim and Sinhalese populations caught up in it are equally at home. Sub-regions, intermediate between the region and city/town/village, with a substantial level of autonomy (including internal policing) much higher than that enjoyed by local bodies, could possibly be part of the scheme. While mono-ethnic regions and sub-regions are neither feasible nor desirable, the sub-regions may be so demarcated as to bring together, as far as the requirement of territorial contiguity may permit, people of like ethnicity. Inter-ethnic power sharing mechanisms and safeguards would be necessary at every level. In ethnically mixed areas ethnic quotas may perhaps be needed for a decade or so. Agreed procedures to resolve disputes would need to be developed and established. There could be provision for similar sub-regions within other regions of the island.

Unit of Devolution in the South

Under the Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam (BC) Pact (which was scrapped without implementation), there was very limited devolution envisaged to the North-East and none to the residual rest (which was treated as one but with no regional council corresponding to the proposed North-East Regional Council). Under the Dudley-Chelvanayakam Pact (which was also scrapped without implementation), and the unsuccessful District Development Council system introduced under the Jayewardene administration, each district was treated as an independent unit. Clearly, neither the district as the unit of devolution nor the powers devolved on the districts were adequate .

It is for this reason that attention reverted to the province as a unit of devolution, with the North-East temporarily merged

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

as under the BC Pact. However, unlike in the case of BC Pact, the powers prescribed to be devolved under the Indo - Sri Lanka agreement were much more substantial, and the devolution covered the entire island and not just the North-East. Inadequacies in the 13th Amendment as well as in the implementation contributed, along with other factors, to the failure of the scheme.

Treating the entire South as one unit would be unsatisfactory for two reasons. Firstly, there would be gross asymmetry in the sizes of the units and, second, two–unit federations tend to be unstable (the zero sum factor). On the other hand, the province, though superior to the district, may yet be too small to be economically feasible as a unit of devolution. Moreover, in the absence of ethnic characteristics as a binding factor (such as language in the case of the North-East), it will help if each unit could have a coherent identity beyond the districts and provinces created by the British purely for their administrative convenience.

This is a matter that should await a Southern consensus but consideration could be given to reducing the number of Southern regions from seven to three or four. Perhaps, the new regions could roughly correlate to the ancient kingdoms centred on Anuradhapura, Kandy, Kotte and Ruhuna. But this needs to be worked out by the leadership of the entire population of the seven Southern provinces, just as the unit devolution within of the North-East needs to be worked out by the leadership of the entire North-East population.

Origins of Tamil Nationalism

Tamil separatism and violent militancy, very much part of the current reality, are developments in the last three decades. An earlier generation of Tamils was inspired by Gandhi, and Tamil areas were noted as having low levels of violence. A political manifestation of this inspiration was the Jaffna Youth Congress (JYC), which dominated the Northern political landscape for two decades beginning in the late 1910s. The ideals of that organization, which captured the imagination not only of the people of Jaffna but virtually all anti-imperialist activists in the island, are in sharp contrast to the values which many now identify with Jaffna. The JYC campaigned for immediate independence, for universal adult franchise, for Gandhian ethics and non-violence in political and social life, against the caste system, against communal electorates, and for the teaching of Sinhala and Tamil in all schools. If maintained very close cooperation with all shades of the political leadership of the South as well as the Gandhian leaders in India (Nesiah, 2001, pp. 9-13).

The Donoughmore Commission appointed by the British Labour government recommended far–reaching reforms including universal adult franchise, the abolition of communal electorates and progress towards dominion status. For the JYC, the latter was too little too late, and it boycotted the 1931 election based on the Donoughmore reforms demanding, instead, immediate independence. Many in the South, notably the Marxists, applauded the stand of the JYC, but the mainstream Sinhalese leaders considered it too radical.The conservatives, in the North and in the South, opposed the Donoughmore reforms for the opposite reason – they thought they were too much too early. In the event, the boycott by the JYC resulted in the Northern conservatives gaining election to the newly formed State Council in lieu of the JYC, stealing a march on the latter. This, together with the rise of communal politics all over the island beginning in the 1930s, led to the gradual fading out of the JYC from the political scene.

It was the mid-1950s imposition of Sinhala as the only official language in the mid 50s, and sweeping discriminatory measures that accompanied and followed it, that precipitated the consolidation of Tamil nationalism (Nesiah, 2001, pp. 13-17). Initially its vision was uncompromisingly federalist and against secession. Till the early 1970s, at every political election, every candidate on a secessionist platform was overwhelmingly defeated. The turnabout was in the 1970s, following the drastic curtailment of the admission of Tamil students into the universities beginning in 1971 and the starkly majoritarian 1972 constitution. The statement of Chelvanayakam on winning the Kankesanthura parliamentary seat at the 1975 by-election marks a fateful turning point. He declared:

We have the for the last 25 years made every effort to secure our political rights on the basis of equality with the Sinhalese in a united Ceylon... It is a regrettable fact that successive Sinhalese governments have used the power that flows from independence to deny us our fundamental rights and reduce us to the position of a subject people... I wish to announce to my people and to the country that I consider this verdict at this election as a mandate that the Tamil Eelam nation should exercise the sovereignty already vested in the Tamil people and become free. (quoted in Nesiah, 2001, p.16)

Pogroms, Civil Wars and Ethnic Cleansing

The general election that followed set the stage for a radical escalation of the ethnic conflict. On the one

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

hand, for the first time, the Tamil electorate returned a slate of candidates on a secessionist platform. On the other, the new government kicked off with a post-election pogrom in 1977 and proceeded to install a new constitution firmly locking in the essential majoritarian character of the 1972 constitution. The well organized, coordinated and widespread ethnic cleansing in 1983 was a follow–up on the scattered cases of ethnic cleansing in 1977. Since then, the practice has been adopted by many groups, affecting Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. In October 1990 the entire Muslim population of the North was evicted by the LTTE in the largest act of ethnic cleansing since 1983.

Since my focus is on a North-East consensus, I will make only passing mention of the extensive discrimination suffered by Tamil-speaking people outside the North-East in transacting official business in the Tamil language.
For example (FCE, 2006).

- the population of Badulla city is 26.2% Tamil speaking but only one of the Municipal Council staff of 450 is Tamil literate.
- The Tamil-speaking proportion of Kandy city is 25.7%, but none of the 60 working in the registrar's office is Tamil literate.
- Ratnapura city is 13.3% Tamil speaking, but no one in the High Court office is Tamil literate.
- Colombo city is 56.7% Tamil speaking, but less than 1% of its staff are Tamil literate.
- Over the decades, the situation has been getting worse, not better.

The Issue of Self-Determination

The critical issue is internal self-determination (regional autonomy within a united island). In this light, the Oslo Statement of 5 December 2002 was a major and valuable breakthrough. It is essentially a modified refinement of the Thimpu Principles put forward in Thimpu in 1985 as representing a Tamil political consensus. Both parties, particularly the LTTE, made unexpected and unprecedented commitments toward peace and reconciliation but, since then, have been trying to wriggle out of that commitment. Perhaps all of us who want peace, including civil society and the international community, have been lethargic in failing to keep the government and the LTTE pinned to the very thoughtfully drafted Oslo Statement, which includes the following:

... a solution founded on the principle of internal self-determination in areas of historical habitation of the Tamil speaking peoples, based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka [and] acceptable to all communities... Power sharing between the centre and the region as well as within the centre... Human Rights protection... Law and order... the need to ensure that the priorities and needs of the women are taken into account... that children belong with their families or other custodians and not in the work place, whether civilian or military... consultation with all segments of opinion as part of the peace process...

Problems Impeding a Consensus

As often in multi-ethnic countries, the largest ethnic minority community (in our context, Sri Lankan Tamils) appears to have the greatest political problems in relation to the state. Except for one or two brief periods, the Sri Lanka Tamil leadership had never any significant representation within the cabinet. Nor had they any part in the formulation of the two post-independence constitutions. Whereas the Muslims and the Indian Tamils have sought to influence national policy and decision making from inside the government, the Sri Lankan Tamils have sought to do it from outside. To make progress on major issues concerning all the minorities, collective action by the leaders of the Sri Lankan Tamils, the Muslims and the Indian Tamils is needed, and this requires orientation and coordination that extends well beyond agreement on common objectives. This may not be easy.

Firstly, the party that has engaged in armed revolt (the LTTE), and many other Sri Lankan Tamils too, may feel that they have vested more into the process than other groups, and that both the negotiation process and the details of the settlement should reflect that reality. On the other hand, it is not easy for the others to agree to such disparity. Second, what are the fallback options if negotiations fail? For one party (particularly the LTTE) it may include a possible return to civil war; for the others that may not be a tolerable option. A further complication is that in the course of the conflict there have been terrible instances of ethnic cleansing between minority communities (including the eviction by the LTTE of the entire Muslim population of the North), fratricidal violence within and among the two communities, and suspicion of complicity by Tamil and Muslim groups in deadly military action by the state against the LTTE/Tamil civilians. Bitterness on account of these atrocities and lingering suspicions that more atrocities may follow may

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

hinder collective action. The bitterness and suspicion are augmented by the 'divide and rule' policies of the state.

Another problem is that of representation. Can the LTTE speak for the whole of the North-East or even for all Tamils? Moreover, it has become increasingly clear that an involvement of a third party, viz. the Muslims, is absolutely essential to any discussion extending beyond the cease-fire to regional autonomy and other issues, and that of a fourth party, viz. the Indian Tamils, is absolutely essential to any discussion extending beyond regional autonomy. But the two negotiating parties seem reluctant to take even the first step and to accept the entry of the Muslims as an independent party to the negotiations. Curiously, both the state and the LTTE seem to prefer including the Muslims as a component of the state delegation. Does this imply that the North-Eastern Muslim interests are more aligned to those of the state than to those of the North-Eastern Tamils?

There are other problems too arising from the lack of an independent Muslim negotiating team. Two-party conflicts tend to take on zero-sum characteristics, with the weaker party likely to come out as the bigger loser. Moreover, each side may be tempted to look for an opportune moment to launch a pre-emptive first strike. We have seen this again and again. In contrast, three-party conflicts may provide inducements to each party to build partnerships, to work out creative solutions and to avoid violent confrontations. We have had a long history of two-party conflict and two-party negotiations; these have failed, leading to a succession of pogroms and civil wars. Perhaps three-party negotiations may yield better results for everyone excluding those with a vested interest in the resumption of war. As the peace process progresses, other stakeholders need to be identified and brought in.

The alternative to collective action is the totally unacceptable continuation of what has gone on in recent years, viz. spells of no-war, no-peace; punctuated by pogroms and outright war from time to time (Eelam War 4 is looming). The strategy for collective action must be based on the reality that the Sri Lankan Tamils, Muslims and Indian Tamils, though socially and politically distinct, share many common interests, apart from the common interests that bind the entire population of Sri Lanka. It is clear that the LTTE-directed armed struggle has gained significant political advance, though at great cost. But there are limits to what can be achieved through armed struggle. Many gains can come only through political coalitions engaged in democratic processes.

The Land Issue

Among the many disasters resulting from the civil war is damage to forests. Forests covered 80% of the island a century ago; today they cover barely 20%. Protection of existing forests (woefully inadequate) and the planting of new forests (equally inadequate) have been affected by the civil war, which has thus accelerated the adverse trend in respect of forest cover. Large numbers of palmyrah, coconut and other trees have been destroyed by shelling; many others have been deliberately felled for security reasons (especially those by the roadside that could provide cover for ambush) or to build bunkers or to provide firewood in areas deprived of other fuel. Over most of the North-East, planting new forests has not been possible on account of security conditions.

For at least six decades a major ethnically contentious issue has been the control and occupation of land. There is much landlessness among agricultural communities in several Southern areas. Land suitable for colonization schemes is available in the North-East as well as in several other regions such as Moneragala, and the North-Western and North-Central provinces. Overall, population density is lower in the East and in the mainland area of the North than in most other provinces. Colonization schemes have served to provide cultivable irrigated land and required ancillary facilities to landless agricultural labourers, helping to transform their lives and socio-economic conditions. In many cases, the settlement of large number of Sinhalese colonists in previously Tamil or Muslim majority areas has also transformed the ethnic character of the neighborhood, with negative consequences to the original Tamil or Muslim residents in such matters as access to schools, public services, security in times of ethnic tension, etc.

A problem that specially concerns those in land-scarce regions is the need for cultivable land. It is true that the North-East region has a disproportionate area of cultivable land per head of population, and this disparity needs to be addressed.

It is also true that from even before independence, colonization schemes have, whether deliberately or otherwise, served to convert large extents of Tamil or Muslim majority areas into Sinhalese-majority areas, with many adverse consequences for the former (in respect of political representation in parliament, language of governance, the ethnic composition of the administration and police, the medium of instruction in schools and many other matters).

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

In many locations the descendants of Tamils and Muslims who had been in occupancy for centuries had been marginalized and, in times of communal tension, had cause to feel deeply insecure. In consequence many such villages have been totally evacuated and are now occupied by others (mostly Sinhalese). The villages ethnically cleansed in this mannerinclude Thennamaravady, Kokkilai, Kokkuthodavaai, Kurunthumalai, Mankemdimalai, and numerous others. This is also happening in urban centres, notably in proximity to Trincomalee harbour. This too is a reality that needs to be addressed.

A third reality is that in many areas of the South, Indian Tamil agricultural labour is largely landless. Many of them have gone to the North-East, and a few of them have gained access to land, but most of them remain landless. Everywhere those of other communities gain precedence in land allocation.

A fourth reality, already referred to, is the alarming shrinking of forest cover over the island. I need not elaborate on the negative environmental consequences, locally, nationally and globally.

The scarcity of land for colonization has been overstated, and colonization schemes undertaken in border areas of the North-East for political reasons, even when equally suitable land is available in other provinces. Some lands in the North-East (as in other regions) need to be reserved for colonization with preference given to people of the region. Those brought in from outside could include significant numbers of Sinhalese and Indian Tamils, but not in such numbers as to radically alter the ethnic character of the district or division. Further, the intensity of mutual discontent in respect of the colonization issue could be substantially reduced, concurrently with gaining very significant environmental benefits, if large areas of the North-East could be demarcated as forest reserves and excluded from all land settlement schemes. The benefits of large scale foresting will accrue to the entire island and even to lands overseas. Several developed countries would be happy to fund the establishment of new forests.

Political Violence

Finally, given the diversity of the population of the North-East and of the tragic events of the last few decades, how do we reach a consensus? It is a very difficult exercise made immensely more difficult by the resort to fratricidal violence, which is surely suicidal. Fratricidal violence has been misguidedly indulged in by activists in many struggles against oppression in the belief that it may be the only means to effectively settle differences. Differences that may arise on policies, strategies, personalities or on any other matter will have to be resolved through discussion among the partners in the struggle, not by liquidation. Resorting to fratricidal violence can only deepen divisions, provoke counter-violence and undermine the struggle. Bitterness created by liquidation or expulsion of communities will linger, like in the case of the fratricidal clashes among Sri Lankan Tamil groups in the late 1980s and early 1990s and the recurrent instances of ethnic cleansing of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims in the 1980s and since then.

A culture of permitting free expression of opinions and lively discussion of differences has been a feature of successful struggles (e.g.,the Russian Revolution and the French Revolution in their early stages, the movement against Apartheid in South Africa, the US Civil Rights Movement of the third quarter of the last century, and the liberation/ independence movements of India and Cuba). In contrast, a culture of violence and intolerance, even if it appears to be helpful to enforce unity, is a recipe for the emergence of dictatorship and further oppression (e.g., USSR in due course, the French Revolution in the later stages, and the proliferation of communal conflict in India in the wake of BJP rule). The end result may be that both in numbers and in quality the potential strength of the movement is undermined, increasing the adverse tilt of the balance of forces and facilitating further majoritarian oppression.

A major concern is that the culture of violence, especially violence against civilians of all ethnic groups, has led to losing the moral high ground occupied by Tamil leaders when the struggle was against violent suppression of Tamils by the state. Ready resort to violence against civilians and indifference to democratic and human rights norms devalue the legitimacy of the struggle against state violence and denial of minority rights. Recruitment and use of child combatants, fratricidal violence and assassinations, torture and brutality, and the intolerance and suppression of dissent, resorted to by various Tamil groups, have contributed to the loss of much support, locally and globally. Attempts to undermine the autonomy and integrity of non-government organizations, political parties, newspapers, universities, schools and other institutions functioning in the North and East by various agencies have also been counter–productive. Even if some of these activities appear to yield immediate gains, their long-term impact on the community is overwhelmingly negative. In contrast, consistent upholding of values and principles

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

played a critical role in the success of the struggles led by Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela.

We need to be concerned about the rights and sensitivities of regional minorities. It is increasingly accepted among the Sinhalese (though not yet by the government) that federalism and inter-ethnic power sharing are necessary to regain national unity and integrity. In turn, Sri Lankan Tamils need to accept the need for power sharing in the regional capital (Trincomalee) as well as sub-regional autonomy, particularly for sub-regions in which regional minorities are dominant. Those who campaign against ethnic violence, ethnic cleansing, ethnic oppression and displacement, de-legitimize their protests if they do not also protest against ethnic violence, ethnic cleansing, ethnic oppression and displacement of civilians of other communities, especially if they occur at the hands of their own ethnic group. Civilized political culture demands that we need to protest all violations of human rights and to uphold the rights and welfare of women, children and all vulnerable sections of the population. Those who claim to fight for human rights cannot afford to be selective.

A striking feature of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is that it has been conducted as if it is a zero-sum game that could be resolved through violence. The misery, displacement and bloodshed caused are disproportionate to the size of the country and, indeed, to the issues involved. After decades of gross oppression, ethnic cleansing, pogrom and civil war it appeared that the protagonists had learnt that the war was unwinnable, and that the way forward is through negotiations, not violence. That lesson now appears to have been quickly unlearnt and we face the prospects of having to relearn through a fresh cycle of oppression, ethnic cleansing, pogroms and civil war. Hopefully the illusion that the war is winnable will be rapidly dispelled and we will turn again to negotiations.

A zero-sum game is intrinsically not conducive to a negotiated settlement; it is the prospects of joint gains that motivate and sustain negotiations. Clearly, there are joint gains to be made by the parties concerned at the centre, between the centre and the periphery, and at the periphery. It is increasingly accepted that a Southern consensus, though difficult to reach, is an essential pre-condition to the resolution of the National Question; so too a North-Eastern consensus.

References and Bibliography

Ali, Ameer 2001. "Plural Identities and Political Choices of the Muslim Community," Marga Monograph Series on Ethnic R econciliation, Colombo.

Cheran, R. 2001. "The Sixth Genre: Memory, History and the Tamil Diaspora Imagination," Marga Monograph Series on Ethnic Reconciliation, Colombo.

Department of Census and Statistics 2002. "Statistical Abstract", Colombo.

Foundation for Co-Existence (FCE) July 2006. "Language Discrimination to Language Equality," Colombo.

Galtung Johan October 2003. " Federation as Peace Structure: The Case of Sri Lanka," Colombo.

