POLITY

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BOOK REVIEWS

TIME OF TROUBLE, TIME FOR READING

The escalation of the conflict in Sri Lanka will result in much violence, death and destruction. Moreover the rising cost of living, along with high inflation that is eroding real income levels, creates much misery among the poor and the low-income families. When the despair begins to build up, there is a risk for socially and politically sensitive people to feel depressed, withdraw to a world of negative contemplation or to privilege cynicism. Claude Cockburn, an eminent British journalist and cynic, famously said in his autobiography, I*n Time of Trouble* (1957), "Between the crisis and the catastrophe, there is always time for a glass of champagne." We are not so cynical, but we do say that the time of trouble is, perhaps a time for reading and analysing.

This issue of *Polity* is an antidote to those who run the risk of being affected by despair. In the form of a special, end-of-the year issue of book reviews, *Polity* recommends a number of books that are worth reading to keep our readers' spirits undiminished.

Reflecting on reading, there are some fascinating developments in the culture of reading in our society. Despite the claims made by some purists that people have abandoned the habit of reading, books and newspapers do seem to have a flourishing market. The number of weekend newspaper in Sinhalese, Tamil and English has increased significantly during the past few years. The easy availability of publishing technology is not the only explanation of this proliferation of popular reading material. In terms of price, Sri Lanka has the most expensive newspapers, periodicals and popular magazines in South Asia. But despite the high price, ordinary citizens do seem to read them. Sometimes, neighbors exchange weekend newspapers in a cooperative system of sharing of cost.

The annual International Book Fair in Colombo every September is the other indication of how a reading, and book-buying culture has spread among all social strata. The whole week of the Book Fair was in a way a public spectacle. Not only middle-class readers from Colombo, but also school teachers and students from rural areas visited the Fair, bought bundles of books and walked back displaying an unmistakable sense of joy. The huge number of new book publishers in Sinhala is another facet of this reading culture one noticed at the Colombo Book Fair. The success of the Perera-Hussein Publishing House, the SSA publications and the Young Socialist Publications show us that there is still a thriving market for writing in English.

But there is also a flip side to this story. The most vociferous of the political and ideological leaders in the country, who think the nation's destiny is in their hands, do not demonstrate any particular evidence of having read any new books in their chosen areas of specialty. Their ideas of democracy, governance, human rights, minority rights, women's rights, social change, ethnic conflict, peace etc. are somewhat outdated. They not only prove the point that demagogic politics require no culture of reading or learning but they also point to the poverty of reigning ideologies that define the path of political change in contemporary Sri Lanka. P

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MUCH DESPAIR, YET A LITTLE HOPE

Jayadeva Uyangoda

The LTTE's recent commando attack on the Anuradhapura Air base and the retaliatory killing of Thamilselvam by the Sri Lankan Air Force no doubt add to the process of greater intensification of the war between the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE. Retaliatory violence by both sides is likely to increase, thereby further reinforcing the reproductive logic of Sri Lanka's protracted civil war. Against this backdrop, the government and the LTTE will be compelled to demonstrate their capacity for destruction in a spirit of competition for world attention.

At present, both sides appear to emulate each other's commitment to a military outcome, with no space allowed to develop for a new political track to open up. The government, under a new ideological and military leadership, is pursuing a strategy of militarily defeating the LTTE. The LTTE on the other hand has been complementing the government's policy of war by its own strategy of belligerence. In the present logic of war intensification, there is no realistic possibility of either side opting for military disengagement.

War Burden

The war in the short run is not likely to bring any tangible benefit to the Sinhalese, Tamil or Muslim people in Sri Lanka. The economic burden of the war and massive corruptions associated with the 'war economy' has already begun to be felt among the poor and the middle class people. With the severe shortage of milk powder and spiraling price hikes, millions of children of the poor and low income families have already begun to bear the brunt of this 'war economy.' Inevitably, and despite the JVP's mild protests, the only the poor and the middle classes will continue to pay the rising war cost.

Meanwhile, the war will further widen the gulf between the already alienated the Tamil populace and the Sri Lanka state while reinforcing latter's Sinhalese ethnic-majoritarian character. The claims made by the government leaders that their war is a 'humanitarian' one aimed at 'liberating' the Tamil people will have only a few takers.

War Trap

Despite its massive economic, social and human cost, the government is not in a position to extricate itself from another two-to-three years of intense war with the LTTE. The government is actually in a self-made 'war trap.' Although the government's political, military and ideological leaders are convinced that they can win the war, defeat the LTTE and then impose a victor's settlement on the Tamil community -- that is what they mean by the phrase 'honourable peace'--, the real trajectory of the war cannot be that easily managed as envisaged by an ideological agenda. As processes, both war and peace in Sri Lanka have been characterized in the past by the extreme unpredictability of their actual paths and outcomes. There is no compelling reason for it to become different this time around.

The LTTE is also caught up in a 'war trap.' The LTTE leadership does not have any trust on the Sinhalese political leadership for a negotiated settlement. They opted for resumption of military engagement under the present Rajapakse administration, claiming that the path of political engagement had reached a stalemate. But, there is another reality; the LTTE is fighting an asymmetrical war in which the state has greater legitimacy, much international support, regular supply of military hardware and easy access to international resources. The logic of this asymmetrical war for the LTTE is that until some measure of symmetry in military power balance is achieved, there is no way for them to unilaterally and temporarily withdraw from military engagement.

Besides fighting an asymmetrical war to achieve a condition of strategic equilibrium with the state, the LTTE also has the added burden of defending their regional state structure. This is the second dilemma the LTTE is facing at the present conjuncture of the conflict. The LTTE seems to have opted for addressing these two fundamental dilemmas only by military means, and not by political means. This is the essence of LTTE's war trap.

Two Scenarios

In terms of the way in which the war might unfold in the coming months, one can only think of a few possible scenarios. One is an all out war. Only the government side seems to be convinced of the utility and viability of a full-scale war. They apparently think that a massive and multi-pronged thrust on Wanni would cripple the LTTE's military machine. According to their thinking, the blockade of LTTE's military supplies, coupled with the paralyzing of the LTTE's international financial networks, would eventually make the war unsustainable for the LTTE. They also appear to believe that by means of relentless use of fire power, to be expressed through continuous artillery and air attacks on the Wanni, it would be possible to separate the Tamil civilian population from the LTTE fighters, as happened in the Eastern province a few months ago.

Such a dramatic turn of the process of war towards greater escalation will have grave economic and political costs for the government. The government seems to be determined not to allow economic, political, international or humanitarian consequences – the so-called extra-military factors-- to deter its strategy for what they see as an inevitable victory. The government leaders display confidence that they can manage the political, economic and diplomatic consequences of war escalation by a strategy of stubborn resistance to internal and external pressures.

Meanwhile, fighting a symmetrical war, the LTTE might not want to take the initiative for an all out war. The LTTE's military thinking seems to be pointing towards a protracted defensive war, which would be fought in multiple fronts, including targeting military, political and economic installations. They might also widen the theater of war, beyond the Northern Province. In the past too, the LTTE has demonstrated that they can withstand concentrated military assaults by the state, re-group and then attack back in a strategy of protracted defensive war. It is also possible that the LTTE's military thinking is constrained by their long-term political goal of self-rule/ separate state. But the LTTE cannot be unaware of the government's immediate military-strategic objectives. In that context, one has to wait and see whether the LTTE would resort to the offensive as the best form of defense.

If a scenario of an all out war is ruled out, the other possibility is a protracted war of attrition. This path would be decided upon by both sides, only if they rationally work out the limits of positive gains that an all-out war can possible bring to each side. A protracted war of attrition will keep the military balance of the two sides substantially unaltered; yet it will produce very high levels of violence and suffering to civilian populations. The economic cost of such a war of attrition will also be great, yet manageable as long as the government does not have ambitious plans for rapid economic growth in the short- and medium-run. But, it may not be the case that the government is now in a mood to choose that option.

Peace?

Is peace possible in this frightening scenario of war escalation? Caught up in the war tap, it is extremely difficult for either the government or the LTTE to take any serious step towards de-escalation, negotiation and political re-engagement through a new cease-fire. Both sides will if at all call for negotiations only as a corollary to the dominant war strategy.