Hasbullah, S.H. August 2004. "Report on a Dialogue between Tamil-Muslim Women: Project on Re-establishing and Strengthening Tamil-Muslim Relations in Northern Province," Colombo.

October 2004. "Regain the Glory of Mannar through Tamil-Muslim amity: A Situation Report", Colombo.

Hoole, Rajan 2001. "Sri Lanka, the Arrogance of Power: Myths Decadence and Murder", Colombo.

Loganathan,Ketheshwaran 1996. "Sri Lanka:Lost Opportunities", Centre for Policy Research and Analysis, Faculty of Law, Colombo.

Mc Gilray, Dennis B 2001. "Tamil and Muslim Identities in the East," Marga Monograph Series on Ethnic Reconciliation, Colombo.

Nesiah, Devanesan December 1998. "An Audit on the use of Tamil as an Official Language in provinces outside the North-East", Marga Institute and Official Language Commission, Colombo

2001. "Tamil Nationalism," Marga Monograph Series on Ethnic Reconciliation.

2001. "The Claim to Self-determination: A Sri Lankan Tamil Perspective," *Contemporary South Asia* 10(1).

2001: Ethnic Identity and Self-determination," -*Polity*, Vol. 1, No.1

Pathmanathan, S. 1999. "Tamil Identity, History and Historiography," Seminar on History, Identity and Historiography, Colombo, 1-3 December.

Rajasingham- Senanayaka, Dharani, Fara Haniffa and **Devanesan Nesiah** 2001. " A Vision for Sustainable Peace in Sri Lanka," *Polity* , Vol. 1, No. 5.

B. Raman, N. Sathiya Moorthy and Kalpana Chithraranjan (eds) 2006. " Sri Lanka: Peace without Process," Samskriti, New Delhi.

Sivathambi, K. 2001. "The Sri Lankan Ethnic Crisis: A Tamil Perspective," Marga Monograph Series on Ethnic Reconciliation, Colombo.

Sumathy, S. 1999. "Militants, Militarism and the Crisis of (Tamil) Nationalism," Marga Monograph Series on Ethnic Reconciliation, Colombo.

Vigneswaran, K. 2006. Unpublished data. ■

Dr. Devanesan Nesiah is a researcher and consultant.

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

FROM PEACE OPTIMISM TO UNDECLARED WAR
THE NARROWING SPACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY PEACE WORK IN SRI LANKA

Camilla Orjuela[1]

A diverse crowd of people gathered for a peace demonstration at Colombo's Lipton Circle on a Monday in late May 2006, displaying placards that condemned the last month's killings of innocent civilians. A week later, an art exhibition combining photos with peace quotes made classy Colombo viewers reflect over the ongoing war, while a multi-ethnic mobile theatre put up its tent to perform in Puttalam. Youth from different areas and ethnic groups got a chance to meet in youth camps, at the same time as peace committees formed in the volatile East struggled to continue being a forum for conflict resolution.

These are some examples of peace endeavours of civil society organizations and actors in Sri Lanka, with financial support of international donors. While similar activities have been carried out for over a decade in Sri Lanka, the context in which they take place has changed radically over the last five years. The peace optimism in the wake of the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement and the commencement of the peace process between the Sri Lankan government and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2002 provided increased space, enthusiasm and financial support for civil society peace work, while the stalled peace talks, drastically escalating violence and harsh criticism of peace NGOs in 2006, have caused that space to shrink.

International donors have over the last years put in large amounts of funds, hoping that civil society could engineer popular support for the peace process, disseminate information about the official peace dealings, build bridges across ethnic divides and consensus for the necessary political restructuring, as well as pressure leaders not to diverge from the peace path. The gradual deterioration of the peace process painfully highlights the limitations of what donor-funded civil-society-led peace work can do. There is a sense of disappointment among international donors and civil society representatives alike that the abundance of peace programmes has not helped to keep peace on track.

This article analyses how the general context in which civil society peace work takes place has changed since the start of the peace process, how donors and civil society actors have responded to these changes, and spells out some challenges ahead for peace-minded donors and civil society actors.

Ceasefire and peace euphoria in 2002

The environment for civil society peace work changed significantly with the shift of government in December 2001, from the People's Alliance's devastating 'war-for-peace' to the United National Party's Norwegian-facilitated peace process and ceasefire agreement with the LTTE. Until then, peace advocacy groups had mobilized some opposition to the war efforts in a context where the country was 'on a war footing' and the space to criticize the government's military strategy (and for donors to fund vociferous critics of the government) was severely limited. Civil society efforts to facilitate cross-ethnic dialogue or canvas support for power sharing had however been welcomed by the PA government, which itself, parallel to the war effort, pursued devolution of power and awareness raising among the grassroots through its Sudu Neelum movement (to which some civil society peace activists had been co-opted).

With the commencement of the official peace process, civil society peace workers found themselves 'fighting a winning battle.' The end of open warfare and the opening of roads (most importantly the A9) facilitated mobility between the formerly isolated North-East and the South of the island, enabled study visits and joint activities and made grassroots activities for peace easier. Key actors, who were earlier the target of peace advocacy, had taken over the initiative in talking and acting for peace, leaving civic groups at the rear. The bipolar (government-LTTE), top-heavy design of the peace process left no space for official civil society involvement. While it became easier for civil society groups to get access to leading figures from both parties, civil society representation at the negotiation table was not seriously on the agenda. Sub-committees established under the peace negotiation teams and groups formed to support the monitoring of the ceasefire had participants from the civil society sphere. Leading NGOs were briefed by the Norwegian facilitators and the government's chief negotiators took part in conferences and meetings with civil society

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

(represented mainly by the Colombo-based elite). 'Civil society' (embodied by the director of the entre for Policy Alternatives) was invited to give a presentation at the Tokyo donor conference in June 2003, and civil society representatives travelled to Thailand and Switzerland in connection with peace talks there. Nevertheless, civil society actors participated in the peace process mainly 'on the outside'.

Civil society actors took on (or were given) the role of mobilising support among the masses for the peace process. In the words of Vasuki Nesiah, civil society became a 'variable that can be strategically plugged-in to legitimate the peace process rather than challenge or re-negotiate its terms' (*Daily Mirror*, 26 November 2002). The eagerness to support the peace process fostered a climate with very little space for criticism of the process, and where those raising disparaging voices were branded as spoilers.

Donor enthusiasm

While Sri Lanka has received relatively large amounts of foreign development assistance since its turn towards open market economy in 1977, donor interest to explicitly support peace took off in the late 1990s. This was part of a global trend in the 'aid industry' to mainstream conflict sensitivity in development and humanitarian programmes and to support specific peace projects. A parallel trend in the donor community has been to fund 'civil society' (a new buzz word from the mid-1990s). Civil society was supported both as efficient subcontractors to deliver services or carry out advocacy work – and for its own sake, as a strong civil society was believed to be conducive for democratisation, economic development and peace. In Sri Lanka a few bilateral donors spearheaded the interest in peace support, making peacebuilding a main motivation for continued engagement in Sri Lanka (as Sri Lanka in 1997 was categorised as a middle-income country and thus not a priority for some donors). It should be noted, however, that Sri Lanka's main donors – Japan, World Bank and Asian Development Bank, which provide about 70% of all aid – have been considerably slower in adopting a conflict sensitivity and peace stand and continue to have economic development as their main interest.

With the peace process – and the UNP's donor-applauded economic reforms – Sri Lanka attracted large donor interest. Donors vowed to contribute to 'make peace visible' for the population and by that presumably consolidate support for peace efforts. New donors entered (particularly to reconstruct the war-torn North-East), prematurely armed with a post-conflict tool kit and driven by the desire to be part of the success story of peacemaking in Sri Lanka.

While donors had begun to support civil society peace work during the previous peace process in the mid-1990s, such support intensified after the signing of the ceasefire agreement (however with some time lag). The distribution of (relatively) small grants to a variety of peace organizations and projects has increasingly been seen by donors as an administrative hassle. Limited managerial resources contributed to a concentration of donor funds in a small number of Colombo-based NGOs and think tanks, and only small amounts trickle out to less high-profile (non-English speaking and -cocktail party going) civil society groups in other parts of the country. To get around this problem, donors created a number of small grant funds which significantly have changed the structures through which civil society groups can access funding. Along with FLICT, there is CHA's (Consortium for Humanitarian Agencies) National Program for Peace and Development by Civil Society, the UNDP's Small Grants Fund in Support of Peace and the programme for Promoting the Benefits of Peace run by USAID, all started after the commencement of the peace process. The funds have to some extent challenged the gatekeeper role of Colombo NGOs and enabled weak organisations, not yet trained in the intricacies of proposal and report writing, to receive funding. All four funds have a mandate to support civil society actors (more or less broadly defined) in building a more peaceful and prosperous Sri Lanka, but they have somewhat different foci and modes of operation. While the diversity of funding opportunities has been positive and representatives of the funds emphasise complementarity, there have also been concerns about overlap and to some extent competition for good projects and partners to support. During the phase of formation, interaction and cooperation among the funds was more frequent than it currently is, although a database started by FLICT is envisioned to be an important tool for coordination.

The availability of new structures and more money for civil society peace work has enabled more work to be done, not least at the grassroots level. Many actors earlier specializing in other areas such as development or media have been attracted to peace work due to funding opportunities. In addition to this, prominent international NGOs, most importantly the Berghof Foundation, have entered the conflict transformation scene in Sri Lanka. The donor enthusiasm over peace work has raised concerns of an over-focus on peace. Critical voices spoke about a 'peace carnival'

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

and civil society groups with humanitarian and development concerns regret having to join that 'carnival' to be supported. The December 2004 tsunami disaster, and the subsequent wave of international support, however shrank the importance of peace work and diverted donor attention towards reconstruction of the coastlines. The huge uncoordinated influx of funds and international actors contributed to weakening local civil society (not least by the brain drain to international jobs), and to increaing mistrust towards NGOs as well as among NGOs.

Stalled peace talks and undeclared war

The peace euphoria of 2002 and early 2003 soon cooled down (just as some donors were in the process of starting up their work in Sri Lanka). The LTTE withdrawal from peace negotiations in April 2003, the UNP loss in general elections (making evident the failure to gain support among the general public for its economic and peace policies), and the emergence of an LTTE breakaway fraction in the East a year later effectively put cogs in the wheels of the peace process. While the tsunami temporarily put stop to an escalation of hostilities, the end of 2005 saw an increase of violence. Since November 2005, more than 1000 persons have been killed, a number which clearly classifies Sri Lanka as a country at war – in spite of the ceasefire agreement formally being in place. There have been various forms of violence – the war between the LTTE and the (most likely government-supported) Karuna faction in the east, attacks on the Sri Lankan Armed Forces and on civilians carried out by LTTE or civilians trained by the LTTE, reprisal attacks on Tamil civilians by government forces, extra-judicial killings by state or state-supported actors, communal violence in Trincomalee (reminiscent of the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983 and earlier), clashes between the Sea Tigers and the Navy, LTTE suicide bombers in Colombo and retaliatory air bombing carried out by the Sri Lankan government, and, since July, large-scale confrontations between government forces and the LTTE, which have led to government take-over of former LTTE-held territory in the East.

This has created a climate of fear in the North-East, and significantly shrunk the space for civil society activities across the island. Mobility has been curtailed due to security concerns and the closing of roads, the militarization of society has intensified, as has the polarization and separation between ethnic groups following inter-ethnic violence and 'communication war' – biased reporting and lack of facts provide space for rumours and feed into enemy images of the 'other'. Attacks on NGOs in Muttur in May and the killing of 17 aid workers in August 2006 sent clear signals that even international organisations are not spared. In addition to this, pamphlets requiring women in the East to quit working for NGOs, due to (unproved) rumours of immoral sexual behaviour, seriously threatened women's rights to take part in civil society work.

In the context of escalated violence, most peace organizations in the war-zone can do nothing but run for their lives. While the interethnic links built up through peace programmes could potentially be useful, in most cases they are too weak to survive the violent polarisation. Human rights monitoring, humanitarian assistance and trauma counselling (on a mono-ethnic basis) are likely to be the prime concerns of civil society groups, while explicit peace programmes in the war zone appear increasingly unrealistic.

The donors, who anticipated contributing to Sri Lanka's path towards sustainable peace, have become more and more frustrated with the situation. The conclusion drawn by the donor-initiated Strategic Conflict Assessment (Goodhand & Klem, 2005) that donors cannot buy peace in Sri Lanka, and the stalled reconstruction process in the North-East, have forced donors to rethink their role. A number of (mainly European) donors are withdrawing, scaling down or refocusing (from peace building to economic development) their programmes in Sri Lanka. If full-scale war breaks out, or low-intensity war continues, donors are unlikely to be able to continue their work (other than strictly humanitarian) in the North-East. Continued engagement in Sri Lanka would mean that they further contribute to the disparity between the North-East and the South – an argument for some donors to leave totally. However, while many European countries are losing interest in Sri Lanka, Asian nations are becoming increasingly important. Japan, China and Australia have regional interests in Sri Lanka, but tend to be less aware of and interested in peace and conflict issues than the European donors.

Donors are simultaneously increasingly frustrated with Sri Lankan civil society, and the lack of sustained and massive mobilisation for peace (despite their continuous funding to NGOs). Donors recognise that the peace work they support can no longer be linked to a top-level peace process, but that they need to support work that will contribute to an enabling environment for peace – irrespective of the developments at top-level. Structural issues linked to state reform and governance are likely to gain increasing importance and civil society actors might than be seen as agents that can work

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

with local government structures to reform the state 'from below'. While donors are likely to continue funding civil society peace work, human rights is coming up as a new priority areas (e.g. by the European Union). Here civil society is envisioned to play an important role, not least in the light of the extremely weakened government Human Rights Commission.

A hostile climate for peace work

The peace euphoria that prevailed during the period of ceasefire was visible in media and the general climate of debate. A look at media today reveals exceptionally hostile attitudes towards NGOs involved in peace work. Peace organisations and their leaders are accused of compromising the sovereignty and integrity of Sri Lanka, and are described as 'peace merchants', 'anti-nationals' and 'puppets of the LTTE'. The abundance of NGO-critical articles in the Sinhala and English press rarely present evidence or facts to substantiate their allegations and criticised NGO representatives are not provided opportunity to present their case. While politicians criticising NGOs are given plenty of media space, the coverage of peace organisations and activities has shrunk. After the suicide bombs in Colombo, the escalated violence in the North-East and the EU banning of the LTTE, demonstrations and statements calling for peaceful conflict resolution (such as the one published by prominent civil society women in late May) are despised as weak, unpatriotic and serving LTTE interests. The JVP plays a lead role in demonising peace NGOs, flanked by other Sinhala nationalist parties and organisations such as the JHU and the National Patriotic Front. The JVP antagonism against peace NGOs has intensified since the party liaised with the government and thus needed to divert attention from failures in delivering on their election promises. JVP gains its votes on a Sinhala nationalist peace process-critical stance, and the attempts by peace organisations to encourage popular support for power sharing and non-military conflict resolution can possibly threaten JVP's vote base. Attacking peace NGOs can thus be understood as a strategy for extremist Sinhala groups. Repeated killings of journalists, the aggressive disturbance of a peace rally in Colombo by Sinhala nationalist Buddhist monks in August and the killing of Kethesh Loganathan (by many peace activists seen as 'civil society's' representative in the Government Peace Secretariat) further underscore the hostile and dangerous environment in which civil society peace actors work.

Government-civil society relations deteriorated with the change of government in 2004. The UNP government interacted with civil society representatives (mainly the Colombo elite) and encouraged donor-supported peace work and engagement with the LTTE. While the new government does not explicitly discourage civil society peace activities (and donor support for them), it is less willing to officially acknowledge them and to fight the obstructions posed by the peace-critical central bureaucracy. Although not a new phenomena, there is mistrust between the government sector and civil society, and a lack of structures for information sharing and meetings (the National Advisory Council for Peace and Reconciliation established by the president in October 2004 is an example of an official but non-functional attempt to provide meeting spaces). Civil society access to political leaders and government officials fluctuates over time, depending on the general situation as well as on persons. The Parliamentary Select Committee set up to investigate the activities of local and international NGOs is seen by many civil society representatives as yet an other attempt to curtail their activities, but by others as a chance to annihilate baseless accusations. Government-civil society relations are also influenced by the fact that many peace organisations are seen as partisan after having actively supported the UNP in its peace efforts. Moreover, it is worth noting that the decreased interest in Sri Lanka by some donors may be influenced by the government's more hostile stance toward donors and less appealing economic policy.

In the LTTE-dominated areas the scepticism towards civil society peace work has prevailed throughout the peace process. While the peace process opened up some space for dialogue, interethnic contacts, the peace NGO emphasis on reconciliation rather than justice is likely to have been interpreted by LTTE representatives as a threat to Tamil unity against a shared enemy (the government, Sinhala chauvinism). NGOs organising exposure visits abroad for LTTE members have been accused of trying to brainwash them to accept federalism. While the JVP blows the importance of peace NGOs out of proportions, LTTE-supporters have commonly considered civil society peace work useless. The LTTE has discouraged peace activities, and with the escalation of violence and mobilisation for 'the final war' the space for peace work has, if possible, become even narrower.

In LTTE-controlled areas, civil society does not function independently from the LTTE. Also in government-controlled areas, the LTTE has extensive influence over civil society. While peace organisations such as the Foundation for Co–existence have successfully engaged in local conflict resolution (including mediating conflicts with the LTTE),

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

LTTE-critical Tamil organisations are unable to function. The LTTE claim to be the sole representative of the Tamil people leaves no space for internal criticism. Public meetings usually express the LTTE-line, while people critical of the LTTE either keep quiet or end up taking a risky anti-LTTE position (which often falls in line with Sinhala nationalist interests). Freedom of expression and assembly in the North-East is curtailed not only by the LTTE but also by the government's military rule and by threats posed by a number of violent groups.

Constructive engagement with the LTTE, with the purpose of facilitating the transformation of the organisation from a military to a political entity, was part of the rationale of the peace process. Such engagement is made difficult by the escalation of violence (which gives the LTTE justification for its military focus) and by government attempts to delegitimise the LTTE and isolate it from international contacts (the ban by the EU being a significant government achievement in this regard). As the LTTE is more and more isolated and the Scandinavian facilitation and monitoring faces severe problems, civil society actors might have to regain its their pre-peace process role of facilitating government-LTTE and international community-LTTE communication.

The (limited) importance of civil society peace work

It is painfully clear from the recent near collapse of the peace process that all the efforts by civil society and donors to promote peace have not been even close to sufficient to prevent a return to war. The correlation between civil society peace work and the track one process is one where the ability and strength of civil society to carry out peace activities to a large extent depend on a successful top-level process – rather than the other way around. Civil society has, at best, a support function.

A main concern of peace activists and donors has been the glaring lack of a mass-based popular movement against war in Sri Lanka. Popular mobilisation in Sri Lanka has tended to be along nationalist lines – and to turn dreadfully violent (the JVP rebellion and the Tamil nationalist struggle being striking examples). The deep divides caused by years of conflict and violence, and the lack of a clear shared enemy make mobilisation for peace difficult. Civil society peace initiatives are largely small-scale, fragmented, donor dependent and not sustained – we are talking about 'projects' rather than 'a movement'. For instance, while civil society has provided temporary meeting places across ethnic and other divides, it has failed to change the structures of ethnic separation in a society where the education system as well as most parts of civil society are largely mono-ethnic.