What can those who are committed to a peaceful outcome to Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict do in this situation? First of all, in the build up to war escalation, the political space for peace and political solution becomes quite limited, and sometimes even non-available. In a context of highly polarized political debate, defined by the logic 'you are either with us or with the enemy; there is no middle path,' belligerents usually see peace advocacy as amounting to weakening the war effort, and worse still, as an act of treason. There are also popular expectations, built through relentless media campaigns, for imminent victories and the hope that 'at last this headache will be over this time.' In ethnic conflicts, it is war, more than peace that has a greater capacity to generate popular expectations.

Humanitarian Focus

What can the international community do to prevent further escalation of Sri Lanka's war? Judging by the relative silence as well as inaction of the Co-Chairs on Sri Lanka's sustained relapse to war during this year, one cannot foresee any significant role for the international community, until the conflict becomes truly unmanageable, with very grave humanitarian consequences as a result of generalized violence even outside the North. One of the tragic features of the present phase of Sri Lanka's conflict is the relative independence and immunity that both the government and the LTTE managed to acquire vis a vis the international community. This continues to enable Sri Lanka's conflict

parties to define and execute the future path of the conflict with a sense of autonomy which they may not have enjoyed in the past.

Perhaps, the only issue that the international community cannot abdicate its responsibility in the coming phase of the war is about the plight of civilians. Among many unpredictables, one predictable outcome of the escalating war would be grave human suffering and humanitarian consequences. Humanitarian assistance, and not peace, will have to be in the immediate agenda of the international community as well as peace advocates.

This poses a great challenge to the human rights and peace advocacy groups in Sri Lanka. It is important for them to recognize limitations of the present context while continuing to own, sustain and defend, amidst difficulties, the argument for peace, a negotiated political settlement, political reforms and inter-community reconciliation. Their belief that the future well-being of the Sri Lankan people lies not in war, violence and destruction, but in establishing inter-ethnic reconciliation, promoting dialogue for compromise and working towards negotiated peace needs to be sustained amidst the impending and obviously inevitable 'war crisis' in Sri Lanka. Exhausted by a mutually-destructive war, both the government and the LTTE are most likely to explore political means of getting out of the 'war trap', not unilaterally, but jointly. Such a scenario will hopefully create new space for political and peace interventions. ■

ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK

Pradeep Peiris and Anupama M. Ranawana

Ranil Wickremasinghe has been labelled as the United National Party's most unsuccessful leader to date. Whether you agree with this statement or not, it is a solid fact that this gentleman has lost a total of twelve elections during his tenure as UNP chief. Mrs. Kumaratunge probably felt rather blessed to have him as opposition leader during her presidential years, but her ex-colleague Mahinda Rajapakse seems to have benefited the most from Wickremasinghe, as the latter's track record as opposition leader is currently at its worst point. Not only was he unable to portray the image of an aggressive opponent, but he has also had no luck picking the right and timely issue against the government, wasting time playing petty politics with Bhikkus and Benz cars and so on. With Mangala Samaraweera's defection, Wickremasinghe is now attempting to create a unified opposition under the umbrella of the Jathika Sabhava. As a step towards this he recently announced his abandonment of the federal proposal. And once again, things backfire.

History does repeat itself

Those who have some understanding of the nation's post– independence political history will be familiar with both the Bandaranaike- Chelvanayagam Pact of 1957 and the Dudley--Chelvanayagam Pact of 1965, two events which show that even in the early stages of nation building, even those parties that held the majority were unable to stand strong in the presence of extremist outcry. If one looks at recent political history, one recalls a courageous and progressive constitutional document that was drafted between the years 1997 and 2000 by such eminent persons as G.L. Peiris and Neelan Thiruchelvam. These three great years of work went to waste when the Kumaratunge government found it difficult to defend this document and stand up to extreme pressure from Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists. The only difference is that in the previous instances it was the nation's leader who gave into nationalist voices but Wickremasinghe decided to drop what he advocated while being the opposition leader.

Thereby, Wickremasinghe's latest detour once again confirms the fact that any strong policy stand taken by x, y or z party will not be advocated for long as it is soon weakened by stronger political voices. Cowed down by chauvinistic uproar, Wickremasinghe now changes track, opting for an idea that he hopes will win him stronger support. And perhaps, he has. Some of the remarks made by JVP firebrands such as Lalkantha and Aruna Dissanayake seem to suggest that the JVP and UNP are now embarking on an intricate rite of courtship; attacking, opposing but intending eventually to seduce each other. Indeed, the latest moves made by the UNP certainly seem to have been made with the specific aim of avoiding any untoward JVP criticism. With the betrayal and defection of eighteen of his own party members, and others on the verge of sliding out, Wickremasinghe may not see any other feasible option before him other than bringing about a marriage of 'untrue minds.' On the other hand, however, Rajapakse and his band of brothers have managed to set a strong agenda for war that is largely rhetorical and somehow distracts the potential for public uproar at the present economic situation. Wickremasinghe is possibly of the sentiment that an entirely anti-governmental stance would be one that is completely unheard and not cared for. Adding his voice to the majority allows, he may hope, for him to have a place on the nation's dance card.

Dropping that "F" word

However, the present UNP policy change seems to suggest that the UNP and its leadership has succumbed to a kind of defeatist syndrome, in a continuation of the UNP's recent attitude where it sets its own goals and agendas according to those taken by other parties. It is interesting to inquire into whether the policy changes were a result of the conviction of the leadership or a tactical move that deviates quite sharply from the party's true ideology. Perhaps the junior members of the party may not have been fully convinced of the power have sharing model but we can be assured that Wickremasinghe believed in it and advocated strongly for it. In fact, to some extent he sacrificed his political career for it. Knowing very well that it was not have a popular idea, he still stood by a move towards power sharing during a period when the LTTE shamelessly violated the Cease Fire Agreement, thereby placing a blot on Wickremasinghe's political career. Hence, it is rational to conclude that the UNP's latest policy change is completely tactical.

What will he gain?

So let us ponder whether this strategic move will yield anything of value to the United National Party. Firstly, will the party achieve any substantial electoral gain from making this policy change? Below are the 2005 election results where the UNP won substantial majorities in eleven out of twenty– two districts.

Presidential election, November 2005

District	UNP	UPFA	District	UNP	UPFA
Anuradhapura	43.6	55.1	Kalutara	43.2	55.5
Batticaloa	79.5	18.9	Kandy	54.3	44
Matale	50.2	48.1	Kegalle	47.7	51
Ratnapura	45.5	53	Kurunegala	46.7	52.3
Badulla	53.1	45.1	Matara	36.7	61.8
Colombo	51.1	47.9	Monaragala	41.6	56.9
Amparai	55.8	42.9	N'Eliya	70.4	27.9
Galle	40.3	58.4	Polonnaruwa	46.2	52.6
Gampaha	44.2	54.8	Puttalam	50.7	48.1
Hambantota	35.2	63.4	Trincomalee	61.3	37
Jaffna	70.2	25	Vanni	77.9	20.3

For instance, in Nuwara Eliya the UNP won over 70% per cent of the vote, while losing Hambantota to the UPFA by only 28.2 points. The results from the North and East show that if Mr. Pirabakaran did not obstruct Tamil participation Wickremasinghe would have received an overwhelming majority. The explosive speeches of Wimal Weerawansa kept Wickremasinghe behind Rajapakse by only 2% of the vote. The JVP repeatedly claims that Ranil's 2005 defeat in the presidential poll shows a strong public mandate against power sharing. If this is the case, then the UNP should consider the 48.43% of the vote it received as an indicator that the general public are at least willing to tolerate federalism. One can conclude from this that Ranil did not lose the presidential battle due to his firm stand on federalism and he will not win future elections just for dropping this policy stand.

According to Social Indicator's 2005 pre-election survey report, the public placed more trust in Ranil than in Mahinda by 6 to 2 points based on each leader's ability to handle the peace process and the cost of living. Where Ranil fell short was in his ability to safeguard religious and cultural values. Mahinda beat Ranil only by 2 points in his capability of protecting the country. This shows that the people have appreciated Ranil's commitment to solving the country's ethnic conflict and stabilize the country's economy. Therefore Ranil should be satisfied with the reception he has received for his policies, even if their content was a far cry from popular chauvinistic thought. So, Ranil should stick to what he is qualified to do instead of trying to preach a new version of the *ariastangika margaya* the noble eight ffold path for which the JHU holds the copyright.

If the UNP expects to win the hearts of the 'JVP sahodarayo' by dropping the federal idea, it is certainly dreaming. There are many considerable differences between the two parties which will place heavy obstacles in the path of any political coalition. Unless the JVP suffers an internal split based on the present debate on whether to support Mahinda, it is completely irrational to expect an alliance between the UNP and the JVP. Even if such miracles occur, the UNP would only increase its electoral votes by a mere 10%. Hence, it would be more rational to make an effort to woo the SLFP, as crossovers usually take place between the two main parties rather than by small parties like the JVP that cater to specific niches of society. At the same time, the UNP would be wrong to spend time hunting any JHU votes. We make this argument for the simple reason that those persons who presently vote for the JHU come from a traditional UNP voter base. Unless the JHU is able to drum up another religious conspiracy, it is hard to believe that these monks will be blessed with more than one seat.

Conclusion

Ranil's latest 'tactical move' shows his utter inability to understand his own constituencies. Perhaps it is a symptom of the UNP's current defeatist syndrome, but this does not change the fact that the UNP should have thought more about making a worthwhile strategic move instead of simply giving in to popular thought.

What pushed us to write this article is the damage we see that the UNP's policy shift will have on the future of this country. Since independence, our majoritarian electoral process has obstructed the creation of a national identity amongst the many communities who share this small island. Time and again, the Sinhala community has violently resisted any move to share power with its Tamil and Muslim counterparts. Every attempt towards creating a consensual democratic process in the country has failed completely, legitimizing violent struggle, not democratic deliberation. Mr. Wickremasinghe's eloquence and seemingly erudite nature made one believe that he was the one political leader who we could count on to truly solve the conflict through a power sharing arrangement. But he, too, fails us. Like many of his predecessors, he chooses the easy route and weakens against

the pressure of mounting Sinhala extremism. In order that he does not lose face, he denies that he has made any policy change stating that he is simply dropping the unpopular term 'federalism'. In his latest press conference he says that his party continues to opt for a "meaningful" power sharing arrangement. "Meaningful" power sharing carries with it any number of connotations, subject, of course, to personal interpretation. Ironically, Wickremasinghe begins to sound like the current incumbent, hiding behind terms and playing with words without giving them any substantiation. One should not be surprised if Wickremasinghe's 'meaningful' sharing of power one day translates into nothing more than the decentralization of power. ■

WHERE FUSION CANNOT WORK — FAITH AND HISTORY

Romila Thapar on the Ram (Setu) Bridge Controversy

If there is strong religious faith among millions of people, it does not require to be protected through massive political demonstrations and the killing of innocent persons. Nor do archaeology and history have to be brought in to keep that faith intact. Faith finds its own place and function, as do archaeology and history. And the place and function of each is separate.

Faith and history have been brought into conflict once again by being forced to jointly occupy the same public space in contemporary India. In effect, there should be no conflict if it is recognized that the two are irreconcilable and that they cannot be fused together. They are independent of each other. Their premises, their methods of enquiry, and their formulations are dissimilar. So instead of trying to conflate them, it might be better to concede the difference and maintain the distance.

When historians speak of the historicity of person, place, or event, they require evidence — singular or plural — that proves the existence of any of these and this evidence is based on data relating to space and time. The two important spaces in the Valmiki *Ramayana* are Ayodhya and Lanka, on the location of which scholarly opinion differs.

The location of Lanka, for example, has been disputed by Indian scholars for the past century and remains unidentified with any certainty. Some have located it in the Vindhyas — in Amarkantak or in Chota Nagpur — and others in the Mahanadi delta. The identification with present day Sri Lanka is problematic. The earliest name for Ceylon judging by Indian, Greek and Latin references of the Mauryan and post-Mauryan period was Tamraparni (Taprobane in Greek). Ashoka in the third century BC, in one of his edicts, mentions Tamraparni as on the frontier. Later, the more commonly used name was Sinhala or Sinhala-dvipa (Silan or Sieledib in Greek). It would seem that the name Lanka was a later adoption of the centuries AD.

This becomes puzzling for the historian. If Valmiki was referring to Ceylon, then the name should have been the one by which the island was known, either Tamraparni or else Sinhala, at the time of his composition. But since the name used is Lanka, which at this time appears not to have been the name for Ceylon, then perhaps Lanka was located elsewhere. The location of the Ram Setu would have to be reconsidered. This has been suggested by scholars who have argued that the *setu* was more likely located in a small expanse of water in central India and not in the Palk Straits. Nor is the *setu* referred to in every version of the story. Alternatively, if Lanka in the text is a reference to Ceylon, then the composition of the Valmiki poem would have to be dated to a later period when the island came to be called Lanka. All this uncertainty is quite apart from the question of the technical viability of building a bridge across a wide stretch of sea in the centuries BC.

It is said that the Ram Setu is a cultural heritage and therefore cannot be destroyed even if it is a natural geological formation and not man-made. Has the idea become the heritage? To search for a non-existent man-made structure takes away from the imaginative leap of a fantasy and denies the fascinating layering of folklore. It would be more appropriate to recognize the undersea formations in the Palk Straits as a natural heritage and protect the relevant areas. We pay no attention to the fact that such marine parks are as important to our ecological future as those visible on the landscape.

That Rama is central to variant versions of the story is, in itself, not evidence of historicity. If the variants contradict each other as they do, this may create problems for those who believe that only one of the variants is true. But multiple variants enrich the interest of historical and comparative analyses in assessing the degree to which each approximates, if at all, to the historical past or what the divergence symbolizes.

The two closest in time to the Valmiki are the Buddhist and Jaina variants. The Buddhist version in the *Dasaratha Jataka* differs entirely from the Valmiki. Rama is the son of the raja

of Varanasi; exile is to the Himalayas; and there is no kidnapping of Sita by Ravana.

The earliest of many Jaina versions, the *Padmacharita* of Vimalasuri, dating to the centuries AD, contradicts all earlier versions and states that it is doing so in order to present the correct version of what happened. It differs substantially from the Valmiki narrative. Ravana is not a demonic villain but a human counter-hero. It presents the story in the conceptual framework of Jainism.

These other versions might be objected to or dismissed by the person who has faith in the Valmiki version since the other versions differ. What is of interest to the historian is not the number of variant versions, which is impressively large, but why major changes were introduced into these.

This does not happen with the biographies of those who were known to be historical figures and who founded belief systems: the Buddha, Jesus Christ, Mohammad. Their biographies adhere largely to a single storyline and this helps to endorse the 'official' narrative of their life. Their existence is recorded in other sources as well that are not just narratives of their lives but have diverse associations. The historicity of the Buddha, for example, is established, among other things, by the fact that a couple of centuries after he died, the emperor Ashoka on a visit to Lumbini had a pillar erected to commemorate the Buddha's place of birth. This is recorded in an inscription on the pillar.

If the current debate had grown from a genuine sense of enquiry, historians might have participated. Human activity has a historical context and this is open to historical comment. But it is only too evident that the issue of the Ram Setu has become a matter of political strategy on the part of those who are mobilizing in the name of faith, and on the part of those who are reacting to the mobilization. From the point of view of archaeology and history, the Archaeological Survey of India was correct in stating that there is to date no evidence to conclusively prove the historicity of Rama. The annulling of this statement was also a political act. Reliably proven evidence is of the utmost significance to history but not so to faith. Blasphemy does not lie in doubting historicity. The historian is not required to pronounce on the legitimacy of faith. But the historian can try and explain the historical context to why, in a particular space and time, a particular faith acquires support. And we need to remind ourselves that our heritage has been constantly enriched not just by those of faith but also by those who contend with faith.