However, the disappointing impact of civil society peace work might say more about the inflated expectations on it than on the efficiency of peace organisations. The inability of civil society to save the peace process (for instance by ensuring a re-election of the UNP, by pressuring the parties to uphold the ceasefire agreement and continue talks or by preventing violence) does not mean that civil society peace work is of no use. On the contrary, we can conclude that civil society organisations (with donor support) take on a range of highly relevant tasks, including peace education, advocacy work and dialogue projects, in a difficult environment. Civil society contributes to raising voices for peace (in an increasingly militarised context) and upholds networks and ideas that can be made use of for massive mobilisation when conditions are more conducive. Over the last five years, peace organisations have become more professional. The establishment of courses in peace and conflict resolution at several of the main universities in Sri Lanka has contributed to a broader systematic spread of knowledge and to an institutionalisation of peace work.

In the context of ongoing war, the voices for peace will be even more important, given the dominance of militaristic discourses. Civil society groups that stick to the message that non-violent peace making is possible and that conflict transformation requires changes of power structures will be important in envisioning alternative ways of thinking and laying the ground for future peace attempts. What are the best ways to support and protect such groups, when there is a risk that even peace groups doubt the possibility for peaceful conflict resolution? Another main challenge is how to ensure that links fostered across ethnic and other divides survive in a militarised, polarised and violent environment – and how to use these links to challenge the logic of war, enemy images and ethnic separation. Cross-cutting links and networks can potentially be used to provide humanitarian assistance – finding ways to provide security and basic needs to those engaging in these activities will be a priority and challenge.

The chance of steering Sri Lanka back to the peace track seems bleak at the moment. In the near future, security concerns, curtailed mobility and the dominance of nationalist discourse and enemy images are likely to provide the backdrop for civil society peace work. Nevertheless, donors

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

and civil society organisations need to identify how they can play a (limited) role laying the ground for new peace attempts and address the underlying causes of the conflict.

Bibliography

Burke, A. & S. Bastian (2004). *FLICT: Concept and Structure*. Colombo: FLICT.

Gundhand, J. & B. Klem (2005). *Aid, Conflict, and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka 2000-2005*. Colombo: The Asia Foundation.

Loyanage, S. (2006). 'Civil Society and the Peace Process' in Rupesinghe, K. (ed.) *Negotiating Peace in Sri Lanka: Efforts, Failures and Lessons (Volume 2)*. Colombo: Foundation for Co-Existence.

Nesiah, V. (2002). 'Politics of Peace Talks: Framework of Conflict Resolution' *Daily Mirror*, 26 November.

Orjuela, C. (2004). *Civil Society in Civil War: Peace Work and Identity Politics in Sri Lanka*. Göteborg: Padrigu.

Rupesinghe, K. (2006). 'An Inquiry into NGO Phobia and NGO Bashing' *The Island*, 24 March.

End Notes

This text was written for FLICT (Facilitating Local Initiatives for Conflict Transformation) to be used as a basis for reflections and discussion about how FLICT should respond to the changed conflict environment, make priorities for the future and continue its work for sustained conflict transformation in Sri Lanka. The article is based on interviews with representatives of civil society organisations and donors carried out in Colombo May-June 2006, as well as on earlier research by the author. ■

Camilla Orjuela, Department of Peace & Development Research, School of Global Studies, Göteborg University Sweden.

Available at the Suriya Bookshop & Other Leading Bookshops

Price : Rs. 850/-

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

THE NOVEMBER 2006 MIDTERM ELECTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES – WAR, ECONOMICS AND ETHICS

Judy Waters Pasqualge

With the newly elected Congress coming into office in January, it is useful to review exactly what happened last November. The success of the Democratic Party in the 2006 mid-term elections has been the subject of much speculation, debate and, often, happiness and relief. Part of the surprise and elation, however, is misplaced; the win at the congressional level continues a trend seen in the 2004 elections, when the presidential contest was close, and the Democrats had many notable wins on state and local levels. It remains to be seen if the party leadership will stick to and act on the issues that enabled last year's win (backing off of the rightward shift seen especially under Bill Clinton), and which will be necessary to win the White House in 2008. This article first looks at key election statistics and at notable national, state and local races. Next, the three key election issues will be discussed: the Iraq war; the economy (in particular issues related to the standard of living); and ethics issues concerning civil liberties and corruption. From these one can gain a rudimentary gauge by which to view legislative action during the next two years.

Congressional Election Statistics

The Democratic taking of both houses of Congress is notable in light of two factors. The first is the more than decade-long trend of congressional district remapping carried out by an incumbent Republican Party, to its own advantage; one estimate notes that only 36 House seats are actually in close contention, as opposed to 100 in 1994.[1] The second factor is the tendency of the Republican Party to have access to more campaign money. In spite of these advantages, no Republican won a Democratic-held House or Senate seat, or governorship.

All 435 seats in the House of Representatives were up for election, with the pre-election status showing the Republicans with 230, the Democrats with 201, and 1 independent (the Socialist Bernie Sanders of Vermont, who won a Senate seat in November). The election results show the Republicans now with 202 and the Democrats with 232. In terms of the total popular vote, the Democrats polled 54.1% to the Republican 44.5% (39.2 to 28.5 million votes).[2]

In the Senate, 33 of the 100 seats were up for election, with the old Republican dominance at 55-44 (1 independent). The Democrats pulled off some cliffhangers to emerge with a 51-49 advantage, which includes 2 independents aligned with the Democrats. The popular vote figures show the Democrats with 53.7% and Republicans with 42.6% (31.5 to 25 million votes). Crucially, Republican incumbents were defeated in six states (Pennsylvania, Ohio, Rhode Island, Missouri, Montana and Virginia, see below).

Voting in terms of population groups in many respects followed expected lines: women favoured the Democrats more than men, by 56% to about 52%.[3] Whites favoured the Republicans (51-47%), and blacks the Democrats (89-10%). Latin Americans favoured the Democrats (69-30%), up from 55-45% in 2004. Asians went Democratic by 62-37%. Voters registered as independents went Democratic (57-39%), and white evangelical and born-again Christians went Republican (70-28%). In the age group 18-29, 60% voted Democratic (50% in 2004); in the 30-44 age group, 53%; in the 45-59 group, 53%; and in the 60 and over, 50%.

Voting in terms of income level showed the usual Democratic preference held by lower groups: families earning under $15,000 per year voted Democratic by 69-31%; and those earning more than $100,000 voted Republican (52-48%).[4] However, within the latter group a crucial shift occurred in 2006. On the East Coast, those making $150-200,000 voted Democratic by 63-37% (in 2004, 50% favoured Republicans), while those earning more than $200,000 favoured the Democrats by 50-48% (in 2004, 56% favoured Republicans). This trend was seen to a lesser extent in the West, South and Midwest. Of course the question arises, why would people who had benefited so much from Republican-sponsored tax cuts abandon the party? The answer involves the issues discussed below, which seem to have produced a concern over long-term, rather than just short-term, interests.

The six Republican Senate losses are instructive.[5] In the two southern states, Missouri and Virginia, the economic populism advocated by Democratic challengers was key. Claire McCaskill in Missouri, while pro-choice, for stem-

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

cell research, and opposed to anti-gay marriage measures, picked up (often conservative) rural votes to beat Senator Jim Talent by 50-47%. The Democrat James Webb in Virginia (a former Vietnam vet, secretary of the Navy and Republican) criticized the Iraq war, is pro-choice and opposed anti-gay measures, and also campaigned for the rural vote; he beat Senator George Allen by about 9,000 votes. In Pennsylvania, Senator Rick Santorum, a staunch conservative noted for his attacks on public schools and working mothers, lost to Bob Casey by 59-41%; Casey's campaign focused on economic issues and administration lies concerning the Iraq war. In Ohio, Sherrod Brown, a House member, beat Senator Mike DeWine by 56-44%, focusing on economic issues, opposition to the Patriot Act (see below), and the adverse effects of free trade agreements. In Montana, state Senate leader and organic farmer Jon Tester called for the repeal of the Patriot Act, and, in a state that had favoured Bush in 2000 and 2004 by more than 20%, beat scandal-tainted Senator Conrad Burns by about 3,000 votes. Finally, Rhode Island's liberal Republican Senator Lincoln Chafee lost to Sheldon Whitehouse by 53-47%, largely due to the former's affiliation to the party.

Democratic wins are noteworthy in other formerly Republican areas, including Colorado, Arizona, Wyoming, Indiana, Michigan and Minnesota. In the six New England states (Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island), of the 20 House seats, only one is now held by a Republican (Chris Shays of Connecticut).

State and Local Elections

Before the election, 28 states had Republican governors and 22 had Democrats. These figures are now switched, a Democratic gain of six positions: winning vacant seats in Colorado, Arkansas, Ohio, New York and Massachusetts, and beating the Republican incumbent in Maryland. New York's Eliot Spitzer, as the former state attorney general, was noted for taking up cases against the securities and insurance industries, and polluters.

With regard to state legislatures, almost all of which were up for election, before the election the Republicans held 21 and the Democrats 19, with 9 split (having upper and lower houses held by different parties).[6] The post-election figures are Democrats 23, Republicans 17, and 9 split – the Democratic gains came in Oregon, Minnesota, Iowa and New Hampshire. With regard to states where one party holds the governorship and the legislature, the Democrats now have 16 (up from 6) and the Republicans 10. In two states the change is especially historic: in New Hampshire the Democrats won such control for the first time in 130 years; in the lower house the Republicans lost 81 seats of their 92 majority; in the upper house they lost 5 of 8 seats held. In Colorado the Democrats last controlled the state in the early 1960s, and this time the winning issues included education, health care and renewable energy.

Other notable results find the election of the first Green Party mayor in a city of more than 100,000 – Richmond, California. And in Dallas County, Texas, of the 42 contested judgeships held by Republicans, Democrats won 41.

Many state and local referenda were held: voters supported stem-cell research in Missouri; and state-mandated increases in the federal minimum wage in Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, Montana, Nevada and Ohio. Voters opposed same-sex marriage by big margins in Tennessee, Idaho and South Carolina, and by small margins in Wisconsin, South Dakota and Virginia; they rejected a ban on same-sex marriage in Arizona. Voters in South Dakota rejected an already legislated ban on abortion (except where the mother's life is endangered), a measure meant to serve as a test case up to the Supreme Court level in order to overturn *Roe v. Wade*; parental notification requirements were defeated in California and Oregon.

The War

The growing opposition in the US to the war in Iraq is well known. Since the end of 2004 a majority have stated that the war was a mistake,[7] and by early 2005 the war was listed as the number one voter concern. In early 2006 one poll found 66% supportive of a reduction in troops, and by 2-1 of a timeline for their withdrawal,[8] although poll results regarding withdrawal depended greatly on how the question was worded.[9]

Among the forces in Iraq, in March 2003, 67% of soldiers thought the invasion was worthwhile, and 50% that their unit's morale was low. Three years later, 72% thought the war should be ended within a year, and 25% were for immediate withdrawal.[10]

In the pre-election period only 38% viewed the invasion of Iraq positively, and 61% said that the president had no clear plan for handling the war.[11] Another poll found that 63%

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

thought that the US was losing ground, and 54% that the US should not have taken military action.[12]

Coverage of the opposition to the war has highlighted the efforts of Cindy Sheehan, whose soldier son was killed in Iraq – and who is one of many 'military families' against the war. Also covered are the three main anti-war coalitions: Not in Our Name (NION), United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ), and Act Now to Stop War and End Racism (ANSWER).
One should add here only a few of the other groups and individuals, including: US Labor Against the War, which successfully urged the AFL-CIO's 2005 convention to call for rapid withdrawal; the Progressive Democrats of America, behind the call by seven state Democratic parties for troop withdrawal; over 35 mainstream Christian denominations, and US Catholic bishops, who came out against pre-emptive war *before* the invasion; the Union of Reform Judaism, which called for an exit strategy and priority of the issue for discussion around the country; towns is Vermont, where 50 of 54 town meetings have adopted anti-war resolutions;[13] and the chief prosecutor for the US at Nuremberg, who stated this was an 'aggressive war.'

This snowballing opinion against the war was reflected in the success of anti-war candidates in both Republican and Democrat-dominated areas, and in the House 'breakthrough wins' in New Hampshire, Iowa, Minnesota and California.[14]

The Economy

According to some exit polls, 50% of voters thought that the economy was not good or poor, with 31% stating that they were 'getting ahead' financially.[15] A poll in October found 63% stating that the economy was not good or poor, 33% stating good, and 4% stating excellent.[16]

While polls often serve to misrepresent actual opinion, the above figures do closely track the class structure in the US.[17] Contrary to the image of a well-off and middle-class dominated society:

62% of workers are in the working class – meaning that most income is spent on necessary consumption, and the jobs held involve no control over work and no supervisory functions. (The 20% of people above the working class spend 5/6 of their *pre-tax* income on necessary consumption.)
36% fall into the middle class of professionals, small businessmen, managers and supervisors.
2% constitute the capitalist class – the corporate elite, senior executives and directors.
The actual ruling class, those having a national impact, numbers 54,000.

While the administration pointed to a low official unemployment rate (4.6%), and moderate inflation and GDP growth, the reality for many people is quite bleak. The number of underemployed, which includes the unemployed, in now about 8%.[18] The economic upswing after the 2001-2002 recession saw an unprecedented lack of job creation, with people being unemployed for longer periods. The recession, job outsourcing and effects of free trade agreements have resulted in the loss of many higher-paid jobs (including in manufacturing and those providing union membership). And job losses have affected people across educational levels. In addition, many of the new jobs created have been in lower-paid industries and the retail sector. Thus, people finding new jobs after a period of unemployment often face a reduction in earnings.[19]

By income, statistics show that half of all workers earn less than $30,000 a year; 70% earn less than $50,000; and 90% earn less than $100,000.[20] But in considering the standard of living issue, it is important to focus on households and wealth (a function of income plus assets minus debt), and to include the factor of taxation. Even before the 2001 recession, income inequality was worse than had been seen since the 1920s (before the Great Depression).[21] Statistics on income received by each fifth of households, and for the top 15% and 5%, show the following:[22]

	lowest 20%	next 20%	lowest 20%	middle 60%	bottom 20%	next 20%	top top 15%	top 5%
1979	5.4	11.6	17.5	34.5	24.1	41.4	26.1	15.3
2000	4.3	9.8	15.5	29.6	22.8	47.4	26.6	20.8
2003	4.1	9.6	15.5	29.2	23.3	47.6	27.1	20.5

Between 2000 and 2003 the average income of middle-income earners fell, and the median household income of families headed by someone under the age of 55 also fell (for whites, blacks and Latin Americans), with losses greater for younger families.[23] In addition, between the end of 2003 and August 2006 the average wage of non-supervisory workers fell by 2%, and in 2005 the top 20% of earners took in 50.4% of total income.[24]

The federal tax cuts passed in 2001 and 2003 (on incomes, capital gains and dividends) provided most of the benefit to the top 20% of income earners; in 2004, those earning over $100,000 received 59% of the gains and those earning under $30,000, 8%.[25] It is estimated that in the 2001-2016 period,

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

53% of benefits will go to the top 10%, and more than 15% to the top 1/1000th. With regard to capital gains and dividends, 53% of benefits will go to the top 1%.[26]

With regard to debt, in 2005 households spent a record average of 13.75% of after-tax (disposable) income on debt service, and the US now has a negative personal savings rate;[27] in 2003 household debt stood at 114.5% of disposable personal income.[28]

In terms of wealth, in 2001 the top 1% of households held 33% of national wealth, and the bottom 80% held 16%. Households with zero or negative wealth numbered 17.6% (whites 13.1% and blacks 30.9%). Finally, stockholding figures (stocks plus retirement accounts) show that in 2001, 1% of stockowners held 33.6% (by value), and the bottom 80% held 10.7%. Regarding stocks alone, the top 1% of households held 44.9%, the top 10% held 85.1%, and bottom 80% held 5.8%.[29]

According to federal statistics, 12.1% of people (34.6 million) lived in poverty in 2002. This number is based on *pre-tax* income, by household type. In 2003, for example, a family consisting of two parents and two children had to gross $18,660 to avoid official poverty; and a single parent with two children, $14,824. Some analysts insist, however, that when the basics of food, clothing, shelter, taxes and childcare are figured in, a doubling of the official poverty standards is necessary; by this calculation, in 2002, 30.5% of people were in poverty.[30]

Thus, one can begin to see the economic issues underlying the 2006 election. One might add that while corporate profits have more than doubled since 2000 (a much high rate than under presidents Clinton or Reagan),[31] the number of people without health insurance continues to rise (about 16%, or 48 million), and for those who have it, it costs more. The importance of several pieces of the Republican agenda also becomes apparent: the attempt to privatize part of the federal Social Security program (to enable some workers to invest contributions in the stock market) met with great opposition and was defeated in Congress; a measure that passed, however, changed the program's prescription drug component to provide a huge subsidy to the pharmaceutical industry.

Finally, the centrality of the issue of the federally mandated minimum wage becomes clear (60% of earners are women), especially since any increase impacts rates above the minimum. Last raised in 1998 to $5.15 per hour, a 40-hour week brings in about $10,700 per year, *before* taxes. So severe is the situation that by the year 2000, more than 60 cities had raised the rate,[32] and before the mid-term elections, 22 states and the District of Columbia had raised it. The rate in Santa Fé, New Mexico, is now $9.50 per hour, and in July Chicago mandated $10 per hour for workers in 'big-box' stores such as Wal-Mart, Toys 'R' Us and Home Depot.[33] Finally, *The New York Times* reported in 2006 that for the first time a minimum-wage earner could not afford a one-bedroom apartment at market price anywhere in the US,[34] this in the context of more than 25% of households consisting of one person.

Ethics: Civil Liberties and Scandals

After 11 September 2001 there has been the most severe erosion of civil liberties in the US since the 'McCarthy era.' At the same time, actions by the US government abroad, associated with the war in Iraq and on 'terrorism,' have earned the condemnation of the world.

The Patriot Act of October 2001 incorporates and sometimes amends provisions in laws and criminal codes pertaining to the investigation of foreign targets, to apply to domestic 'terrorism' targets. One of these laws is the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) of 1978, which has provisions regarding electronic surveillance, access to business records, physical searches, and the issuance of search warrants that are not a matter of public record. With regard to the latter, a special FISA Court was set up to approve such requests when, in theory, the normal court procedure was deemed to be too slow; the Act provided for a standard of reasonable, as opposed to probable, cause. Among the more controversial provisions of the Patriot Act are: the power to delay notification of the execution of a search warrant, and of the items seized, with no notification required regarding phone records; the ability to use of the FISA Court for such warrants; the ability of the FBI to access library and bookstore records of anyone connected to an investigation, via the FISA court, with the recipient barred from making the demand public; the creation of a foreign student monitoring program;[35] the criminalizing of material aid and advice to terrorists and foreign terrorist organizations; the ability to "freeze the assets of suspected charities without any showing of wrongdoing, and based on secret evidence; and permitting foreign nationals to be locked up without charges, deported for innocent political associations and kept out of the country for endorsing any group the government labels as 'terrorist' ..."[36]

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

The Patriot Act contained permanent provisions and temporary ones that needed reauthorization by the end of 2005, subsequently extended to March 2006, when Congress made all but two of the temporary provisions permanent, after some minor changes: approval regarding library and medical records must be obtained from the director or deputy director of the FBI; and recipients of orders regarding library and bookstore records may inform their lawyers. In September 2005 the American Civil Liberties Union estimated that there were 30,000 information demands being made each year. Over 400 charges had been filed, with half of cases resulting in conviction or guilty pleas. On the local level, 8 states and 396 cities and counties have passed resolutions against the Act and its violation of civil liberties.