If there is a strong faith — in the religious sense — among millions of people, then it does not require to be protected through massive demonstrations and the killing of innocent persons, through political mobilization. Nor do archaeology and history have to be brought in to keep that faith intact. Faith finds its own place and function, as do archaeology and history. And the place and function of each is separate. To say that the partial removal of an underwater formation in the Palk Straits is going to hurt the faith of millions is not giving faith its due. Is faith so fragile that it requires the support of an underwater geological formation believed to have been constructed by a deity? Making faith into a political issue in order to win elections is surely offensive to faith?

What is at issue is not whether Rama existed or not, or whether the underwater formation or a part of it was originally a bridge constructed at his behest. What is at issue is a different and crucial set of questions that require neither faith nor archaeology but intelligent expertise: questions that are being wilfully diverted by bringing in faith. Will the removal of a part of the natural formation eventually cause immense ecological damage and leave the coasts of south India and Sri Lanka open to catastrophes, to potential tsunamis in the future? Or can it be so planned that such a potentiality is avoided?

What would be the economic benefits of such a scheme in enhancing communication and exchange? Would the benefits reach out to local communities and, if so, how? Equally important, one would like to know precisely what role will be played by the multinational corporations and their associates in India. Who will finance and control the various segments of such an immense project? It is only when such details are made transparent that we will also get some clues to the subterranean activities that are doubtless already simmering. These are the questions that should be asked of this project and that at this point in time should be occupying public space. ■

Courtesy the *Hindu*, 28 September 2007

Romila Thapar is a distinguished historian of ancient India. She is the author of several books, including *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, 1961; *A History of India*, Volume 1, 1966; *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*, 2002; and *Somanatha: The Many Voices of History*, 2005.

SPEAKING THE TRUTH TO POWER

Edward Said

One of the Reith Lectures given by Edward Said on a Radio 4 broadcast London, in July 1993.

In last week's lecture I spoke about the way an intellectual can become a professional who specialized in one bit of turf, accredited, careful, speaking not the general language of a wide audience but rather the approved jargon of a group of insiders.

As an alternative, I suggested that as a way of maintaining relative intellectual independence, having the attitude of an amateur instead of a professional is a better course. But let me be practical and personal here. In the end, one is moved by causes and ideas that one can actually choose to support because they conform to values and principles one believes in. I do not therefore consider myself bound by my professional training in literature, consequently ruling myself out from matters of public policy just because I am only certified to teach modern literature. I speak and write about broader matters because, as a rank amateur, I am spurred on by commitments that go well beyond my narrow professional career. Of course, I make a conscious effort to acquire a new and wider audience for these views, which I never present inside a classroom.

> But what are these assertions/forays into the public sphere all about, really? Is the intellectual action galvanized into intellectual action by primordial, local, instinctive loyalties—to one's race, people, or religion—or is there some more universal and rational set of principles that can, and perhaps do, govern how one speaks and writes?

In effect, I am asking the basic question for the intellectual: how does one speak the truth? What truth? For whom and where? Unfortunately, we must begin by saying that there is no system or method broad and certain enough to provide the intellectual with direct answers to these questions.

Take as a starting point the whole, by now extremely disputatious matter of objectivity, or accuracy, or facts. In 1988 the American historian Robert Novick published a massive volume whose title dramatized the quandary with exemplary efficiency. It was called *That Noble Dream* and subtitled *The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession*. Drawing on materials taken from a century of historiographic enterprise in the United States, Novick showed how the very aim of historical investigation the ideal of objectivity by which a historian seizes the opportunity to render facts as realistically and accurately as possible gradually evolved into a mass of competing claims and counter-claims. All of them wore down any semblance of agreement by historians as to what objectivity was to the merest fig leaf, and often not even to that. Objectivity has had to do service in the Cold War as "our" (i.e., American as opposed to Communist) truth; in peacetime as the objective truth of each competing separate group (women, African-Americans, Asian Americans, gays, white men and so on) and each school (Marxist, establishment, deconstructionist, cultural). After such a babble of knowledges, what possible convergence could there be? Novick asks, and he concludes mournfully that "as a broad community of discourse, as a community of scholars united by common aims, common standards, and common purposes, the discipline of history had ceased to exist ... The professor [of history] was as described in the last verse of the Book of Judges: 'In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.'

One of the main intellectual activities of our century has been the questioning, not to say undermining, of authority. So to add to Novick's findings we would have to say that not only did a consensus disappear on what constituted objective reality, but a lot of traditional authorities, including God, were in the main swept away. There has even been an influential school of philosophers—among whom Michel Foucault, the French thinker, ranks very high—who say that to speak of an author at all (as in the author of Milton's poems) is highly tendentious, not to say ideological overstatement.

In the face of this formidable onslaught, to regress either into hand-wringing impotence or into muscular reassertions of traditional values, as characterized by the global

conservative movement, will not do. I think that the critique of objectivity and authority did perform a positive service by underlining how, in the secular world, human beings construct their truths, so to speak, and that, for example, the so-called objective truth of the white man's superiority built and maintained by the classical European colonial empires also rested on a violent subjugation of African and Asian peoples and they, it is equally true, fought that particular imposed truth in order to provide an independent order of their own. And so now everyone comes forward with new and often violently opposed views of the world: one hears endless talk about Judaeo-Christian values, Afrocentric values, Muslim truths, Eastern truths, Western truths, each providing a complete programme for excluding all the others. There is now more intolerance and strident assertiveness abroad everywhere than any one system can handle.

> The result is an almost complete absence of universals, even though very often the rhetoric suggests, for instance, that our values (whatever these may happen to be) are in fact universal. One of the shabbiest of all intellectual gambits is to pontificate about abuses in someone else's culture and to excuse exactly the same practices in one's own.

For me, the classic case is that of the brilliant 19th century French intellectual Alexis de Tocqueville, who to many of us educated to believe in classical liberal and Western democratic values, exemplified those values, almost to the letter.

Having written his assessment of democracy in America, and having criticized American mistreatment of Indians and black slaves, Tocqueville later had to deal with French colonial practices in Algeria during the late 1830s and 1840s, where, under Marshal Bugeaud, the French army of occupation undertook a savage war of pacification against the Algerian Muslims. All of a sudden, as one reads Tocqueville on Algeria, the very norms with which he had humanely demurred at American malfeasance are suspended for French actions. Not that he does not cite reasons: he does, but they are lame extenuations whose purpose it is to license French colonialism in the name of what he calls national pride. Massacres leave him unmoved; Muslims, he says, belong to an inferior religion and must be disciplined. In short, the apparent universalism of his language for America is denied, willfully denied, application to his own country, even as his own country, France, pursues similarly inhumane policies.

It must be added, however, that Tocqueville (and John Stuart Mill, for that matter, whose commendable ideas about democratic freedoms in England he said did not apply to India) lived during a period when the ideas of a universal norm of international behaviour, meant, in effect, the right of European power and European representations of other people to hold sway, so nugatory and secondary did the non-white peoples of the world seem. Besides, according to 19th century Westerners, there were no independent African or Asian peoples of consequence to challenge the draconian brutality of laws that were applied unilaterally by colonial armies to black or brown-skinned races. Their destiny was to be ruled. Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and C. L. R. James - to mention three great anti-imperialist black intellectuals– did not live and write until the 20th century, so what they and the liberation movements of which they were a part accomplished culturally and politically in establishing the right of colonized peoples to equal treatment was not available to Tocqueville or Mill. But these changed perspectives are available to contemporary intellectuals who have not often drawn the inevitable conclusions, that if you wish to uphold basic human justice, you must do so for everyone, not just selectively for the people who your side, your culture, your nation designates are OK.

The fundamental problem is therefore how to reconcile one's identity and the actualities of one's own culture, society and history to the reality of other identities, cultures, peoples. This can never be done simply by asserting one's own: tub-thumping about the glories of 'our' culture or the triumphs of 'our' history is not worthy of the intellectual's energy, especially not today when so many societies are composed of different races and backgrounds as to beggar any reductive formulas. As I have been discussing it here, the public realm in which intellectuals make their representations is extremely complex, and contains contradictory features. But the meaning of an effective intervention there has to rest on the intellectual's unbudgeable conviction in a concept of justice and fairness that allows for differences between nations and individuals, without at the same time assigning them to hidden hierarchies, preferences, evaluations. Everyone today professes a liberal language of equality and harmony for all. The problem for the intellectual is to bring these notions to bear on actual situations where equality and justice, on the one hand, and, on the other, the rather less edifying reality, is very great.

This is most easily demonstrated in international relations, which is the reason I have stressed them so much in these lectures. A couple of recent examples illustrate what I have

in mind. During the period just after Iraq's illegal invasion of Kuwait in 1990, public discussions in the West justly focused on the unacceptability of the aggression, which, with extreme brutality, sought to eliminate Kuwaiti existence. And as it became clear that the American intention was in fact to use military force against Iraq, the public rhetoric encouraged processes at the United Nations that would ensure the passage of resolutions–based on the UN Charter–demanding sanctions and the possible use of force against Iraq. Of the few intellectuals who opposed both the Iraqi invasion and the subsequent use of largely US force in Desert Storm, none to my knowledge cited any evidence or made any argument excusing Iraq for what it did.

But what I think was correctly remarked at the time was how weakened the American case against Iraq was when the Bush administration, with its enormous power, pressed the UN towards war, ignoring the numerous possibilities of a negotiated reversal of the occupation before 15 January, when the counter–offensive began, and also refusing to discuss other UN resolutions on other illegal occupations and invasions of territory that had involved the United States itself or some of its close allies.

The real issue in the Gulf so far as the US was concerned was oil and strategic power, not the Bush administration's professed principles. But what compromised intellectual discussion throughout the country, in its reiterations of the inadmissibility of land unilaterally acquired by force, was the absence of universal application of the idea. What never seemed relevant to the many American intellectuals who supported the war was that the US itself had recently invaded and for a time occupied the sovereign state of Panama. Surely if one criticized Iraq, it therefore followed that the US deserved the same criticism? But no: 'our' motives were higher; Saddam Hussein was a Hitler, whereas 'we' were moved by largely altruistic and disinterested motives, and therefore this was a just war.

Or consider the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, equally wrong and equally condemnable. But US allies such as Israel and Turkey had occupied territories illegally before the Russians moved into Afghanistan. Another US ally, Indonesia, had massacred hundreds of thousands of Timorese in an illegal invasion during the middle seventies; there is evidence to show that the US knew about and supported the horrors of the East Timor war, but few intellectuals in the US, busy as always with the crimes of the Soviet Union, said much about that. And looming back in time was the enormous invasion of Indo-China, with the results in sheer destructiveness wreaked on small, mainly peasant societies that are staggering. The principle here seems to have been that professional experts on US, foreign and military policy should confine their attention to winning a war against the other superpower and its surrogates in Vietnam or Afghanistan, and our own misdeeds be damned.

For the contemporary intellectual, living at a time that is already confused by the disappearance of what seemed to have been objective moral norms and sensible authority, is it acceptable simply either blindly to support the behaviour of one's own country and overlook its crimes, or to say rather supinely "I believe they all do it, and that's the way of the world."

Most if not all, countries in the world are signatories to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted and proclaimed in 1948, reaffirmed by every new member state of the UN. There are equally solemn conventions on the rules of war, on treatment of prisoners, on the rights of workers, women, children, immigrants and refugees. None of these documents says anything about disqualified or less equal races or peoples. All are entitled to the same freedoms. Of course, these rights are violated on a daily basis, as witness the genocide in Bosnia today. For an American Egyptian or Chinese government official, these rights are at best looked at politically, not from a consistently moral standpoint. But those are the norms of power, which are precisely not those of the intellectual whose role is at the very least to apply the same standards and norms of behavior now already collectively accepted on paper by the entire international community.

Of course, there are patriotism and loyalty to one's people. And, of course, the intellectual is not an uncomplicated automation, hurling mathematically devised laws and rules across the board. And, of course, fear and the normal limitations on one's time and attention and capacity as an individual voice operate with fearsome efficiency. And no one can speak up all the time on all the issues. But I believe there is a special duty to address the constituted and authorized powers of one's own society, which are accountable to its citizenry, particularly when those powers are exercised in a manifestly disproportionate and immoral war, or in deliberate programmes of discrimination, repression and collective cruelty.

In all these instances the intellectual meaning of a situation is arrived at by comparing the known and available facts with a norm, also known and available. This is not an easy

task, since documentation, research, probings are required in order to get beyond the usually piecemeal, fragmentary and necessarily flawed way in which information is presented. But in most cases it is possible, I believe, to ascertain whether in fact a massacre was committed, or an official cover-up produced. The first imperative is to find out what occurred, and then why, not as isolated events but as part of an unfolding history whose broad contours includes one's own nation as an actor. The incoherence of the standard foreign policy analysis performed by apologists, strategists and planners is that it concentrates on others as the objects of a situation, rarely on 'our' involvement and what it wrought. Even more rarely is it compared with a moral norm.

The goal of speaking the truth is, in so administered a mass society as ours, mainly to project a better state of affairs, one that corresponds more closely to a set of moral principles–peace, reconciliation, abatement of suffering–applied to the known facts. This has been called "abduction" by the American philosopher C.S. Peirce, and has been used effectively by the celebrated contemporary intellectual Noam Chomsky. Certainly in writing and speaking, one's aim is not to show everyone how right one is, but in trying to induce a change in the moral climate whereby aggression is seen as such, the unjust punishment of peoples or individuals is either prevented or given up, and the recognition of rights and democratic freedoms is established as a norm for everyone, not invidiously for a select few.

Admittedly, however, these are idealistic and often unrealisable aims; and in a sense they are not as immediately relevant to my subject here as the intellectual's individual performance when, as I have been saying, the tendency too often is to back away or simply to toe the line.

Nothing in my view is more reprehensible than those habits of mind in the intellectual that induce avoidance, that characteristic turning away from a difficult and principled position which you know to be the right one, but which you decide not to take. You do not want to appear too political; you are afraid of seeming controversial; you need the approval of a boss or an authority figure; you want to keep a reputation for being balanced, objective, moderate; your hope is to be asked back, to consult, to be on a board or prestigious committee, and so, to remain with the responsible mainstream; someday you hope to get an honorary degree, a big prize, perhaps even an ambassadorship. For an intellectual these habits of mind are corrupting par excellence. If anything can denature, neutralize and finally kill a passionate intellectual life, it is these considerations, internalized and so to speak in the driver's seat.

And finally a word about the mode of intellectual intervention. One doesn't climb a mountain or pulpit and declaim from the heights. Obviously, you want to speak your piece where it can be heard best; and also you want it represented in such a way as to affiliate with an ongoing and actual process, for instance, the cause of peace and justice.

Yes, the intellectual's voice is lonely, but it has resonance only because it associates itself freely with the reality of movement, the aspirations of a people, the common pursuit of a shared ideal.

Let's look at an example. Opportunism dictates that in the West, much given to full-scale critiques of, for instance, Palestinian terror or immoderation, you denounce them soundly, and then go on to praise Israeli democracy. Then you must say something good about peace. Yet intellectual responsibility dictates, of course, that you say all those things to Palestinians, but your main point is made in New York, in Paris, in London, around the issue which in those places you can most affect, by promoting the idea of Palestinian freedom and the freedom from terror and extremism of *all* concerned, not just the weakest and most easily bashed party. Speaking the truth to power is no Panglossian idealism: it is carefully weighing the alternatives, picking the right one, and then intelligently representing it where it can do the most good and cause the right change. ■

Courtesy *The Independent* 22 July 1993

Prof. Edward Said, author of *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* died in 2003.