Among other important Congressional measures are: the December 2005 McCain amendment, which bars cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment to anyone, including foreigners held outside of the US; the Graham-Levin amendment, that restricts habeas corpus review for those held at Guantánamo Bay[37]; and most importantly (and just after the Supreme Court prohibited the trial and execution of enemy combatants based on coerced testimony, hearsay and classified evidence), the September 2006 Military Commissions Act, which sets up special courts, allows such evidence, and virtually nullifies the McCain amendment.[38] Finally with regard to civil liberties, in December 2005 it came to light that President Bush had secretly authorized warrantless wiretapping by the National Security Agency, a violation of the FISA.[39]

Administration and Republican actions regarding the war, economy and civil liberties has occurred in the context of, and has contributed to, a general climate of high-handedness, arrogance and hypocrisy, which is superbly illustrated in the mushrooming scandals surrounding government.

A few examples will suffice, the prime one involving the dealings of political lobbyist Jack Abramoff, a conservative connected to the religious Right, and whose background involves activities on behalf of the Republican Party and in the 1980s of Oliver North and the Nicaraguan contras.[40] Abramoff was a paid lobbyist for several Native American tribes attempting to protect their casino interests. In 1995, legislation to tax such casinos was defeated in Congress, with Rep. Tom DeLay (Republican, Texas, and from 2003 the House majority leader) a prime actor. Abramoff worked with former DeLay aide Michael Scanlon, and with the former chief of staff of Rep. Bob Ney (Republican, Ohio). Abramoff admitted to bribing Rep. Ney, and in early 2006 pleaded guilty to three criminal felony counts (conspiracy, fraud and tax evasion). Scanlon and the former chief of staff to Ney pleaded guilty to conspiracy; and in September Ney pleaded guilty to conspiracy and false statements. In Louisiana, Alabama and Texas, Abramoff worked for Native American casino interests against the establishment of new casinos; in this effort he paid for the assistance of Ralph Reed, co-founder of the Christian Coalition, who set up anti-gambling coalitions among his constituency (without their knowing of the Abramoff connection). Reed contested the Republican primary in the race for lieutenant governor of Georgia in July, losing 56-44%.[41]

Other Abramoff activities included working against giving the minimum wage to workers in the US-controlled Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, a successful effort in which DeLay and Montana Senator Conrad Burns were involved. In 2001-2002, Abramoff also worked for the Guam Superior Court against the establishment of a (higher) supreme court. When the US attorney in Guam, Frederick Black, started to investigate Governor Gutierrez for diversion of funds, the latter hired Abramoff to smear the attorney as a 'Clintonite'; Black also started to investigate Abramoff. The Department of Justice replaced and demoted Black in late 2002.[42] Abramoff was also involved with a partner in an attempt to buy SunCruz Casinos in Florida; the two concocted a fake wire transfer in order to qualify for a loan, and were convicted on two criminal felony counts. In November Abramoff began serving time in a minimum-security jail, while cooperating with authorities and while several investigations continue. In 2006 DeLay was indicted for violation of Texas state election law; he resigned as majority leader, withdrew from the House race, and in June resigned from the House.

There is no doubt that the immediacy of the Abramoff scandals affected the November vote. Beyond Abramoff, however, lie allegations concerning the Houston, Texas, company Halliburton Energy Services (of which Vice-President Cheney was made chairman and CEO in 1995), and its range of high-cost and/or no-bid contracts in Iraq; and investigation of which had been blocked by Republicans in the Senate. And then there was the matter of Rep. Mark Foley of Florida, who resigned before the election after publicity about his email overtures to male House pages – with the House Republican leadership knowing about it and doing nothing

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

And so?

And so, eyes will be on the new Congress. Watch to see what action the divided Democrats take on Iraq – an alternative is now demanded; and the nature and progress of investigations undertaken regarding the decision to go to war. Watch for quick action on the minimum wage; but, and more indicative, the measures taken regarding taxation, financial regulation and health insurance. Watch to see what action is taken with regard to the Patriot Act and the Military Commissions Act, and to the status of detainees at Guantánamo Bay and beyond. Monitor congressional treatment of the president's right-wing court nominees. See if Democratic action on environmental issues in any way comes close to the sentiments of the population, which is far ahead of Washington. And watch to see if the Democratic Congress makes serious efforts to reform campaign finance, and to correct voting irregularities.

The agenda is huge, and the leadership of both parties do agree on the main aim of US policy – to maintain and expand global economic supremacy, with the related neoliberal agenda. Their success will be greatly impacted by resistance within the US itself. In that sense, the wins in November 2006 have opened the political space, and progressive ideas and policies will gain more exposure – their proponents should be supported by people everywhere.

Postscript: With regard to Iraq, as of early March, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted against the troop build-up announced by President Bush, but Republicans blocked debate in the full Senate. The House passed a non-binding resolution against the build-up, and divided Democrats are considering several plans for troop withdrawal. With regard to the minimum wage, the House and Senate both passed bills to raise it by $2.10 to $7.25/hour. The Senate bill, however, would phase in the increase over two years and contains tax concessions to small businesses; the House and Senate have not yet reconciled the two bills. At present, about 479,000 people earn the $5.15 minimum, and 5.6 million earn less than $7.25. With regard to the Patriot Act, the Department of Justice admitted that the FBI has broken the law in obtaining information without official authorization and in non-emergency situations; it has also under-reported to congress its issuance of demands for information (over 140,000 requests, 2003-2005); both the House and Senate are to conduct hearings. With regard to the president's 2001 authorization of warrantless domestic spying, the Senate Judiciary Committee has obtained and is seeking still greater access to administration records. Finally, with regard to corruption, former Rep. Ney is now serving a 2-1/2-year jail term in connection with the Abramoff scandal. And, a jury has just convicted Vice-President Cheney's former chief of staff, Lewis Libby, of lying about his knowledge of administration leaks that revealed the identity of CIA agent Valerie Plame Wilson. Plame's husband, Joseph Wilson, had refuted the administration's pre-war claim that Saddam Hussein had sought uranium from Niger. Libby is the first White House official to be convicted since the Iran-Contra scandal in the 1980s.

End Notes

[1] Karen Tumulty and Mike Allen, "It's Lonely at the Top," *Time*, 6 November 2006, 17.
[2] Unless otherwise noted, election results are from en.wikipedia.org (2006 Midterm Elections).
[3] On group voting, see Jon Meacham, "The Prodigal Returns," *Newsweek*, 20 November 2006, 23.
[4] On voting by income level, see Rick Wolff, "Exit Poll Revelations," *mrzine*, 13 November 2006, mrzine.org.
[5] John Nichols, "Measuring the Mandate," *The Nation*, 27 November 2006, 4; and Bob Moser. "A New Southern Strategy," in same issue, 6.
[6] John Nichols, "Power Shifts in the States," *The Nation*, 4 December 2006, 5-6.
[7] en.wikipedia.org (Iraq War).
[8] Ari Berman, "The Democrats: Still Ducking," *The Nation*, 27 March 2006, 21.
[9] en.wikipedia.org (Iraq War).
[10] en.wikipedia.org (Iraq War).
[11] Tumulty and Allen, 16.
[12] Evan Thomas, "The Rescue Squad." *Newsweek*, 20 November 2006, 30.
[13] Above examples from John Nichols. "Bringing the War Home," *The Nation*, 27 March 2006, 4-5.
[14] Editorial, *The Nation*, 27 November 2006, 3; and Nichols, "Measuring the Mandate," 4.
[15] Jane Bryant Quinn, "The Economic Perception Gap," *Newsweek*, 20 November 2006, 39.
[16] John Maggs, "The Republican Economy." *National Journal*, 13 October 2006.
[17] Michael Zweig, "Six Points on Class." *Monthly Review*, July-August 2006, 116-117; and John Bellamy Foster, "The Household Debt Bubble," *Monthly Review*, May 2006, 1.
[18] Fred Magdoff, "The Explosion of Debt and Speculation," *Monthly Review*, November 2006, 2.
[19] Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein and Sylvia Allegretto, *The State of Working America 2004/2005* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 8, 172, 185.
[20] "America by the Numbers," *Time*, 6 November 2006, 25, 30.
[21] Mishel, et al., 3.

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

[22] Mishel, et al., 67.
[23] Mishel, et al., 40, 48, 51.
[24] Maggs.
[25] Maggs.
[26] William K. Tabb, "The Power of the Rich," *Monthly Review*, July-August 2006, 12.
[27] Magdoff, 11.
[28] Mishel, et al., 299.
[29] Mishel, et al., 10, 187, 277.
[30] Mishel, et al., 12, 309.
[31] Maggs.
[32] Sasha Abramsky, "The Moral Minimum," *The Nation*, 6 November 2006, 20.
[33] Katrina vanden Heuvel and Sam Graham-Felsen, "Chicago's Living Wage," *The Nation*, 25 September 2006, 10.
[34] Katrina vanden Heuvel, "$13,700 an Hour," *The Nation*, 1 May 2006, 5.
[35] en.wikipedia.org (Patriot Act).
[36] David Cole, "Patriot Act Post-Mortem," *The Nation*, 3 April 2006, 4-5.
[37] Cole, "Patriot Act Post-Mortem," 5.
[38] David Cole, "Sanctioning Lawlessness," *The Nation*, 23 October 2006, 4-5.
[39] Athan G. Theoharis, "The FISA File," *The Nation*, 6 March 2006, 7.
[40] Unless otherwise noted, see en.wikipedia.org (Jack Abramoff).
[41] On Ralph Reed, see Max Blumenthal, "Abramoff's Evangelical Soldiers," *The Nation*, 20 February 2006, 16-18; and Bob Moser, "The Devil Inside," *The Nation*, 17 April 2006, 11-12.
[42] Ari Berman, "Can Justice Be Trusted," *The Nation*, 20 February 2006, 19-20. ■

Judy Waters Pasqualge is the author of *International McCarthyism: The Case of Rhoda Miller de Silva* (SSA, forthcomimg)

RIGHT PEOPLE, WRONG QUESTION

Gloria Steinem

Even before Barrack Obama and Hillary Clinton threw their exploratory committees into the ring, every reporter seemed to be asking which candidate are Americans people more ready for, a white woman or a black man?

With all due respect to the journalistic dilemma of reporting two "firsts" at the same time - two visible presidential candidates who aren't the usual white faces over collars and ties - I think this is a dumb and destructive question.

It's dumb because most Americans are smart enough to figure out that a member of a group may or may not represent its interests. After all, many African-Americans opposed the appointment of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme court in 1991 because they were aware of his record - and the views of his conservative supporters.

Similarly, most women weren't excited about Elizabeth Dole as a presidential candidate for the 2000 election because she seemed more attached to those in power than those in need of it. Indeed, Elizabeth dole even got support from people who opposed women making their own reproductive decisions. (If Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice decides to run for president, I imagine that she would face the same fate.)

The question is also destructive because it's divisive. In fact, women of all races and men of color - who together form an underrepresented majority of this country - have often found themselves in coalition. Both opposed the wars in Vietnam and Iraq more and earlier than their white male counterparts. White women have also been more likely than white men to support pro-equality candidates of color, and people of color have been more likely to support pro-equality white women.

It's way too early to know which candidate will earn trust or survive swift—boating, but forcing a choice between race and sex only conceals what's really going on.

So far, for example, polls show that about 60 percent of African-American Democrats support Hillary Clinton, while only about 20 percent support Barrack Obama. These surprising numbers probably have less to do with Senator Obama himself than with whether people feel he's been around long enough to trust, whether the name "Clinton," with its association of racial inclusiveness, is a better bet,

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

and whether a member of one's own group - a group that has endured a history of discrimination - could win anyway.

This disease of doubt plays a big role:

Forcing a choice between
Race and sex only conceals
What's really going on.

81 percent of black voters tell pollsters that a white man will get the Democratic nomination, while only 58 percent of white voters do. Such doubt also helps to explain why women are more likely than men to support Hillary Clinton, but also more likely to say she can't win.

Still, the larger question is: Why compare allies and ignore the opposition?

Both Senators Clinton and Obama are civil rights advocates, feminists, environmentalists and critics of the war in Iraq, though she voted early and wrong, and he spoke out early and right. Both have resisted pandering to the right, something that sets them apart from any Republican candidate, including John McCain. Both have Washington and foreign policy experience, George W. Bush did not when he first ran for president.

But the greatest reason for progressives to refuse to be drawn into an irrelevant debate about Clinton and Obama is that it is destructive. We can accomplish more if we act as a coalition.

Think, for instance, of the powerful 19th-century coalition for universal adult suffrage. The parallels between being a chattel slave by race and chattel as a wife, daughter or indentured worker turned abolitionists into suffrages, and vice versa. This coalition against a caste system based on race and sex turned the country on its head - until it was divided by giving the vote to its smallest part, Negro men.

Sojourner Truth famously warned that this division would cripple the movement for decades to come - and it did. Only a half-century later did white and black women get the vote, by then tarnished by the racist rhetoric of some white women and diminished by racist restrictions and violence at pools. And only decades after that, in the 1960s, did the civil rights movement start a new wave of equality that spread into feminism, the Native American movement, the gay and lesbian movement and much more.

But those activists were reinventing the wheel. They were rediscovering Gunnar Myrdal's verdict of the 1940s that "the parallel between women and Negroes is the deepest truth of American life, for together they form the unpaid or underpaid labor on which America runs."

This time, we could learn from history. We could double our chances by working for one of these candidates, not against the other. For now, I've figured out how to answer reporters when they ask if I'm supporting Hilary Clinton or Barack Obama.

I just say yes. ■

Gloria Steinem is the co-founder of the Women's Media Center.

Available again at the Suriya Bookshop

KAMLA BHASIN'S

- **What is Patriarchy?**
- **Exploring Masculinity**
- **What is a Girl? What is a Boy?**
- **Understanding Gender**
- **Laughing Matters**
- **Feminism & its Relevance in South Asia**

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

GLOBALIZATION AND ITS MISCONCEPTIONS

G. Chris Rodrigo

I am sending you this brief appreciative comment on the article "Globalization, Militarism and Labour" in the latest issue of *Polity* (Vol. 3. Nos. 5 & 6) written by Rohini Hensman. In particular, she identifies specific features of 'contemporary globalization,' distinguishing it from the hoary catch-all term 'imperialism' which have been stretched so far so as to obscure more than clarify meaning. This is the fate of particularly popular terms like 'technology' which are used in so many different senses that they have lost their utilityto convey precise definition. Globalization is experiencing a similar fate: for example, the *Economist* of 23, December 2006 reports that Mongolians in Ulan Bator claim that Genghis Khan "all but invented globalization," encouraging trade, the flow of wealth, technology and ideas across a number of vastly different cultures.

Hensman shows a rare ability to break through the stultifying shibboleths of the orthodox Left as regards globalization, the WTO and other political economy issues. It appears to me that her work is based on serious, extensive research in sharp contrast to most analyses of globalization that flow out of uninformed speculation on how the world economy works. Most 'Marxist' analyses that I have come across, here and abroad, have not been able to master and assimilate much of the extensive research on technological change, institutions and the economics of information, that have been developed over the last few decades. Most of this has not been done by orthodox neoclassical economists, but by the growing band of heterodox evolutionary economists operating at the fringes of the profession; these are a small fraction of the economics profession worldwide, but already they run into many hundreds, to judge by conference attendance numbers.

Rohini Hensman's article deserves a more detailed critical review, but let me briefly point out some important insights she presents that address current misconceptions.

1. She points out that contemporary globalization is not only very different from classical imperialism, it is in some ways opposed to it. She argues, correctly in my view, that this is because of the establishment of global regulatory institutions at the expense of state sovereignty. She does not go on to explain that this is the result of the way technology itself and the global value chains of production and distribution have developed. That is a pity since there is already a considerable literature on global value chains of production that is invaluable to those of us who work as consultants on industrial development. Nevertheless, the insight she does present is a quantum leap beyond the anti-globalization rhetoric one comes across routinely.

2. Another important insight relates to the WTO, which is very different from the Bretton Woods institutions. She correctly shows that the WTO is a one-country, one-vote body in which Third World countries have considerable ability to influence policy. That is why around 150 countries are members and even powerful countries like China were very keen to joint at almost any cost. Of course, there is imbalance in the degree to which countriessuch as Sri Lanka can influence policy compared to say the US, Brazil, China or India.

But now we have a rule-based system that regulates world trade and allows even small countries to obtain favourable rulings. Anyone who has taken the time and trouble to go through the tedious task of studying individual cases will immediately realize that there are many rulings that have gone against powerful nations such as the US. The WTO and the GATT process that preceded it have gone through many 'rounds' ranging over more than a half century. Over this period many trade barriers have been reduced very substantially and world trade has grown exponentially, at around double the rate of growth of world GDP. The world trading system is an institutional framework that is constantly evolving, and now that most developing countries realize the benefits to be gained from trade, everyone wants to be a part of it. Furthermore, countries such as Brazil, India and China have learned how to use their trading power effectively and are sharp negotiators.

Of course there are major imbalances on account of their enormous technological and market power, but the US, the EU and Japan can by no means get it all their own way. Not

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

only that, trade conflicts between the major powers – for example, on farm subsidies between the US and the EU - are very substantial. That is why the current Doha round is caught up in gridlock. Developing countries and even small countries are no longer the pushovers they once were. Somehow all this has escaped our orthodox Marxists.

When I raise such issues with my socialist friends they typically point to some imbalance to dismiss the WTO system as an 'imperialist conspiracy' that is being foisted on the poor nations. This kind of 'lazy Marxism' is based on ignorance of what is actually happening. It also reflects a 'creationist' view of institutions rather than an 'evolutionary' view: i.e. unless an institution emerges perfect, like Venus from the brow of Jupiter, it has to be an instrument of oppression. The WTO system is like the legal system in Sri Lanka; it has major defects, but it is better to have even an inefficient system of codified law than have everything decided by the whims of powerful actors alone.

3. Hensman also points out that other international institutions such as the ILO, the FAO and the ICC play positive roles, despite some shortcomings. She does not point out that some international institutions, such as UNIDO, are abhorred by the US, which refuses to give any funds for its work and argues it should not exist. I personally think UNIDO's work is very valuable; but I am biased because most of my consulting work over the last three years has been for UNIDO. Despite the opposition of the US, UNIDO continues to function and even cooperate with the World Bank from time to time. The problem with these inherited conceptions of 'imperialism' is that it seems to stop people from actually studying how global relations work.

4. Hensman has also provided valuable insights on the global expansion of the proletariat and the improvement in working conditions resulting from globalization. It is important to point out the positive outcomes as well as the many negative outcomes of globalization. The point is that globalization is an objective development that is not controlled by any nation, much like the first and second industrial revolutions. Once the process starts, the productivity gains that flow out of this arrangement are so compelling that no nation can opt out of it. The US is very much affected by globalization, which is now becoming very unpopular with lower-skilled US workers as their jobs migrate to developing country workers whose skill levels are similar or even superior. But to argue against globalization because China and India are now doing work previously done in metropolitan centres is to retreat to neo-Luddism.

There are other valuable insights which I do not have sufficient time to comment on in this short letter. Rohini Hensman's analyses are far different from the kind of 'mindless Marxism' that is unfortunately all too common in the Left literature. In this she has returned to the scholarly tradition of Marx, Trotsky and Luxembourg who based their conclusions on deep study and critical apprehension of contemporary economic research. While it is easy to find flaws in the thinking of these giants from the standpoint of what we know today, they undoubtedly developed very reasonable insights on the basis of available knowledge. The mistake made by their followers is to base their perspectives on 'holy writ' alone without reference to contemporary social research. They see 'Marxism' as a body of thought developing within a closed ideological envelope, much as a religon based on revealed truth.

At its best, scientific social theory should be seen as a critical apprehension of knowledge in its entirety as it evolves in many distinct disciplines, much like an orchid growing on the body of the host organism. I think this is how Marx and his great followers also developed their own constructions. Unfortunately, orthodox Marxism has morphed into quasi-religious deployment of outmoded formulae

Rohini has taken a bold step to break away from the above sterile methodology. But she has some ways to go yet. She seems to be unaware of the extensive literature on the evolution of technology and its consequences for the evolution of capitalism.Thus. in taking up the various conceptions of imperialism she describes the extensive expansion of capitalism through the search for external markets, but is silent on the intensive development of the productive system through technological change. Starting in 1871, industrial capitalism entered a qualitatively different phase with the linking of university research to industrial production in Germany in the chemical industry. This practice was taken up very quickly in the US as well. Germany and the US then experienced a rapid growth of labour productivity brought on by the intensive development of technology. Because of this they had no need of colonies, since expansion is based on the deepening of the internal market as the gains from rising labour productivity are passed on to the working class. This new industrial system was taken up by Britain and France, the classic imperial powers, only after the Second World War when the technological superiority of the US became apparent and they had been reduced to second–rate powers.

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

From the standpoint of contemporary research in the economics of technology, the push into colonies was not "the highest stage of capitalism" as Lenin characterized it, but a dead end. This extensive expansion may have been the easy option, but it held back the further development of technology and productivity in Britain and France for over half a century at the least. Bismarck seems to have had some inkling of this since he astutely encouraged France's colonial misadventures while keeping Germany away from colonies.

This policy was changed only when Kaiser Wilhelm took over the reins pushing aside the experienced statesman.

There is much more to write about on these issues, but I am afraid that would take a much longer document. Let me close by complimenting Rohini on her bold and insightful paper and hope that she will eventually find her way to the literature on the economics of technology, developed by eminent evolutionary economists. I also hope her paper will be read carefully and digested by political activists on the Left. ■

Dr. Chris Rodrigo is an international consultant on competitiveness building, technological upgrading and the facilitation of trade.

Available from the Suriya Bookshop. A New SSA Publication.

Matrilineal Communities, Patriarchal Realities

A Feminist Nirvana Uncovered

"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, Patriarchal 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

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

ANTHROPOLOGY OF 'SINHALA BUDDHISM'

Premakumara de Silva

The disciplinary identification of "Buddhism" in Sri Lanka as an anthropological object began in the late 1950s as part of the growing field of 'peasant' or village studies in South and Southeast Asian societies. In Sri Lanka, the work of Gananath Obeyesekere, Edmond Leach, Michael Ames and Nur Yalman is central to this inaugural moment. These anthropologists have identified the integration of the diverse beliefs and practices of Sinhala Buddhists within a religious worldview that is in accord with fundamental Theravada Buddhist teachings. Within this academic exercise Obeyesekere (1963, 1966, 1970) insisted on the term 'Sinhalese Buddhism' to convey the idea of full variety of religious practice, popular and esoteric, in Sri Lankan Buddhism. He argues that Sinhala Buddhism should be seen as 'a single religious tradition,' and not as composed of separate 'layers' to be analysed in isolation from each other.[1]

Most of these studies on the anthropology of Buddhism in Sri Lanka present an idealized, often perfectly integrated and highly Weberian or functionalist view. The continuity of this kind of theoretical approach in the anthropology of Buddhism in Sri Lanka can even be seen in recent studies. For example, it is addressed in the recent work of H.L. Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings: The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka* (1999), which is heavily grounded in the Weberian model of scholarship. Such questionable theoretical formulation on the 'anthropology of Sinhala Buddhism' is not only considered in Seneviratne's works but also in the works of other anthropologists who belong to a similar intellectual tradition. For example, works of Gananath Obeyesekere (1963,1966, 1984, 1995), Stanley Tambiah (1976, 1992), Richard Gombrich (1971,1988), Kitsiri Malalgoda (1976) and others are notable in this regard. The analyses they provide largely revolve around the popular binary categories such as 'village' and 'urban' or 'the great tradition', and 'the little tradition', 'worldly' and 'other worldly', 'orthodox' and 'syncretistic', 'tradition' and 'modern'.

However, recent works on religion, identity and politics by the later generation of anthropologists have criticized this kind of conventional, essentialized theoretical conceptualization in order to further our understanding of the anthropology of Sri Lanka in general, and Buddhism in particular. For example, Jonathan Spencer has criticized the Weberian and functionalist position in his essay "Tradition and Transformation: Recent Writing on the Anthropology of Buddhism in Sri Lanka" (1990). As he puts it, "the idea of the traditional is no longer an innocent analytic category in Sri Lanka but has become a central weapon in arguments about what Buddhism is and what it should try to be in the contemporary world" (1990:130) and "almost all who engage in this argument,...sooner or later seek to legitimate their version of what is essential by appeal to some idea of the 'traditional' "(ibid. 138). Spencer's main thrust is to disclose the unproblematic use of 'tradition' when understanding or formulating different forms of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. But the most influential criticism came from the work of David Scott (1994) who argues for a radical rethinking of historical change within the context of Sinhala Buddhism. He questions the ways in which anthropological and colonial production of knowledge about religion and ritual has objectified Buddhism in an unproblematic way (1994). Scott has proposed groundbreaking approaches to theorizing the relation between colonialism, anthropology and culture in Sri Lankan anthropology in particular, and anthropology in general. He has suggested that in order to understand 'Buddhism,' we need to drop our anthropological formulation that retained the colonial preoccupation with marking the distinction between an authentic Buddhism and Spirit religion, and instead to begin asking about the ways in which Buddhists in Sri Lanka make claims about what Buddhism is, the kinds of social and political projects into which the figures of the Buddhist tradition get mobilized, and to leave Buddhists to say what Buddhism is (1994: 242).[2] In short, his concern was to locate genealogies about what constitutes 'authentic Buddhism.' This radical approach to the anthropology of Buddhism in Sri Lanka has been further developed by the recent study of Ananda Abeysekara. In his award wining text *Colors of the Robe: Religion, Identity, and Difference* (2002), Abeysekara examines "the formations and deformations of contingent relations between 'religious' [Buddhist] identity and difference" (2002: 04) by turning to several native debates that challenged and shaped ideas about what can and cannot count as 'Buddhism'. In other words,

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

he explores how authoritative traditions become created, challenged, and established in varying conjunctures of Buddhist tradition in post-colonial Sri Lanka. Abeysekara brings his theoretical argument against the conventional anthropological formulation of 'Buddhism,' 'politics,' 'violence' and 'monkhood' by focusing his attention on the processes by which "authoritative understanding about Buddhism and monastic identity" is produced (2002:56). He focuses on "the ways in which diverse persons, practices, discourses, and institutions conjoin to foreground competing definitions about 'Buddhism' and its 'others'" (ibid. 3) in order to demonstrate his theoretical framework that "what can and cannot count as Buddhism, culture, and difference, alter within specific native debates" (ibid.). He draws attention to several native debates pertaining to 'what kinds of 'Buddhist' practice should be performed by whom" (2002: 41), as well as "what persons and practices constitute Buddhist monkhood" (ibid. 43). How these are fashioned and debated transcend not only a monk's own tactical rules and logic of formation but also disciplinary attempts at canonizing them as universal categories (ibid. 239). Such critical studies appeal to us to rethink the conventional anthropological formulation of Sri Lanka's Buddhism.

This new approach to anthropology of Buddhism in Sri Lanka has heavily undermined the way in which 'Buddhism' has been constructed and analysed so far, particularly conceptualization of 'radical' changes that have taken place in Buddhism during the 19th and 20th centuries. According to this new approach, the 'theoretical problem' of the study of Sinhala Buddhism was developed in terms of "Buddhism and Society" rather than to investigate the relationship between 'text and context.' The former gives us, according to Scott, the illusion that Buddhism and society are two separate entities (1994: 178). Even though this anthropology of Buddhism avoids the pitfalls of earlier understanding of Sinhala religion, it also constructs an "authentic Buddhism" (ibid.).

The transformation of this 'authentic Buddhism' (e.g., Theravada Buddhism) has been the dominant subject matter in the anthropology of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. One recalls at once such notable book-length examples as Gombrich's *Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon* (1971) and *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo* (1988).[3] In the latter, Gombrich develops social explanations for "three major points of change" that have occurred in Theravada's history: the foundation of Buddha's Sasana in India some 2,500 years ago; its migration from India to Sri Lanka, where a reformulation of Buddhist identity happened; and in which a transformation took place in response and reaction to the influence of the Protestant Christian missionary contingent that accompanied the British colonization of Sri Lanka. Gombrich argues that 'pre-colonial Buddhism' was marked by fluid boundaries–religious tolerance that was mixed with indigenous strands of religion, particularly Tamil Saivite and Väddâ's religion. 'Colonial Buddhism,' on the other hand, was mixed with the 'colonial religion' of political authority that was impervious to change at the popular level. Such intolerance, by Gombrich's definition, cannot be Buddhist, so it is attributed to Protestant Christianity and its evangelical spread, which profoundly affected the nature of the Buddhist revival. Revivalist Buddhism, for Gombrich, began to assert religious boundaries and religious purity and thereby created an intolerant Buddhism.

The effect of this gap and the most recent 'transformation' of religion of Sinhala people are further identified in *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka* which is based on a collaborative research project begun in the 1970s by Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere. In this provocative detailed text, they identify the stages of how Buddhism has been "transformed" in Sri Lanka. They differentiate between three forms of Sinhala Buddhist religion: traditional Buddhism – the Theravada of the Buddha, the sangha, and the Pali Canon, which implies that some kind of authentic Buddhism has existed; "spirit religion"; and "Protestant Buddhism," and they show how the spirit religion and Protestant Buddhism have interacted and mixed recently in complex ways and such new development is labelled as "Post Protestant Buddhism."

"Protestant Buddhism," a term previously used by Obeyesekere (1972), started in the late nineteenth century under the influence of Anagarika Dharmapala. It was at once a protest against Christian cultural encroachment that incorporated its style and content from Protestantism. It was a style of Buddhism that encouraged a new, this-worldly asceticism for the laity and a return to the text-based 'authentic' form of Buddhism.[4] Protestant Buddhism appeals to the more privileged urban middle class and reflects the cultural values of a bourgeois Protestantism. It also blurs the sharp dichotomy between the hierarchically dominant monks and the subordinate laity and encourages the greater capacity of the individual to seek his or her own salvation without the need of intermediaries and traditional authorities. The Protestant Buddhists have denounced the popular religion of their fellow Sinhala Buddhists as being corrupted and 'non-

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

Buddhist,' one that is, as Gombnch Gombrich and Obeyesekere say, labelled as "Spirit religion."

Spirit religion, which is defined at one point as the non-Buddhist part of the religion of Sinhala Buddhists, is nothing new. Deities, such as Vishnu, Natha, Saman and Kataragama and the goddess Pattini, planetary deities (*grahayo*), demons (*yakku*), and the manipulation of their powers have long been an integral part of Sinhala Buddhism. It deals not with Buddhist soteriology, but rather with mundane aims and worldly affairs. The recent transformation in the Spirit religion is called by them "Post Protestant Buddhism"–a different religious style which combines the ecstatic devotionalism of Hindu *bhakti*, and the propitiation of the formerly out-worldly Buddha for in-worldly benefits particularly through the Bodhi *pûjâ* ritual. This new development in Sinhala Buddhist religiosity has been identified in broad psychological terms and they attribute these major changes to the failure of the economy to meet the aspirations of the people, a political system which encourages unrealistic aspirations, and mass universal education, which, in turn, increases social aspirations. One way of relieving psychological tensions that arise from these changes, for Gombrich and Obeyesekere, is to rely on new forms of religiosity (de Silva 2000:5).

Following Gombrich and Obeyesekere's formulation, I am reluctant to distinguish contemporary religious practices by Sinhala Buddhists as belonging exclusively to either 'Protestant Buddhism' or 'post-Protestant Buddhism,' or 'village Buddhism' or 'urban Buddhism'. Sinhala Buddhist practices have a long history. For this reason I am inclined to regard such practices as 'popular religion,' which also expresses the sentiments of Buddhist revitalization. I am not seeking to identify a unitary whole, but I do wish to avoid the style of dichotomous reasoning that I regard to be a critical feature of early theoretical formulations in anthropology of Sinhala Buddhism.

Rather than engage in discussion regarding the pedigree of certain aspects of contemporary Sinhala Buddhism and thereby participate in specific Sinhala Buddhist discourses concerning what is 'authentic Buddhism' and what is not, I am interested in considering what Buddhism is, the kinds of social and political projects into which the figures of the Buddhist tradition get mobilized, and to leave Buddhists to say what it is Buddhism is. This is the project that has been suggested by recent scholars on anthropology of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

References

Abeysekara, Ananada (2002). *Colors of the Robe: Religion, Identity and Difference*. University of South Carolina Press.

Almond, Philip (1988). *The British Discovery of Buddhism*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.

De Silva, Premakumara (2000a). "Sri Lankan Culture under the Impact of Globalisation: Homogenisation or Revitalisation?" In *Sri Lanka at Crossroads: Dilemmas and Prospects after 50 Years of Independence*, (eds.) S.T. Hettige and M. Mayer. Delhi: Macmillan Press, 206-23.

(2000b). *Globalization and the Transformation of Planetary Rituals in Southern Sri Lanka*. Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies.

Gombrich,R.F. (1971). *Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

(1988). *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*. London: Routledge & Kengan Paul.

Gombrich, R.F & G. Obeyesekere (1988). *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

Hallisey, Charles (1995). "Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravada Buddhism," in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism*, (ed.) S. Donald Lopez. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Malalgoda, Kitsiri (1976). *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900: A study of Religious Revival and Change*. London: University of California Press.

Obeyesekere, Gananath (1962). "The Sinhalese Buddhist Pantheon and Its Extensions" in *Proceedings of the Conference Theravada Buddhism* (ed.) M. Nash New Haven: Yale University.

———(1963) "The Great Tradition and the Little in the Perspective of Sinhalese Buddhism'. In *Journal of Asian Studies*. Vol.22, 139-53.

———(1970). "Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon". *Modern Ceylon Studies* No1.

———(1977). "Social Change and the Deities: The Rise of the Kataragama Cult in Modern Sri Lanka," *Man*, 12, 377-96.

———(1984). *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

(1995). "Buddhism, Nationhood and Cultural Identity: A Question of Fundamentals," in *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, (eds.) M. E. Marty and R. S. Appleby. Chicago: Chicago University Press. 232-44.

Scott, David (1994). *Formation of Ritual: Colonial and Anthropological Discourses on the Sinhala Yaktovil*. London: University of Minnesota Press.

Senaviratne, H.L. (1999). *The Work of Kings: The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Spencer, Jonathan (1990). "Tradition and Transformation: Recent Writing on the Anthropology of Buddhism in Sri Lanka." *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*. Vol. xxi, 3.

Tambiah, S.J. (1976). *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

——— (1992). *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

End Notes

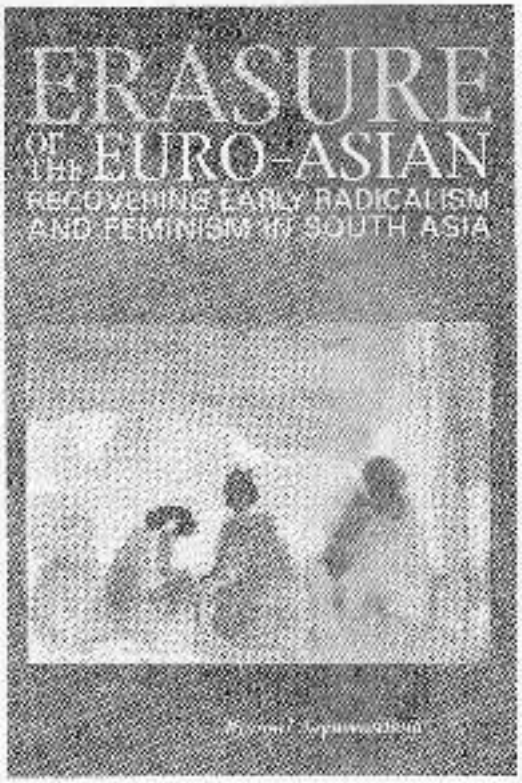
1 David Scott calls attention to the importance of Obeyesekere's seminal essay "The Great Tradition and the Little in the Perspective of Sinhalese Buddhism," (1963), which reconceptualized the Great Tradition and Little Tradition distinction in a manner that emphasized the integration of Sinhala Buddhist belief and practice, in contrast to earlier work that stressed a dichotomy between "Buddhism" and "animism" in Sinhala religion (see Scott 1994: 175-203).

2 Jonathan Spencer has contested this claim of Scott (see *American Ethnologist* 1996: 192). But Scott's protagonists, Philip Almond (1988) and Charles Hallisey (1995), also investigate nineteenth-century European constructions and representations of Buddhism. Hallisey demonstrates some of the ways in which modern Asian patterns of discourse have marked European representations of Buddhism.

3 This led to the creation of important work of Kitsiri Malalgoda: Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900: *A Study of Religious Revival and Change*, 1976.

4 Spencer argues that the appeal to the textual tradition was not simply imported as part of "the culture of colonial encounter" (always has been an integral part of Theravada Buddhism (1990: 139-43).

Dr. Premakumara de Silva is Senior Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Colombo.



Available Soon

Suriya Bookshop
12, Sulaiman Terrace
Colombo 05.

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

CRICKET AS MYTHOLOGY

Point of view – Bhaskar Ghose – TNR – 12

The millions who are angry today are not so concerned about the game as about the players, and winning fulfils dreams and fantasies for all of them.