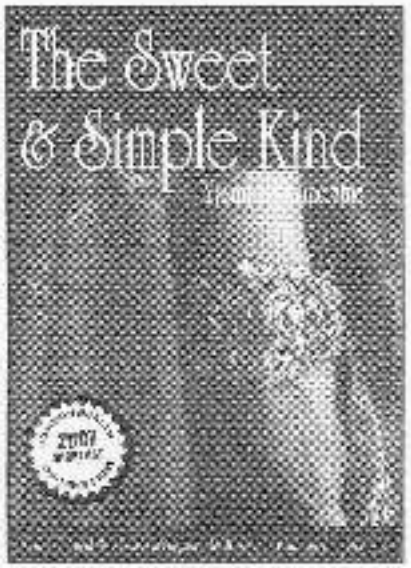
BOOK REVIEWS

THE SWEET AND SIMPLE KIND

Sharanya Jayawickrama

Yasmine Gooneratne. *The Sweet and Simple Kind.* (Columbo: Perera Hussein Publishing House, 2006).

Set in Ceylon in the transformative moments immediately before and after Independence in 1948, Yasmine Gooneratne's recently published novel *The Sweet and Simple Kind* presents a narrative trajectory of love, loss and remembrance that it shares with many other works of fiction that seek to reflect upon the nation's fraught twentieth-century history and present beleaguered state. The novel combines an arguably postcolonial transformation of the *bildungsroman* that ties the coming-of-age of the individual to the painful maturation of the newly-born nation, with the well-worn inter-racial family romance, and an autobiographical impulse that is central to the distinctive memorializing tendency of recent Sri Lankan literature in English.



A novel divided into three parts, it presents us with the intertwined stories of Latha and Tsunami, distant cousins and close childhood friends, as they move through formative periods in their lives. To her various aunts and to the mothers of prospective husbands, Latha appears as the winningly "sweet and simple kind," yet she possesses a clear intellect, a maturity of sense and a keen love of English literature (revelling in particular, like the author, in a partiality to Jane Austen novels). In some ways, the novel reads as homage to Austen, with its female-centred and socially embedded narrative; like Austen, it ends with marriage, yet not before considering what marriage means for both intellectually and emotionally independent women and for inter-community relations in the newly independent island.

It is Latha who provides the organizing consciousness of the novel, for it is she who presciently grasps the meaning of her cousin's unusual name, although she is as yet unsure whether she is "an earthquake waiting to happen" or "the one the earthquake hits" (p. 53). Her cousin's name – a seemingly humorous narrative touch presented as the result of an increasingly pretentious tendency in the girl's father – allows Gooneratne to point to the underlying cracks in a society beginning to experience seismic and self-destructive shifts. Of course, Gooneratne also alludes to the devastating force of the natural disaster that so recently brought the island to global attention and which only served to underscore and deepen its existing social and political fault lines. With this play on names, Gooneratne ties the gentler world of 1950s and 1960s Ceylon to the ruptures of the present day.

Gooneratne writes this novel in an unhurried and often digressive style, which, at times, proves to be a little frustrating as the narrative diverges into, for example, an entire chapter dedicated to Latha's autograph book filled with dedications from school friends and pious aunts, or a chapter recounting the playing of a particular game of Monopoly by the group of cousins. However, this also effectively contributes to the gradual construction of the world of the novel through an accumulation of details and characters, so that the listing of dishes feasted upon at Tsunami's home at Lucas Falls, or the description of everyday life at Peradeniya University, add to the accrued atmosphere of lived moments in time. The pace of the narrative also reflects the pace of memory as it gathers together a gentle documentary of the past or an inventory of a vanished way of life.

Gooneratne's gentle documentary is of the world of "a patrician elite in which old money and privilege had frequently joined forces with political power" (p. 195). The

first part of the novel is set in the main at Lucas Falls, the home of the wealthier branch of the Wijesinha family. Tsunami's father Rowland Wijesinha had been the A.D.C. in the time of the adulterous British Governor Millbanke, until the mysterious death of Lady Millbanke brings an end to this particular episode of colonial habitation. The estate is bought by a young British planter whose fortunes thrive on tea cultivation until he eventually sells the property to a wealthy Sinhalese mudaliyar, from whom the present Wijensinha clan descend. In Latha and Tsunami's time, the ghost of Lady Millbanke is said to haunt particular corridors of the historical house, her spectral presence neatly tying together colonial deceit with the intrigues of Independence and the treachery of the post-colonial era.

Lucas Falls is a fallen paradise within which the stories of a family register the traces of colonial history and prefigure the neo-colonial future. For Latha, Lucas Falls is a life lived in displacement, where she spends the formative moments of her childhood away from her own genial father and conservative mother, keeping secret the English porcelain baths, rose-patterned quilts, and coloured squares of a Monopoly board that make her dream of far-away London. Here, Latha attends Sunday services at church with her Christian relatives and participates in the imperialistic renaming of the ayah, chauffeur and other domestic staff as characters from the verse of Longfellow and Pope.

However, Lucas Falls is also a place that initially offers symbols of the plural life of the times, centring around the figure of Helen Ratnam, the Indian-born mother of Tsunami and her siblings. Helen is an inspired and talented artist who favours vibrant colours and free-flowing lines; as mistress of Lucas Falls she must take on certain domestic duties which require her to channel her energies differently. While she is unable to tutor the young girls in Sinhala, an increasingly urgent knowledge for the youth of Independence, she instead teaches them to quilt, an unorthodox skill in Ceylon but one learnt by Helen from an English teacher at her Delhi school. This is her means to "extend the beauty of her husband's ancestral home" (p. 56) and she allows the young girls to tack and hem the bright diamonds and hexagons in place while she reads to them from her own childhood favourites including *As You Like It*, *David Copperfield* and *Pride and Prejudice*.

This homespun artist also plants wild flowers in a corner of the Lucas Falls grounds, which comes to be lovingly known to Latha as the Indian garden. Its previous mistress, the wife of the tea planter, had directed the laying out of the roses, lilies, hollyhocks, mazes, bowers and avenues that point to the imposition of an obsessive memory of England on the tropical land. Helen transforms the garden into a space for the nurturing of wild flowers, reflecting the way that Lucas Falls during her time is a space that allows the blossoming of open minds. However, the fraying ties that bind this large and unconventional family, whose free opinion first unsettles and then nourishes Latha, prefigure the fragility of an open society and the alienation of "outsiders" and non-conformists within the increasing politicization of an exclusivist Sinhala Buddhist national identity. 1948 is the year marking Independence, the year of the Citizenship Act that disenfranchises Indian Tamils working on the tea estates, and the year which marks the fracturing of the family, as Gooneratne begins to portray the privately devastating oscillations caused by the seismic shifts in public life.

Lucas Falls continues to reflect the transformations taking place in the nation at large and becomes a space that records the rewriting of history through polarized "race-memory." The colonial plantation house takes on another life, renamed as the Wijesinha *maha walauwa*, the requisite ancestral house tying the claims of an opportunistic family to heritage and land. Helen's artworks are swiftly replaced with images of Sigiriya frescoes, elephants carved from ebony and ivory, and a gilded *papier-mâché* frieze of Prince Dutu Gemunu adorned in full battle regalia. These overt a national markers promote the new identity of Rowland Wijesinha as nationalist politician, who exchanges European dress for national costume, self-indulgently woven from the finest silk. The hypocrisy of such self-serving Sinhala Buddhist nationalism is nicely observed, for after a recent trip to the US, the new mistress of the house deems it proper that Bibles should be visibly positioned because "every well-appointed guest room should have one" (p. 438).

While Gooneratne builds a full world with such details and observations, her cast of characters does in some instances – such as the fiercely prejudiced university warden or the eldest Wijesinha progeny – fall prey to caricature and manichean delineation. Moreover, the flow of dialogue is occasionally disrupted by the obligation to provide factual explanations of key moments of history, such as when Tsunami's brother Chris explains to her lover the factors behind the eruption of the 1958 riots, exclaiming "[m]aybe they were responding to some ancient race-memory of actual, historical invasions from south India, or it's possible that this seemed to confirm the unease they had already been feeling about the obliteration of 'Sri' signs, who knows!" (p. 565). In these instances, Gooneratne participates in a shared predicament for Sri

Lankan English writers who feel the pressure to record accurately and explain faithfully while seeking to exercise creative license in fictional works.