To the few who are not hysterical about cricket, the spectacle of the Indian cricket team losing their way in the World Cup was only a little more depressing than the reaction of millions of fans to their exit – wild anger, frenzy, depression and shock (one elderly fan seems to have died after he saw the Indian team being defeated by Sri Lanka). The houses of the Indian players are now guarded by the police as they are on the hit-list of furious and murderous fans.

Fans? One may well ask. Are these lovers of the game? Do they understand the game at all? Have any of them actually played cricket at some time as a boy or girl? There certainly are thousands who do understand the game, and love it as a game; they will watch good cricket when they get a chance to see it, and many will surely be up at night watching the World Cup games in the hope that they will see good cricket being played by some of the greatest players of the game. And among them there will certainly be a very large number who have actually played the game in some form or the other, in their neighbourhood with friends, or in schools or colleges or in some club or sports group.

But, large though their numbers are, there seem to be millions more who do not understand the game, and have never played it, but are still hysterical with rage – these are, going by reports in the media, the ones who take most easily to violence, attack the houses of the members of the Indian team, set fire to effigies and stamp and spit on photographs and posters of the players. To give them their due, had the Indian team won the match against Sri Lanka and gone into the final rounds of the World Cup, these fans would have been dancing in the streets, capering madly to loud music and bursting crackers. And that is what is so depressing.

To these millions, cricket has ceased to be a game. The players are icons, no different from Bollywood stars. They have adored the players when they do well in the same mindless and total manner, and just as there is a temple to a female film star in Tamil Nadu, there would certainly have been one or more to the 'heroes' of Indian cricket, if the adulation had been sustained. But a defeat in even one game brings out a frightening outburst of rage. The heroes of the previous night become worse than the worst villains. Nor is this the preserve of the lumpen elements among the 'fans'; the media join in, each television channel and newspaper or journal outdoing the other in searching for words that convey their rage, and sudden discovery of contempt.

Why does this not happen with other sports? Our hockey team has lost disgracefully on most of the international tournaments they have played recently, but apart from a few scathing comments in the media that were more reportage than anything else, there were no reactions at all among the vast numbers of professed sports lovers. Then there is the curious case of the tennis player Sania Mirza, who regularly loses in either the first or second round of all the tournaments she plays in, but features, nonetheless, in a number of television commercials. Perhaps that has less to do with her tennis, a game that excites no passion in this country, and more to do with her winsome good looks.

But cricket is something else. It has, with its players, moved away from the world of sports to the ultimate fantasy world, the world of Bollywood. Yuvraj Singh and M.S. Dhoni are given the adoration that is given to Aamir Khan and Abhishek Bachchan; they are considered not the boys next door but glamorous, slightly mysterious figures who lead lives not unlike Batman's. Except for one big difference. Unlike Aamir Khan and Abhishek Bachchan they sometimes are not heroes at all.

Not that the film stars do not do what is called in the film world 'negative' roles; but even while they do those, they still remain heroes, and retain the adulation of their drooling fans. In the films where they play such characters, there are always the real evil ones, so that the rage and loathing of the masses has a locus, so to speak. But there is no such character to take the rage of the infuriated fan when the cricket heroes play badly; it has to be the players themselves.

Consider the logic. A hero can never fall, simply because he is a hero. Once so cast, he becomes the object of the fantasy

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

of these delirious, mindless millions of men and women – the men fantasizing that they are in love with them. For such people, to fail is to betray these private fantasies, to tear them to tatters, and this is an outrage, a blasphemy that drives them wild. It has nothing to do with cricket.

The players have moved away from the game itself and become icons. This move has been happily fuelled by the media and the advertisers who have spent crores in the conversion of cricketers into larger than life, macho figures in television commercials. If Yuvraj Singh smiles patronizingly at the emergence of an almost complete Mercedes Benz out of thin air, and then goes on to score a duck, he is not just playing a 'negative' role; he is destroying an image that millions had taken into their hearts and into their private fantasies.

We are only too well aware of the drabness in which these 'fans' live; the dreary daily round, beset with the despair that poverty breeds, the constant unhappiness and tensions that are relieved only by the fantasies when they sit with their friends and noisily enter the world of film and cricket heroes who appear in every channel as those – heroes, smiling carelessly, selling a cold drink or a pair of shoes or something else.

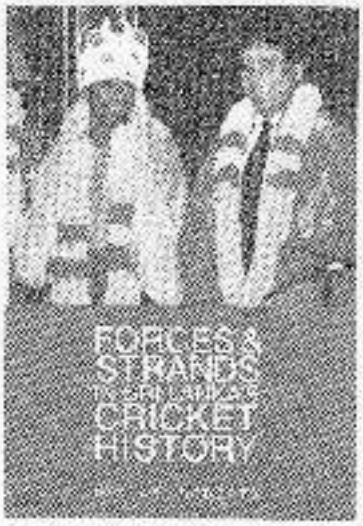
Advertising takes them away from the grim, hopeless reality of their lives and when a hero is seen driving a fast car and then goes on to actually to score a century, or what is described usually as a 'swashbuckling' half-century, then the illusion is complete. Dhoni, or Sehwag, or Yuvraj is a hero, semi-divine, seeing whom girls will swoon or dream dreams, and men will become what they are so good at, frenzied, in an effort to demonstrate to the hero how adoring they are.

One would imagine that the real losers of cricket would have been despondent, certainly, bitterly disappointed, and upset at the Indian cricket team's performance in the World Cup; but being primarily lovers of the game they would see it in those terms, and even if they vilify the players, it would be in terms that are within limits, in terms the players deserve. They would know only too well that there are other games to be played, and other players to play them, that everyone needs to move on. They would, in the final analysis, not be too different from those who love tennis and when Sania Mirza loses in a tournament, look to the next one, and hope her form picks up on the way.

But, alas, cricket at the national level is not like that, as far as the millions are concerned. They are not so concerned about the game as about the players, and winning fulfils dreams and fantasies for all of them, just as it delights the lovers of the game. There was a time when only actors and then film stars took fans to a world of dreams; now it seems that the hapless members of the Indian cricket team can also say, with them: "We are such stuff as dreams are made of, and our little life is rounded with a sleep." ■

Courtesy, Frontline, 20 April 2007

Available at the Suriya Bookshop



No. 12, Sulaiman Terrace, Colombo 05

Tel: 2501339, 2504623, 2586400

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

BOOK REVIEWS

DEVELOPMENT UNDER STRESS: SRI LANKAN ECONOMY IN TRANSITION

W. D. Lakshman

Development Under Stress: Sri Lankan Economy in Transition, by Saman Kelegama, Sage Publications, New Delhi & London, pp. 305, 2006.

A leading economist in the country, providing leadership to the Institute of Policy Studies, the author of the book has already established his mark as a critical commentator on important and topical issues in economics. The distinguishing characteristic in his commentaries, both spoken and written, is that he moves, quite correctly, out of the conventional confines of economics bringing relevant historical, political, institutional and sociological factors into his analyses to give them life.

The book is the author's second within about six months. The earlier work contained a collection of articles he had written to a Sunday newspaper over a period of ten months. *Development under Stress* is a collection of 14 research papers published over the last 10 years or so. These papers are published in this book after some editing together with an Introduction written specifically for this book to guide the reader through the anthology. The papers are presented in five parts: (i) fifty years of economic development, (ii) liberalization debate, (iii) macroeconomic management, (iv) sectoral policy, and (v) employment and poverty. Although the subject coverage of a few of the papers may be thought to have lost their relevance today through the passage of time, most of the papers in the collection appear to have present day relevance.

For purposes of this review, taken up for comment are only a few of the papers published in the book – selected largely on the basis of the reviewer's own personal disciplinary interests and for their being of particularly strong relevance today.

In general, the author examines and analyses comprehensively and carefully whatever subject that comes under his scrutiny. One is particularly impressed by the comprehensive nature of the analyses in a few chapters like Chapter 8 on Conflict Transformation through an Economic Dividend and Chapter 13 on Structural Adjustment and Employment. On the basis of the subject matter in the few chapters commented on in this review, several themes will be taken up for observation. These themes, I believe, are sufficiently controversial to be raised in a book review of this nature.

Conflicts, Stresses and Development

As indicated in the Preface to the book the author notes that the chapters in the volume examine various impediments Sri Lanka faced in its development process, preventing it from achieving higher levels of development, which otherwise were within its reach. The entire socio-political and economic system is searched to identify these development impediments. The main theme in many of the chapters, also summarized in the Preface and the Introduction, and captured in the title chosen for the book, is that the country failed to achieve higher levels of development because of the stressful nature of the socio-politico-economic environment. The following paragraph from the Preface perhaps summarizes the author's perception:

> Sri Lanka's experience with economic liberalization ... has some unique features. First, the country lived with export pessimism for two decades after independence and overstayed its experimentation with a closed economy before embarking on liberalization. .... (I)t was a late-comer to export-led industrialization. Second, it attempted to manage an open economy ... while there was an on-going war in the North-East of the country. Third, it tried to transform a conflict via a peace dividend based on economic gains from further liberalizing the economy. Fourth, it experienced weak coalition governments after 1994, and 2000 in particular, and tried to push through reforms while managing and safeguarding the political coalitions.

The author presents a similar analysis also in the Introduction. The fact that Sri Lankan policy had to go through such stressful conditions is interpreted as the main reason behind

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

its failure to do as well as the East Asian high performers. The analysis in the Introduction categorizes these stresses as having emanated from three "key factors":

- Those arising from the contradictions of running a welfare state under sluggish economic conditions and rapid population growth;
- The fact that a strong export pessimism led to a controlled economy which was retained far too long and that there was the delay in the commencement of export-led growth;
- Stresses arising from failures to address the ethnic conflict in the country.

Any process of change – all processes of growth and development are about change – invariably generates contradictions, conflicts and stresses. There cannot be development, slow or rapid, without these accompanying stresses and conflicts – capital labour conflicts, urban-rural conflicts, and many other distributional conflicts. No growth process can do away with these conflicts, they can only be managed.

Conceptually, markets may be depended upon as a major mechanism for conflict management but the conflict-exacerbating powers of markets, particularly in developing countries with inadequate development of institutional safeguards to protect the interests of the weak in society, are likely to be stronger than the conflict-alleviating powers of market forces. Throughout the history of capitalism therefore, the state took upon itself the major role as the prime agent of conflict management, supported by its role of adjudication in conflicts.

If one takes the liberty to rephrase the author's key point, Sri Lanka's failure to do the feats or the miracles of East and South East Asian high performing economies (HPEs) could be attributed to the failure of the Sri Lankan state to perform its due role as conflict manager. One may also consider that there was another major point of view from which the state failed or was made to fail – namely the failure to give the socio-economic system a long-term vision. After 1977, in order to resolve conflicts, there was over-dependence on markets and, at critical points, dependence on the state's coercive power rather than its consensus forming capability. Indeed the Washington Consensus framework which was guiding policy did not permit the state to acquire the necessary capacity to perform its conflict-management role.

In sum, the point that needs emphasis is the following. One has to be careful in presenting the argument that economic and socio-political conflicts and stresses were behind Sri Lanka's failure to grow faster, because that argument can give the impression that conflicts are taken as extraneous to the growth process – like so many other extraneous forces economists are familiar with. The more realistic position to take is that contradictions and conflicts are part and parcel of any process of change and that economic and social policies have to be designed taking this carefully into account. Sri Lanka, after 1977, has gone for policy reforms which included processes described by now very familiar terms like liberalization, privatization, stabilization and structural adjustment as discussed in Chapter 3. In this policy reform process, it is doubtful whether due consideration was given to understand and address contradictions and conflicts generated by policy reforms and to manage those conflicts so as to facilitate smoothness in the process of change. The writers that the author refers to frequently in regard to post-1977 policy reforms – e.g., Rajapatirana, Athukorala and Deepak Lal – were looking into questions like sequencing of reforms or completing the unfinished reform agenda but very rarely, if at all, into contradictions and conflicts in the policy process. One could draw from Sri Lanka's past experience a few concrete examples of policy conflicts and failures to devise mechanisms to manage those conflicts when policy reforms were introduced:

- Serious conflicts arose from loss of jobs through liberalization and privatization as shown quite well in Chapter 13 of this book. Did the government consciously plan to create adequate sources of productive employment opportunities for those losing jobs in the reform process – except for hoping that liberalized markets would take care of this? Did the authorities ever devise adequate retraining programmes to enable those losing jobs to find alternative livelihoods? Did they have mechanisms in place to help entrepreneurs who were going bankrupt as a result of liberalization to move into promising new areas of investment?
- High rate of inflation in the late 1970s and early 1980s led to a serious drop in real incomes of fixed income groups. This led to serious conflicts. Was the correct solution the sacking of the eighty thousand or so public servants who went on strike in protest?
- Income disparities widened as a result of neo-liberal policy reforms as shown by survey after survey beginning from the Central Bank's *Consumer Finances Survey* of 1982. This produced social conflict, which in the absence of conflict management mechanisms acquired serious proportions. In such an environment, is it enough to think, that also merely wishfully, that absolute poverty is dropping and ,therefore, the policy makers need not worry about

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

worsening relative distribution? When they realized that relative distribution also is important it was probably too late – as developments during the late 1980s showed.

· Markets, as should be expected, were favouring Colombo and metropolitan areas and discriminating against other regions. One of the solutions offered was the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP). Was it correct on the part of Sri Lankan authorities to deprive the North and the East of the country of any IRDP initiative? It is good to remember that these projects had their origin very much before the commencement of armed conflict in these areas. It is also said that when the Mahaweli Scheme was accelerated, Iranamadu Tank, which was earlier within the Mahaweli Diversion plan, was removed from it. The Mahaweli Project indeed was the government's hope that liberalization would take place in an environment of widespread welfare improvement in the society, including that of the rural masses. By removing the Iranamadu Tank from the Mahaweli Project, its prospective benefits were denied to people, mostly Tamil, in the Wanni areas.

· Liberalization was implemented in an environment of excessive politicization of the bureaucracy and a system of majoritarian political practice, with no adequate safeguards to protect minority interests. It was nothing but natural in such an environment for movements demanding some autonomy for the North and East to gain strength. How fair were the methods the authorities adopted to address this issue, e.g., how they handled the 1983 incidents and action they took in respect of District Development Councils (DDCs) in the North.

For rapid development to take place, the environment in the country need not be free from conflicts and not stressful, because that kind of environment will never be found when changes are taking place. What facilitates rapid development is the ability of the state to better manage conflicts and stresses accompanying change – as was done in countries like Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, China, etc.

Neo-liberal Policy Package

The 14 essays in this book were written at different times over the last 10 years. It is natural that during different times over this period the author would have taken somewhat different positions on controversial subjects about policies and strategies. This was the period when Sri Lanka experimented with the package of policies variously described – neo-liberal or market-friendly or Structural Adjustment Package (SAP) or Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) or the 'Washington Consensus' (WC). Most Sri Lankan economists, as were their kind in the rest of the world, have been stuck in the so called neo-classical analytical framework behind these policy packages together with their ideological baggage. Very rarely have critical questions been asked in this country about the neo-classical analytical framework or the 'free' market (or laissez faire) ideological baggage over the last three decades. There seems to be greater readiness today than in the 1980s and 1990s to ask critical and awkward questions about the Washington Consensus. As in the rest of the world, in Sri Lanka too these critics may have any one of these options:

· Drop both the analytical framework and the ideology attached to neo-liberalism in favour of a complete alternative like socialism.

· Change the analytical framework (e.g., into traditions like post-Keynesian, historical/ institutionalist) and drop the "complete free" market ideology.

In both options the state is brought back in – in the first option to become the key player and in the second to be a principal partner in a "coalition" of domestic private capital, foreign capital and state capital.

The few chapters used for this review give one the impression that most of them were written at a time when the author himself was stuck in the neo-classical model (though may be not in its ideological baggage). A chapter which gives that impression is Chapter 3 on stabilization and adjustment. Today the general impression in the country about the author is that he is allied to the second option mentioned above. This change in thinking produced over time may be through experiences of 'Washington Consensus' failures in Sri Lanka, is unfortunately not reflected adequately in the chapters in this book. This brings one to the industrialization issue. The author presents his critical perspectives about the 'Washington Consensus' in his discussion of this issue.

Issues of Industrialization

It is the reviewer's belief that industrialization in a developing country like Sri Lanka must be discussed in the backdrop of late-late industrialization scenario. This

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

has clear implications for industry in today's developing countries. When this scenario is kept in mind, one can easily see the difficulties of industrializing these developing countries in a laissez faire or neo-liberal framework. Particularly inapplicable is the negative industrialization strategy of "level playing fields" as advanced in the one-size-fits-all thinking of the Washington Consensus. It is activist industrial policy that conditions of late-late development recommend. History of industrialization episodes everywhere also supports efficiently implemented selective and activist industrial policy in developing countries. The importance of such an industry promotion policy is shown by the Sri Lankan experience as well in the last 30 years. The author shows the importance of industry promotion on a selective basis through his analysis of the 1990-94 period. He argues quite rightly that the challenge is to strengthen the current export-led industrial strategy, while making the import substitution sector more competitive. In regard to the latter he argues for the need for reasonable protection. The need for care in developing regional integration agreements, with the objective of protecting and promoting domestic industry, is highlighted.

North and East Conflict

The last topic to comment on is the North and East conflict. Very briefly a few words on the subject are indicated in the light of Chapter 8 on conflict transformation through an economic dividend. The enthusiasm to use "economic development" as a means for conflict resolution was found extensively within the world community a few years ago. It probably remains even today although to a lesser extent. There has been a drop in that enthusiasm because of past failures (like that in Sri Lanka). This extensive enthusiasm and interest in what has come to be called the "economic dividend" arose concurrently with the World Bank increasing its role in analysis and action in conflict resolution in conflict-ridden economies. The world community came out strongly with the willingness to commit large sums of foreign aid to generate this economic dividend. This indeed reminds one of the times when the developed countries and international agencies were so naive as to believe that foreign aid could be the main vehicle to eliminate under-development from the world.

Economic development spread well to all communities in a society and to all regions in a country would be a good antidote (or a preventive measure) to the emergence of violent conflicts and separatist struggles. Once a separatist struggle got under way, with historically determined, firmly established social divisions highlighted as a basis for discrimination, an exercise with economic development as the main strategy will be rather ineffective as a corrective to the conflict concerned. This is what the author shows through his lucid and clever analysis in this chapter. As is well known, the North and East conflict remains Sri Lanka's most intricate and complex problem. This chapter should prove illuminating to all those who are interested in gaining deeper insights into this problem. ■

W. D. Lakshman is Professor of Economics, University of Colombo

New from the SSA

Tomorrow is Ours - Trotskyism in India & Sri Lanka

by

Charles Wesley Erwin

Rs. 850/-

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

CROSSOVER AND MIXED PUBLIC REACTION

Pradeep Peiris and Rangani Ranasinghe

The latest survey conducted by the Social Indicator, the survey research unit of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, reveals that Sri Lankans express mixed opinion on the recent crossover by the 18 UNP parliamentarians along with 6 Muslim Congress MPs. 37% of people approve of this move while the same percentage disapproves. Interestingly, a quarter of Sri Lankans are either unaware of the crossover or do not have an opinion on whether to approve or disapprove of it has despite the chaos it has triggered in many corners that yet to be settled.

In the wake of numerous interpretations and reinterpretation of the present political situation as a result of the recent crossover by the political elites, the authors of this article attempt to discuss how citizens perceive the crossover. The results of the latest poll, are used to discuss the public views in this article. This survey was conducted amongst 1300 individuals residing in 17 districts using the interview technique. It should be noted that this survey was conducted Islandwide with the exception of the North and East and therefore does not capture the opinion of the Sri Lankan Tamil community.

Who's Hurt the Most: UNPers or JVPers?

Despite the rationales put forward by the MPs who have crossed over, the present political accusations and counter– accusations indicate that the crossover has hurt many parties who lost their MPs as well as who lost their political positions. If we were to look at the UNP itself, it lost a group of heavy weights including its deputy leader as a result of the recent crossover. Also it led the opposition leader Mr. Wickramasinghe to a new battle in order to retain the opposition leadership from the JVP a party that has shown a remarkable capacity in mobilizing the masses against any ruling party. The present government too is faced with issues resulting from the crossover. President Rajapakse's main electoral ally, the JVP, permanently walked into the opposition while vowing to topple the government, accusing it of going against the electoral mandate it received in November 2005. Not only that, but this parliamentarian exodus triggered a battle between the president and the two ministers, Mr. Mangala Samaraweera and Mr. Sripathi Suriarachchi, who have done tremendous work in bringing President Mahinda Rajapakse into office. On the one hand the crossovers shook the status quo of the government while on the other hand it annulled the memorandum of understanding signed between the SLFP and the UNP even before its ink dried. In addition, this disappointed the groups who were optimistic and overjoyed about the rare opportunity of a southern consensus.

The disapproval of the crossover is highest among JVP loyalists – 68% disapprove while 15% approve of it. Perhaps this could be a reflection of the feeling of humiliation that they are undergoing after the SLFP sidelined them ignoring the crucial role they performed at the elections. Among the UNPers, only 48% disapprove of party members crossing to the SLFP while 34% could not decide whether to approve or disapprove of it. However, 18% of the UNPers approve the crossover. While on the one hand this reflects the frustration of the UNPers with their leadership on the party reforms, on the other hand this is a clear indication of the confused status of the UNPers in the aftermath of losing a group of the most senior members of the party. Interestingly, this survey does not indicate that the SLFPers are over-jubilant about the newly captured elephant herd. This is apparent as only 50% of them approve of the crossover while 30% disapprove.

Crossover for Democracy or Vice Versa

In the present electoral system, more primacy has been given to the parties than to the MPs. When selecting candidates for an election, most members are at the mercy of party leaders. Even after being elected to parliament, MPs will have to support the party decision rather than act on their conscience. In this context, MPs do not have much option other than crossing over to another party that allows them to voice the concerns of their communities or adhere to one's conscience. Therefore, MPs crossing over to another party can be considered as an expression of democracy that one may want to practice. This was not the first time that MPs crossed over to another party in parliament and neither, we suppose, the last time. However, when analysing the history of crossing over, usually it has been opposition MPs who cross over to the ruling party instead of otherwise. Some get cabinet portfolios with other privileges while others allegedly receive huge sums of money. Therefore, it is very

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

difficult to decide whether it is principle or perks that matter when deciding to crossover.

It is interesting see on what grounds people have approved or disapproved of the recent MP drain from the opposition to the ruling party. Amongst the people who approve of the recent crossover, 50% think that the move strengthens the government and the president while 24% think that it would help the government's present war with the LTTE. Only 6% approve of the crossover on the basis that it is an expression of democracy. Interestingly, more SLFP loyalists than UNP loyalists approve of the recent crossover as it strengthens the government and the president. Nevertheless, even for UNPers who support the crossover, the main reason for their approval is that it strengthens the government and the president.

Among the people who disapprove of the recent crossover, 46% disapprove on the basis that it adds a bigger burden to the public due to the the increased number of ministerial posts. However, 9% disapprove on the basis that it damages democracy while 7% and 6% reject the crossover as it goes against the 'Mahinda Chinthanaya' and as it will lead to the abrogation of the SLFP-UNP MOU, respectively. It is interesting to see the varying reasons on which different party loyalists disapprove of the recent crossover. The primary reason for the SLFP and UNP loyalists to disapprove of the crossover is the fact that this will become a bigger burden for the already suffering Sri Lankans. However, JVP loyalists who disapprove of the crossover seem to have two main arguments. They think this is a clear violation of the 'Mahinda Chinthanaya,' which they successfully advocated during the presidential elections, and that the large number of present ministerial posts would (will?) increase the burden on citizens. 29% of JVPers see the recent crossover as against the 'Mahinda Chinthanaya,' while only 9% of SLFPers think that way.

Hence, when looking at the rationales for approvals and disapprovals, it seems that they are based on three arguments, namely forming a national government, waste of public funds and betraying the mandate received for the 'Mahinda Chinthanaya.' According to Mr. Karu Jayasuriya, his motive of crossing over was the dire need to join the two main parties in the South in order to solve the ethnic conflict and establish good governance. When analysing the (often vague) interviews of President Rajapakse in the wake of the crossover, it seems that both the President and Mr. Jayasuriya are trying to voice that they have the same objectives. If this is the case we do not think anyone would disagree with such a noble objective. Nevertheless, unfortunately what we see in the government today does not reflect the stated objectives.

If the recent crossover aims to assist the government in solving the protracted ethnic conflict, then the government must be keen on a negotiated settlement on the basis of a federal structure, because the heavyweights of the reformists who crossed over led the UNP Government's peace process that insisted on such a solution. However, having received their cabinet portfolios, they have not yet shown any active engagement in such activities. Therefore, Minister Tissa Vitharana has to be engaged in a solo battle at the APRC in bringing forward a constitutional transformation. Given the SLFP's negative stand on the CFA and the passive commitment to constitutional arrangement, it is not clear what the role of UNP reformists is in transforming SLFPers to accept the federal solution that has been agreed in the Oslo Communique in 2003.

Given the wastage of public funds in maintaining the large number of ministries, which was the primary result of the crossover, and the prevailing impunity that has high potential to worsen in months to come, a rosy picture on good governance that Mr. Rajapakse and Mr. Jayasuriya are dreaming about does not exist. Therefore, the rationales given as the basis for the crossover are difficult for people to stomach.

However, it is undeniable that this recent crossover has made President Rajapakse stronger – a personage whose popularity is anyway on the boom in the context of the recent military victory in the East. Therefore, we believe President Rajapakse enjoys a stronger political position, empowering him to make drastic political decisions in order to solve the country's ethnic conflict even if he is unable to clean the office of corrupt officials and politicians.

Therefore, in next few months the public can witness the real impact of the crossover on the Sri Lankan society and how distant the reality is from the claimed motives of the UNP reformists. ■

Pradeep Peiris and Rangani Ranasinghe are researchers at the Social Indicator, the survey research unit of the Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN SRI LANKA (SDSA)

A Brief Report

Pradeep Peiris and Jayadeva Uyangoda

Introduction

The study on the "State of Democracy in Sri Lanka" is a component of the larger study carried out in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka carried out under the theme 'The State of Democracy in Human security in South Asia" in 2004-2005.

The analysis presented in this Report is based on a survey carried out in late 2004 and early 2005.

The survey is only one component of the overall study which in methodological terms followed four different 'pathways.' They were as follows:

(i) Cross Section Survey: the survey aimed at arriving at a snapshot of the views and perceptions held by people in the five countries on what democracy meant to them, their confidence in various institutions of governance, levels of political activity, views on the status of minorities, and on personal safety, and the perceptions of material conditions of their families and the country.
(ii) Democracy Dialogues: Dialogues sought to obtain various positions and viewpoints of community, party, union and social activists who are engaged in reforming or radicalizing
democracy. Dialogues were held on issues of political structures, political practices, social institutions, gender and diversity.
(iii) Case Studies: This allowed deep investigation into a selected case, or a puzzle, relating the experience of democracy. The purpose of case studies was to look at certain facts that went against the democratic wisdom, or were 'inconvenient' from the established viewpoint.
(iv) Qualitative Assessments: This component of the study sought to assess democracy in each country by a team of scholars. The scholar-experts were asked to give assessments of the experience of democracy in each country within a detailed framework. They covered four themes: the promise of democracy, institutional designs, working of democracy and futures.

Survey Methodology

The survey was conducted among 4500 respondents across the country excluding the districts of Mannar, Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire and face-to-face interviews. The sample was selected using a Stratified Random Sampling technique giving equal opportunity for each man and woman and all the age groups above 18 years in the surveyed districts to be selected to the sample. However, in the districts of Jaffna, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Vauniya, the survey was only conducted in the government-controlled areas. Limitations on access and inability to deploy the same sampling method and more importantly to verify the quality of the field research prevented the surveying of LTTE-controlled areas[1]. However, in addition to the random sample, a booster sample was used in the Northern and Eastern provinces to make a detailed analysis among the Tamil community in this region.

The sample was distributed among 75 of the 196 electorates in the country. The number of constituencies per district was decided based on the proportion of the population as well as the socio-political diversity of each district. A total of 6 polling booths were chosen from the selected constituencies using the Simple Random Sampling (SRS) technique. The latest voters' lists were used as the sampling frame to select the respondents within a polling station. A total of 25 people were selected from each polling booth, and field researchers were advised to interview 15 of them. However, we anticipated an average of 10-12 interviews from a polling booth. Field researchers were instructed to stay in the field as late as possible and visit a selected respondent three times before 'ignoring' him/her from the respondent
list.

A total of 80 field researchers from both genders and all four communities – Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Up-country Tamil - were involved in the data collection. Fieldwork was conducted during the period of September to October 2004. Field researchers were sent to the field after a three-day residential training programme on the questionnaire and field

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

techniques. Instruments like show cards and ballot boxes were used to enhance the quality of the field work. However, 10% field work was revalidated in the field before data analysis.

The Meaning of Democracy

The concept of 'democracy' is understood by different groups differently. As this study is 'a first of its kind' in the South Asian region, people were asked to describe what they meant by democracy. We asked the open-ended question, "What, if anything, does democracy mean to you?"

It is noteworthy that 37% of Sri Lankans surveyed were unable to, or did not, provide a definition for 'democracy.' This was the highest figure in South Asia.

The answers given to this open-ended question were categorized into the following broad themes: people's rule, parties and elections, the rule of law, freedom, equality, welfare, peace and security.

Of the Sri Lankans responding to this question, 78% associated democracy with freedom. Of them, 60.7% understood freedom in terms of the ability of 'everyone to speak and act freely.' Right to free speech and action seemed to be the dominant understanding of democracy among Sri Lankans. At the same time, 46%, 29% and 30% described democracy in terms of equality, welfare, peace and security, and people's rule, respectively.

It is noteworthy that only 1.3% of Sri Lankans saw democracy in negative terms. However, among other South Asian neighbours, Sri Lankans were least likely to define democracy in negative terms.

When asked as to what characteristics they identify as 'most essential' in 'democracy,' half of the Sri Lankans, stated that democracy means equal rights to all while for 24% it was the opportunity to change the government through election. For 19%, the essential characteristic of democracy was the availability of basic necessities for everyone. However, 19% of Sri Lankans were unable to associate democracy with a clear/single characteristic.

The above overall pattern of understanding of democracy was observable across all the age groups.
In understanding democracy, there are significant variations among ethnic groups. The Tamil community, both in the North-East and Up-country, identified 'equal rights' as the most essential characteristic of democracy. A majority of the Up-country Tamil community mentioned 'basic needs' as democracy's most essential characteristic. Meanwhile, a vast majority of respondents in the entire sample, 80%, without ethnic variation have also understood 'democracy' in terms of majority rule.

Sri Lanka's data and the meanings and attributes of democracy provide space for a variety of interpretations. One way to make sense of this is to compare them with data from other South Asian countries. Such comparison, as indicated in the following table, gives a picture of Sri Lankans attributing greater importance to equal rights and the ability of citizens to change the government. This contrasts with the overall picture in South Asia in which there was a greater emphasis on the capacity of the government to provide basic necessities as most essential to democracy.

Component Matrix	National Component			Sinhala Component		Tamil Component		Muslim Component	
	1	2	3	1	2	1	2	1	2
Strong Leader	0.44	0.61	[illegible]	0.43	0.63	0.68	-0.25	0.36	0.73
Military Leadership	0.56	0.61	0.14	0.80	-0.07	0.57	0.53	-0.75	0.23
Elected Leader	-0.58	0.72	0.49	0.19	0.74	-0.73	0.04	0.86	0.74
Religious Leaders	0.27	-0.75	0.70	0.86	0.14	-0.17	0.85	0.48	0.33

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

The second observation is that the vast majority Sri Lankans related to democracy in association with two major themes, freedom and equality.

Other attributes of democracy are not insignificant. 14.8% liked democracy because it enables people 'to have control over the rulers.' Another 14.2% liked democracy 'since it protects interests of the minority communities.'

In this study, people were asked to describe how they identify themselves in terms of majority and minority. Unlike in other South Asian countries, Sri Lankans understood the categories of majority and minority in terms of ethnic identity. Among those who identified themselves as belonging to the majority, 93% agreed that the majority's will should prevail in

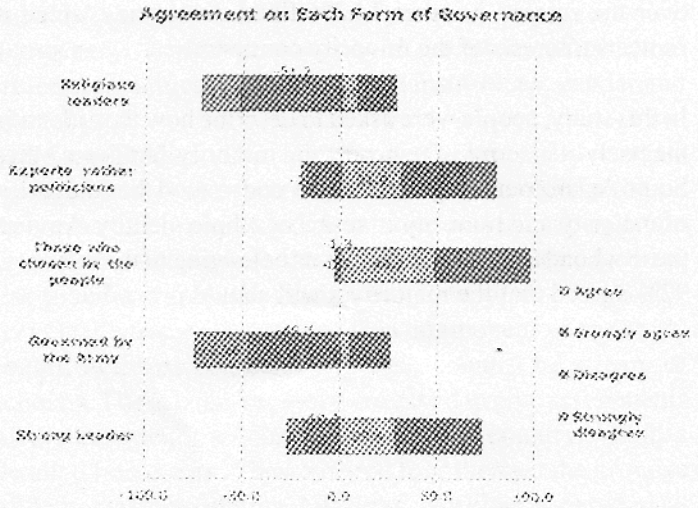
Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

democracy. Quite interestingly, 69% of those who identified themselves as belonging to the minority also expressed the same view.

What are the negative attributes of democracy? When asked about the most disliked attribute of democracy, 53.9% of Sri Lankans identified it as the 'increase in corruption.' For a significant minority of Sri Lankans, that is for 20.6%, the most disliked characteristic of democracy was that 'many parties divide the people.' Political parties as a divisive and therefore negative factor was also seen in the low public trust recorded in political parties. Only 36.9% had some or a great deal of trust in parties

Support for Democracy

This survey also elicited data on public support for democracy. Sri Lanka, as other South Asian countries, recorded an exceedingly high support for democracy. Nearly everyone thought of democracy in positive terms. Those who described democracy in 'negative' terms was just 1% in Sri Lanka, among those who answered the open-ended question, "What, if anything, democracy mean to you?" The relevant figures for other South Asian countries were 2, 7, 9 and 8, respectively, for Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Similarly, support for rulers elected by the people was overwhelming. It was 98% in Sri Lanka, compared with the average of 94% for South Asia. Very few appeared to doubt the suitability of democracy for Sri Lanka. 92% of Sri Lankans reported democracy as 'very suitable' (62%) and 'suitable' 30%). The overall South Asian figure for the suitability of democracy was 88%.



In this survey, people's preferences for different forms of government were obtained. 'Rule by the army' as well as 'rule by the king' too were included in the questionnaire, in addition to seeking people's 'preference for elected leaders.' Further, people were asked to indicate their agreement for three different statements that would indicate the degree of support for democratic rule. The three statements were: "Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government," "in certain situations a dictatorial government is preferable to a democratic one," and "it does not matter to people like me whether we have democratic or non-democratic governance."

Based on the response given for the above questions, we developed a "Support for Democracy Index" with three categories, 'strong democrats' 'non-democrats' and 'weak Democrats or 'skeptics.' The "strong democrats" were those who prefer democracy and strongly disagree or disagree with army rule AND monarchy AND strongly agree or agree to 'rule by elected representatives.'

The 'non-democrats' are those who prefer dictatorial rule or who express that it does not matter for them whether the government is a democratic or a non- democratic one, while strongly agreeing or agreeing to army rule or monarchy. They also strongly disagree or disagree to the elected democratic form of governance.

The 'weak believers' in democracy are those who do not fit into any of the above–mentioned categories. Among the respondents there were also those who were in the category of 'not sure/can't say.' They had no opinion on their preference towards democratic or a non-democratic governance.

The results of the Support for Democracy Index are quite interesting, because they problematize the data on meanings and essential attributes of democracy. For example, according to this index, close to only one third, 36 %, of Sri Lankans fall into 'strong believers in democracy' while the majority, 50%, appears to be weak believers. There are 14% non-democrats. This is a worrying result for those observers who would want to see strong popular support for democracy in Sri Lanka. One satisfying outcome for Sri Lanka's democracy advocates is that in a South Asian comparison the percentage of Sri Lanka's strong democrats exceeds the average South Asian figure of 26%. It may be a great consolation to say that Sri Lanka's 36% strong democrats is numerically higher than the corresponding figures of 19, 22, and 10, respectively, for Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan.

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

India records the highest percentage of strong democrats with 41.

The fact that 14% of Sri Lankans preferred non-democratic alternatives may be compared with another result: 72% of Sri Lankans agree that the country should have a strong leader who does not have to bother about elections. However, this statement is somewhat ambiguous as it has two possible meanings. One such meaning would be: 'a leader who has an agenda that does not focus on winning the next election.' The other would be 'a leader with great charisma who would take unpopular decisions as s/he is sure of winning the elections.'

It is interesting to note that 82% of Up-country Tamils and 72% of the Sinhala community agreed with a leadership of this nature, while 47% and 63% of Muslim and North-East Tamil communities too agree. The survey shows a 97% support among Sri Lankans for elected leaders irrespective of differences in age, gender and ethnicity.

The idea that all major decisions about the country should be taken by experts rather than politicians was supported by 79% of Sri Lankans.

This survey was conducted within five months after the General Elections held in 2004. One of the striking outcomes of the election was that for the first time a party comprised of Buddhist clergy was elected to parliament with nine seats. In this background, the respondents were asked to express their agreement/disagreement with the statement that 'all major decisions about the country should be taken by religious leaders.' Findings suggest that only 27% of Sri Lankans agreed while 55% expressed their disagreement. This outcome was recorded at the height of a political campaign by monks to win the parliamentary election.

People also appeared to support more than one type of governance. For example, person who supported an elected leader could also support a strong leader who does not need to bother about elections.

The following table provides a component matrix generated by a simple factor analysis. It attempts to explain what this combination means and what these combinations mean for each community.