Latha and Tsunami's sojourn at the new University of Peradeniya occupies the central part of the novel as a significant transformative space for consciousness and identity, experienced by the young women students in a potentially transitional moment for the young nation. Arriving in Peradeniya in the first class carriage of the train, Latha takes her seat on the campus coach next to a girl from whose hair rises the strong aroma of coconut. Gingerly glancing at her new companion in the close atmosphere of the coach, Latha notes that she is wearing a brightly flowered skirt and rubber slippers and that she holds "a paper parcel with oil stains on it that smelt of stale *masalawadai*" (p. 310). However, when the coach enters an avenue of ancient overhanging marā trees, from which garlands of golden ehela beslow their blossoms on the lush grass beneath. Latha's misgivings dissolve for it is this girl who lyrically voices the shared experience of beauty and idealism that is to envelop the students in their new world: Latha looks at her companion with new respect and reflects "It's true…We are moving together, this stranger and I, and all of us in this coach, through a shower of gold" (p. 211).

This moment captures the affectionate and idealistic tone that infuses Gooneratne's narrative as it seeks to recreate spaces of possibility for equality, intellect and love. Like the plump cardamom pod that Latha's father rolls around his tongue near the end of the novel, whose flavour has been distilled and almost dissipated as it slowly cooks in a pot of saffron rice, the novel memorializes what is now "no more than an exquisite rumour, a mere hint of its own presence," a memory of sweetness and the loss of simplicity. ■

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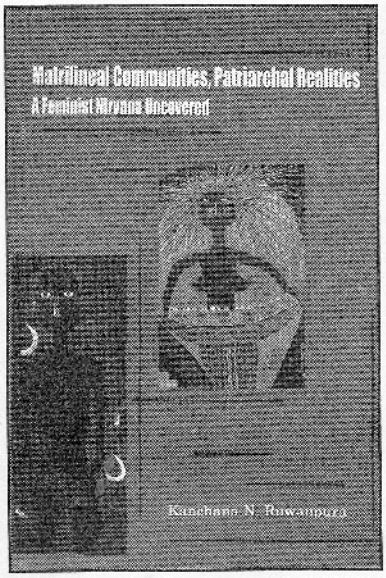
MATRILINEAL COMMUNITIES AND PATRIARCHAL REALITIES

Cynthia Caron

Kanchana N. Ruwanpura. *Matrilineal Communities, Patriarchal Realities: A feminist nirvana uncovered.* Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2006.

Kanchana Ruwanpura has given us an ethnographically rich, feminist economist's analysis of female-headed households in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province. Within the context of Sri Lanka's socio-economic development, the Eastern Province is often thought of in broad terms as a conflict-affected area or more recently as a tsunami-affected area. But the content, analysis and reflection about the Eastern Province that Kanchana Ruwanpura provides the reader, while taking the conflict into account[1] transcends such a narrow focus and its consequent interpretation of a place and its people. As such, her text is important for academics living in and scholars concerned about Sri Lanka as well as for individuals working in policy making and social programming through government or non-governmental organizations.



Ruwanpura challenges the dominant discourse that Sri Lankan women have achieved a favorable position in society compared to many women elsewhere because they have achieved high scores in human development indices and other global statistical studies, as well as the fact that Sri Lankan women can own and inherit property (through matrilineal and bilateral inheritance patterns). The nirvana. The author takes us inside hundreds of households run by women in the Eastern Province to see the extent to which their lived realities reflect these scores. Even with high levels of literacy, free education, access to healthcare and matrilineal practices, women in the eastern province live within a larger social world and are constantly negotiating patriarchal structures and ideologies about women, work, and respectability. Ruwanpura demonstrates how the negotiation of patriarchy in general and its convergence with class structure in particular is not a phenomena restricted to female heads of any one particular ethnic group. Her ability to show the shared experience of Muslim, Tamil and Sinhala female heads with regards to negotiating ethno-nationalist discourse and class structures is an important intervention to a society that tends to focus on ethnic difference (71-73)

A reader might think the Eastern Province a logical choice for a study about female-headed households, as the probability of female headship would be high as a result of the war. However, Ruwanpura's selection of the Eastern Province is a move to elucidate how the creation of female-headed households is not only war related. This is not a book about war widows. While widows and other types of *de jure* female-headed households are part of her sample of 298 such households, she makes a decisive move to open up the conceptualization of female head to include *de facto* female heads as well. De facto female heads include married women who have been abandoned by their husbands, are separated from them or women married to husbands who are disabled, mentally ill, suffering a terminal illness, alcoholic and cannot work or husbands who are otherwise unemployed (Chapter 3).

The presentation of demographic data and its analysis can often make for rather dry reading. That is hardly the case here. Ruwanpura's investigation of how a woman comes to assume headship provides a starting point for the reader to establish a relationship with the women who will be introduced throughout the book. The author disaggregates types of female headship by ethnicity and district giving the reader a feel for the life for particular women in particular places (Chapters 4, 5 and 6). For example, *de facto* headship in the Muslim community in the sample is due mostly to terminal illness followed by alcoholism and unemployment (61), whereas it is primarily due to physically disability and unemployment in the Tamil community and to alcoholism

and unemployment in the Sinhala community (82). With respect to widowhood in the province's three districts (Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara), 56% of Muslim female heads became widows as the result of death by natural causes, with 20.3% by war-related killing (58). These figures are markedly different for the Tamil community in the same areas where 25% of widows became such due to death by natural causes or suicide and 72% due to a husband's death by the army or paramilitary forces. In the case of Sinhala widows in the sample, 70% lost their husbands to natural causes or suicide and 27% to death by paramilitary forces (81). These are only a few examples of the differential impact of war for women in the Eastern Province.

Another interesting demographic point she makes is to indicate the age at which women assumed headship. Approximately 41% of the female heads in her study assumed this role between the ages of 21 and 30. When women lose a husband at such a young age, the likelihood that there are young children is high. In such a case, the resource mobilization strategies and opportunities available to a young female head, which are culturally and socially contingent, influence the life chances of the children in the household.

In Chapter 7, Kanchana discusses and elaborates the role of children in female-headed households. Working may entail withdrawing a child from school or else diverting time away from after-school studies. In either case, a female head does not consider the abandonment of education with ease. She knows the importance of education, how her own education has shaped her own opportunities, she might even know that every child has the right to be educated, however, due to her own social positioning and other structural factors such as a female child's employability in the future, she might withdraw a child from school. Below I cite two of the author's illustrative examples. First, is a consensus from a group discussion of Tamil and Sinhala female heads:

> Those of us who did have to terminate the education of some daughters will only feel regret for making this decision. And while a variety of circumstance may have brought this about, not for one minute did we delude ourselves into thinking that this was the best decision from the point of view of our daughters' welfare (124-25).

Second is the reflection of a 49-year old Muslim widow from Ampara:

> I had never been allowed to move in public spaces ... so when my husband died I felt helpless.... while a relative put me in touch with an NGO (to buy and sell short eats)... I still needed additional help in buying and selling the goods. I spoke with my older children (oldest was 16) about all this, and we decided that my eldest son would stay back and work with me. So ten years later, I have a fairly successful business and have managed to educate my other seven children as well (131).

Thus while some daughters and sons are sacrificed, female heads also noted that moving about in public spaces, buying and selling, working in their mother's agricultural fields, negotiating with shopkeepers and government officials were real world experiences that while not replacing formal education did involve the development of its own particular kind of skills set. But as Ruwanpura notes, "the key point is that not all boys benefit from patriarchal structures. Some boys do have a price to pay, at least in the short run, and feminists should pay attention to these contradictions so as to comprehend the complexity of patriarchy itself" (133).

The sacrificing son is one of many examples of a resource mobilization strategy, how female heads draw upon networks for monetary and non-monetary support, and the reciprocity involved in sustaining them. Ruwanpura demonstrates how female heads in different ethnic communities differentially rely on networks with Muslim women, for example, relying more on older children and kin, Sinhala female heads more dependent on members of the community rather than on their relations (193) and how female heads are "constantly involved in maintaining and renewing network contracts, as a crucial aspect of their household's well-being" (208). In listening to these oft-marginalized women discuss the challenges that they face running a household, as they try to abide by socials norms or in some cases suffer the social stigma attached to flouting traditional conventions, the book moves beyond traditional economic analyses of the household as static, homogenous economic unit, while also complementing the scholarship on war and poverty, and children and poverty. Ruwanpura has opened up the lives of female heads in a theoretically exciting way that extends beyond an academic agenda. She makes the reader care about who these women are.