Most Essential Attributes of Democracy

	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	Up-Country Tamil	Other	Don't Know
Power to change govt.	12	13	15	12	12	17
Freedom to criticize govt.	6	4	7	6	9	7
Basic rights	37	31	24	31	48	32
Basic conditions	39	51	42	51	29	32

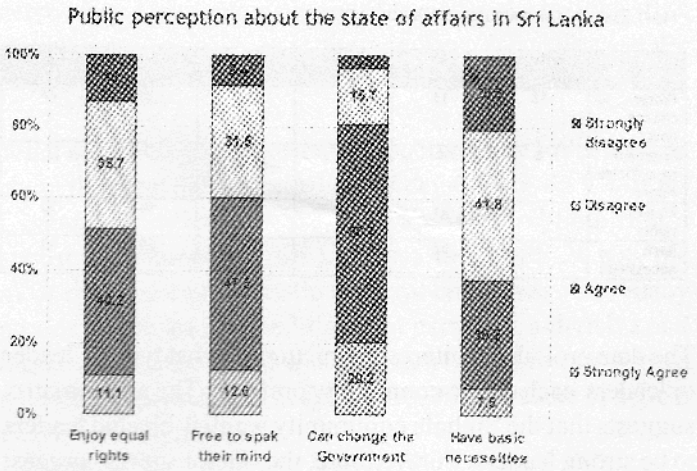
The data provide an interesting picture of what type of leader or leaders each ethnic community prefered. The above matrix suggests that the Sinhala community wanted elected leaders to be strong leaders. Furthermore, the 'factor scores' suggest that people who supported military rule supported the religious leaders as well. On the other hand, the North-East Tamil community identified strong and military leaders as the same category of leaders. They negatively correlated with elected leaders. For the North-East Tamil community, strong leaders were the same as military leaders because they are undemocratic.

As for the Muslim community, those who supported strong leaders supported religious leaders as well. They also did not mix them with the elected leaders. However, the more striking finding here is that the Muslim community did not see 'strong' or 'religious' leaders as necessarily undemocratic, though they refrained from identifying the three groups together.

Satisfaction with the working of democracy

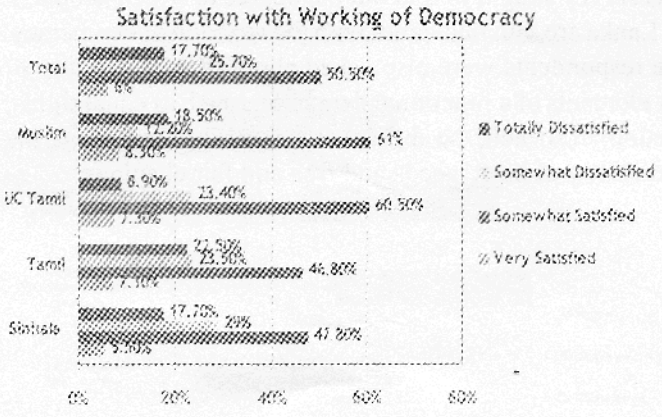
This survey sought to find out the degree to which people in Sri Lanka are satisfied or not with the working of democracy. The respondents were also asked about their perception of key elements of a functional democracy such as equal rights, freedom of speech, the ability to change the government, the availability of basic needs and free and fair elections.

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org



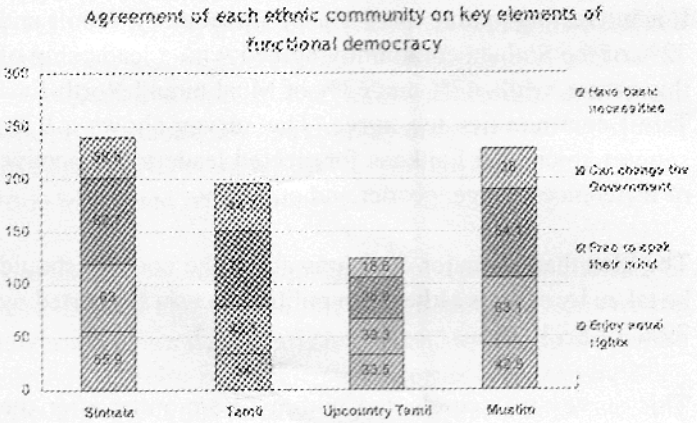
Among all ethnic communities, 56.5% reported that they were satisfied with the way democracy works. Contrary to our common–sense knowledge, the survey data suggest that minority communities were satisfied with the working of democracy either equally or more than the majority.

Among the Sinhalese only 53.30% were 'very satisfied' and 'somewhat satisfied' with the working of democracy while North-East Tamil, Up country Tamil and Muslim communities record higher figures with 53. 90, 67. 80 and 69. 30, respectively. One way to interpret this finding is to suggest that the minorities were more supportive of democracy in Sri Lanka. This is the general picture in South Asia as well. For them, democracy is also an aspiration.



The way in which different ethnic groups felt they enjoy democratic rights has significant variation. Overall, 51.2% of Sri Lankans said that they enjoy equal rights. However, this opinion varied among different ethnic groups. While a majority of the Sinhala community (53%) agreed enjoyed equal rights, North-East Tamil (64.3%) and Upcountry Tamil (69.8%) communities disagreed with it. The Muslim community expressed a mixed feeling with 44% agreeing and 50% disagreeing.

Agreement of each ethnic community on key elements of functional democracy



Among all respondents, 60.1% believed that people are free to speak their minds without any fear. From an ethnic community perspective, a majority of Muslims (60.6%) and Sinhalese (58.7%) believed that they are free to speak their minds without fear, while the North-East Tamil (54.5%) and Up–country Tamil (55.2%) communities largely disagreed with it.

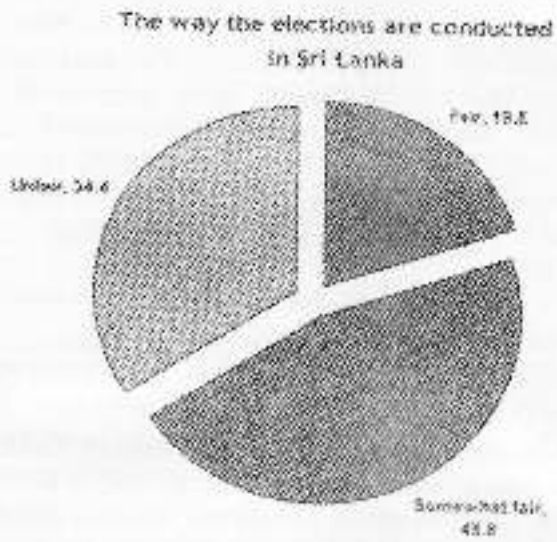
One of the experiences of democracy that the Sri Lankan people seemed to appreciate most was their ability to change the governments they do not like. 80.9% of Sri Lankans agreed with this dimension of democracy. This perception can be seen across all the ethnic groups. However, the North-East Tamil and Up country Tamil communities recorded a slightly lower agreement with this than the Sinhala and Muslim communities.

It is interesting to note that 62.4% disagreed that most people have basic necessities under democracy. This disagreement is approximately ten points higher among the Up–country Tamil community in comparison with other ethnic communities.

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

The perception of a large segment of Sri Lankans, as demonstrated in this survey was that the conduct of elections has not been either free or fair. Only 19.8% thought they were free and fair. While 45.8% thought that elections have been 'somewhat fair,' 34.4% felt that they have not been fair. Looking at the ethnic perspectives, majorities in all ethnic groups felt elections are conducted in a 'somewhat free and fair' manner. The study shows that the belief that elections are conducted in a free and fair manner was higher among villagers than among the urban population. However, one-third of both social groups thought that elections are held in an unfair manner.

The way the elections are conducted in Sri Lanka



The study also attempted to understand the public assessment of each political party's contribution toward building the country's democracy. People were asked to rate each political party using a ten-point scale 'no contribution' being 0 value and 'maximum contribution' given a value of 10.

The political parties that the respondents were asked to rate were the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), United National Party (UNP), Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), New Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), Tamil National Alliance (TNA), Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC), and Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC). Among the listed parties, the SLFP (mean score=5.64) and UNP (mean score=5.05) contributions have been appreciated the most. It is interesting to note that the role of these two parties was recognized across all ethnic groups, despite their past history of discrimination against the ethnic minorities. The Sinhala community placed the SLFP slightly higher than the UNP, while the ethnic minority communities appraised the UNP role the over SLFP. This perhaps reflected the electoral shift of the minorities toward the UNP in recent years. The JVP, the third largest political party, was evaluated as the third contributor (mean score=3.49) though the gap between the JVP and the two main parties of SLFP and UNP was considerable.

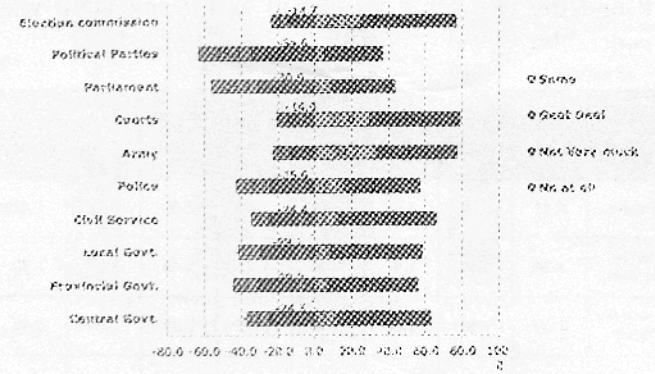
	Mean Scores (0-10 scale)							
	SLFP	UNP	JVP	JHU	NSSP	TNA	CWC	SLMC
Sinhala	6.11	5.30	3.55	2.72	1.67	0.98	1.52	1.47
North East Tamil	3.14	5.15	1.44	1.06	1.79	5.43	3.52	3.30
Upcountry Tamil	2.29	2.85	0.62	0.44	0.49	0.35	2.73	0.46
Muslim	5.42	6.38	2.27	1.59	1.91	3.28	3.09	5.81
Total	5.64	5.05	3.49	2.38	1.62	1.67	1.75	1.59

Trust in Institutions

This study assessed the degree of public trust in a group of selected public institutions. They were the National Government, the Provincial Government, Local Government, Civil Service, Police, Army, Courts, Parliament and Political Parties. The survey also assessed the degree to which people trusted the government-controlled media for 'telling the truth.'

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

Trust in Institutions



There are some surprises in the findings on the people's trust in public institutions. A quarter of Sri Lankans did not seem to trust the central government. Political parties and parliament recorded a very high level of public mistrust, with figures of 63% and 56.2% . The police, with all the stories of corruption and abuse of power,was trusted by 57%.

62.1% of Sri Lankans placed some or a great deal of trust in the central government. From an ethnic perspective, the Up-country Tamil community (74.8%) placed the highest trust in the central government followed by the Muslim community (70%), Sinhala community (64.4%), and the North-East Tamil community (49.5%). When asked to what extent they trust the provincial government, 56.1% expressed that they have either some or a great deal of trust. From an ethnic perspective, the Sinhala and Tamil communities placed the lowest trust in the provincial government. The Up-country and Muslim communities placed higher trust in the provincial government.

With regard to trust in local government, 58.6% expressed either some or a great deal of trust in it. It is interesting to note that it is trusted largely by minority communities– Up-country Tamil 74.2%, Muslim 68.4%, and Tamil 61.6%. The greater trust that the three minority communities place in provincial and local governments suggests the importance they attributed to the devolution of power and local government institutions.

65.8% of Sri Lankans expressed some or a great deal of trust in the civil service. This is observable across all ethnic groups (Up-country Tamil 78.1%, Muslim 70.4%, North-East Tamil 66.3%, Sinhala 63.6%). Interestingly, the majority community (Sinhala 63.6%) had the lowest trust in the country's civil service.

The survey shows that only 57% of Sri Lankans placed their trust in the police. It is somewhat surprising that the Muslims (68.8%) and Up-country Tamils (58.7%) placed the highest trust in the police while only 54% of Sinhalese did so. The fact that only 51.1% of North-East Tamils trusted the police may not be surprising in view of the context of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

The army has been identified as the second most trusted institution by Sri Lankans (77.4%). However, when looking at ethnic perspectives, there is a stark difference between the trust in the army among the majority Sinhala and minority Muslim communities, as opposed to the minority Tamil communities. Among the Sinhala community 86.6% place trust in the army while among Muslims it is 72.6%. In sharp contrast, the trust in the army among Up-country Tamils was 37.6%, while among the Tamils in the North and East it was only 35.1%.

Sri Lankans across all ethnic groups placed a higher degree of trust in the courts. 79% of Sri Lankans stated either they have some or a great deal of trust in the courts. Despite this, Sri Lankans placed low trust in the parliament. Overall, 43.8% expressed either some or a great deal of trust in Parliament. From an ethnic perspective Muslims (59.2%) seemed to trust the parliament most, followed by North-East Tamils (49.9%), Sinhalese (41%) and Up-country Tamils (41.1%).

According to the survey, political parties seem to be the least trusted institution in Sri Lanka. Only 36.9% had some or a great deal of trust in parties. However, when compared to other ethnic communities, Muslim community (52%) seemed to have slightly higher trust in political parties. 76.6% of Sri Lankans placed some or a great deal of trust in the elections commissioner. This could be a reflection of violence-free election that was held a few months before the survey.

The findings on the trust in public institutions point to an interesting paradox of democracy in Sri Lanka. People had the least trust in representative institutions (political parties and parliament) and greater trust in unrepresentative and unelected institutions of governance (courts, the army, elections commissioner and public service). Another puzzle is the relatively low degree of trust that the majority Sinhala

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

community seemed to place in public institutions except the army. The other side of the puzzle is that ethnic minorities seem to maintain a robust degree of trust in all public institutions except the high mistrust of the army among the Tamils in the North and East.

Ethnic Conflict

To what extent do the Sri Lankan people support a negotiated settlement to the ethnic conflict? When this survey was carried out in 2004, the peace process of 2002 had come to a halt and the UNP government that engaged in negotiations with the LTTE had been electorally defeated. A new coalition that saw negotiations and the ceasefire agreement with the LTTE as a costly political mistake had come into power.

Quite surprisingly, this survey indicated that the support for a negotiated political settlement continued among a significant majority of the Sri Lankan people. 61.2% of Sri Lankans stated that the best way to achieve peace in Sri Lanka was to negotiate a solution based on devolution of power. Of the North-East Tamil community 83.2%, of Up-country Tamil 87.5%, of the Muslim community 73.5% of the and Sinhala (56.6%) supported this idea. Only 7.4% of the Sinhala and 3.7% of the Muslim communities supported a solution through a military defeat of the LTTE. Meanwhile, 15.9% of Sinhala and 12.3% of Muslim communities believed that peace could be achieved through a combination of military and negotiated approaches.

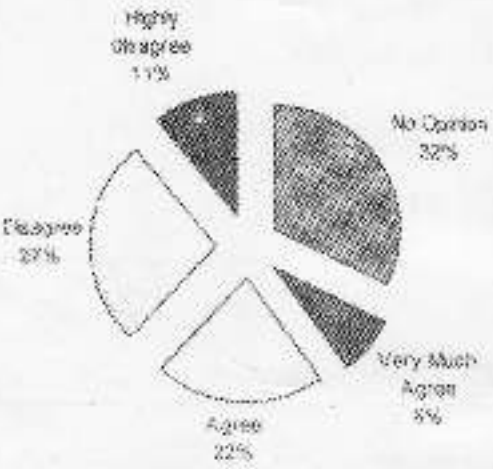
People saw democracy to be central to a solution to the ethnic conflict. In this survey, 77.8% of Sri Lankans expressed the belief that democracy can be most helpful in the country's search for a peaceful solution to the ethnic conflict. This belief was widespread among the minority communities and less so among the Sinhalese. Of the respondents from the Sinhala community, almost 50.3% stated that democracy was very important to resolve the ethnic conflict while another 23% still stated democracy to be 'important.'

When analysing responses to the question on a solution to the ethnic conflict in relation to their 'support for democracy,' there appear to be three sub-groups of respondents. The first are those who prefered democracy to any other form of governance. The second group held the view that the non-democratic governance is sometimes better than the democratic form of governance. The third group did not have a special preference either towards democracy or the non-democratic form of governance.

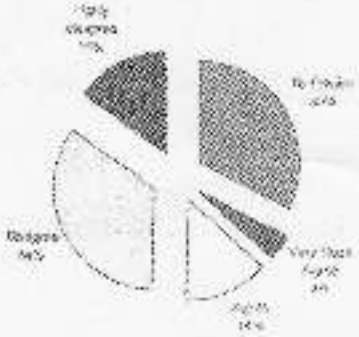
The first group of respondents expressed the highest support (68.9%) for a negotiated settlement to the ethnic conflict. The second group too preferred a negotiated settlement but showed the highest preference (28%) for a combined approach (negotiations and militaristic) toward resolving the conflict.

At the time of data collection for this study, the government and the LTTE agreed to explore a solution within a 'federal framework. Hence the study intended to evaluate the support for 'federalism' and 'asymmetrical federalism' through the following two statements:

Federalism: "The powers of provincial councils should be increased even by reducing the powers of the central government."



Asymmetrical Federalism: "Powers of some provincial councils should be increased in comparison to powers of other councils".



Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

In this survey, 43.2% of Sri Lankans supported the idea of federalism. This support was overwhelming among the minority communities (North-East Tamil 81.6%, Up-country Tamil 83.3%, Muslims 76.1%) while only 34.4% of the Sinhala community supported it. On the contrary, only 26.2% of Sri Lankans supported asymmetrical federalism. However, the support for asymmetrical federalism was higher among the minority communities.

Some Key Lessons

- There was widespread support for the idea of democracy, but the people's support for the institutional forms of representative democracy was not deep.
- Ethnic minorities, more than the majority community, continue to have confidence in democracy, despite the negative experience with democracy among some minority communities. The majority Sinhala community demonstrated a lesser degree of satisfaction with the way democracy has worked in Sri Lanka.
- Sri Lankans of all communities were majoroitarian democrats in their understanding of democracy.
- A majority of Sri Lankans were weak believers in democracy. Only about one-third were strong believers.
- The twin idea of freedom and equality, associated with basic needs, were the three key themes through which Sri Lankans appeared to understand, value and relate to democracy. This combines both procedural and substantive dimensions of democracy.
- Sri Lanka has an elaborate set of public institutions for democratic governance. Yet, public attitudes toward them constitute a on usual puzzle. Institutions of democratic mediation and representation had a lesser degree of public trust and legitimacy than the unrepresentative institutions of governance. Similarly, among public institutions, those that command lowest public confidence are those whose functioning involves regular public interaction.
- Despite setbacks to the peace and negotiation processes, there is substantial public support for a negotiated political settlement to the ethnic conflict. State reforms in the direction of power-sharing had a crucial support base. However, commitment to federalist state reforms was stronger among ethnic minorities.
- Those who supported democracy were also supporters of a negotiated political settlement to the ethnic conflict. Democrats were a solid support base for peace. ■

Now Available at the Suriya Bookshop

In the Making

Identity Formation in South Asia

by

Meeto (Kamaljit Bhasin -Malik)

Introduction by Kumkum Sangari

Price Rs. 350/=

Printed by Karunaratne & Sons Ltd

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org