In providing robust examples and succinct quotations with their interpretations from the female head's point of view about who they are, the choices that they make, and the social orders that they negotiate (Chapter 8), Ruwanpura creates a

solid platform from which she calls for gender-sensitive programming and planning that also takes a woman's ethnicity into account (113-16) as well as for development planners to move from "realizing practical gender needs to strategic gender needs" (209) that will allow women to expand their resource base and thereby exercise their individual agency (Chapters 9 and 10).

Kanchana Ruwanpura has crafted an intellectually rigorous, thoughtful account of female-headed families that exposes the gender biases embedded in economic analyses of 'the household' and highlights the contradictions of patriarchy, which should force feminist scholars to complicate their own analyses. One point that is driven home is that unless patriarchal structures and ideologies are tackled head on (to expand a female heads' resource base), female heads and their children will continue to live in poverty. Individuals and institutions that focus on issues of women and children must start to direct some of their intellectual and financial resources, their policy and programming more strategically to the transformation of wider social structures and giving women some "room to maneuver" (172). The business-as-usual approach to development policy and planning might only serve to reproduce the very structures that keep female heads in their disadvantageous social position in the first place.

For readers interested in other gendered accounts of development in Sri Lanka written by Kanchana Ruwanpura, please see:

- De Mel, N. & K. Ruwanpura. 2006. "Gendering the Tsunami: A Report of Women's Experiences" Report Series, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo.

- Ruwanpura, Kanchana N. 2007. "Awareness and Action: The ethno-gender dynamics of a Sri Lankan NGO." *Gender, Place, and Culture* 14(3): 317-33. ■

Notes

1. The research was completed before the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami hit Sri Lanka.

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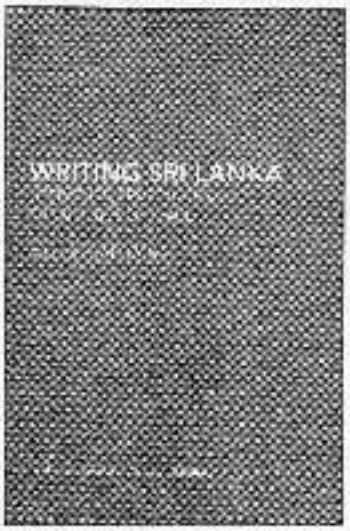
CRITICAL PREMISES: THE NATION AND IT'S BORDERS IN CONTEMPORARY SRI LANKAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Neloufer de Mel

Minoli Salgado. *Writing Sri Lanka: Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place*. London & New York: Routledge. 217 pages.

Borders, whether they signify spatial, temporal, critical, creative, gestural or performative locations, figure as a central analytical category in Minoli Salgado's appraisal of contemporary Sri Lankan literature in English in her book *Writing Sri Lanka: Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place*. Important and timely, given its own argument that Sri Lankan literature in English has yet to find 'settlement' within the canon of postcolonial literatures and is largely known in the West only through the work of its migrant writers, *Writing Sri Lanka* offers the reader valuable (re)appraisals of the novels of James Goonewardene, Punyakante Wijenaike, Carl Muller, Jean Arasanayagam, A. Sivanandan, Shyam Selvadurai, Michael Ondaatje and Romesh Gunasekera. Importantly, it also insists on a detailed and energetic engagement with the local Sri Lankan critical reception of this work in a maneuver that marks the creative text and critical field as equally important intersecting registers in the discursivity of Sri Lankan writing in English today.



The borders are from where one writes, whether creatively and/or critically. In *Writing Sri Lanka* they feature as sites of contest particularly when marked as fluid and contingent by writers, and rooted and fixed by critics. On the axes of this tussle reside questions of cultural (il)legitimacy, patriotism and nationalism. It is apt to recall Paul Gilbert's statement here that literatures, not accidentally, bear the name of nations, stamping an 'inescapably *political* context' within which they are written, constructed and received. (Gilbert (1996), "The idea of a national literature," John Horton and Andrea Baumeister (eds.), *Literature and the Political Imagination*, Routledge, 198-217). It follows that works of Sri Lankan literature in English which do not fit the critic's understanding of what constitutes 'the nation' and of how it should be represented are 'expatriated' and ostracized from the national literary canon. Those which do conform (and it must be noted that critical prescriptions have themselves changed over time responding to the demands of cultural de-colonization, nationalism and post-nationalism) are upheld as units of value and therefore inclusion in the canon. Divided into three parts, *Writing Sri Lanka* takes the reader through a contextual introduction to these issues in Part 1, the work of Lankan writers domiciled in Sri Lanka in Part 2, and those residing abroad in Part 3.

Critical Premises

Salgado marks two 'critical territorialities' occupying the spectrum of Sri Lankan English literary criticism which have, in one way or another, engaged with the project of inclusion and exclusion. The first she terms 'patrician' which has its derivative roots in a Leavisite tradition and a corollary in ethno-nationalist thought in its impulse to act as a paternalistic guardian of national culture. Epitomized in the title *Sri Lankan English Literature and the Sri Lankan People 1917-2003*, which deploys sweeping categories in an unself-reflexive manner that is invested in a unitary, homogenized concept of the nation, this type of criticism oscillates between stating, on the one hand, that 'the artistic weakness of [Sri Lankan] poetry is [...] because our recent poets do not draw upon the Western traditions available to them', while berating Sri Lankan writers working in English for their remoteness from Sri Lankan 'realities' and for their Westernized sensibilities on the other (p. 32). The effect of this, according to Salgado, is an 'antinomian scripting of anglicisation to mark boundaries of belonging in ways that reveal the profound uncertainty underpinning the project of cultural identification.'(p. 33). Such paradoxes

and contradictions constitutive of 'patrician' criticism are necessary to signal. But that they remain on a latent, aporetic register unknown to or ignored by the 'patrician' critic despite the deconstructive critical turn within postcolonial literary theory today is, in my opinion, equally important to mark. Such an emphasis requires us to go beyond an easier dismissal of the 'patrician' critic as old fashioned and past his sell-by-date, to pay attention, as Salgado does in her book, to the discursive registers that may *connect* apparently divergent schools of criticism, whether 'patrician' or not. Salgado argues that such connections take place when the common critical endeavour is that of cultural and national guardianship.

Two main critical approaches to such custodianships are noted in the book. The 'patrician' route is one. The other is a 'nativist' path that broadly undertakes a revision of the literary canon within a 'subaltern politics of reclamation' but does so, in turn, through different emphases that construct lines of exclusion and inclusion. The exclusionist is often underpinned by an 'isolationist cultural logic' that leads to a rejection of Western models and 'filters' the work of migrant Sri Lankan writers to assess whether they should be included in the canon or not. (p. 27). The inclusionist works to privilege the local as well as marginal voices.

Salgado does allow, at times, for how standards of 'authenticity' and representation have shifted over the years towards a greater absorption of lessons learnt from the historical exigencies of (post)nationalism, diaspora and globalization. From a position that insisted on an autochthonous identity in the early days of cultural decolonization there is greater discussion now of the pluralities that shape the postcolonial nation. These pluralities are not uncontested, but importantly, as *Writing Sri Lanka* emphasizes, they are also linked to diasporas that make territory no longer determined or bounded. (p. 167). Hybridity becomes a valued identity. However, an important argument in *Writing Sri Lanka* resides in the assertion that even when Sri Lankan critics have stressed the category of hybridity when highlighting how a writer like Michael Ondaatje, for instance, gestures towards the political marginalization of the Burghers in postcolonial Sri Lanka, they do so by offering detailed socio-political contextualizations the writers themselves resist. In doing so the critics serve to fix the nation yet again (p. 135). Nor is the place of unqualified hybridity without tension. Salgado notes that 'triumphalist hybridism', when combined with 'nostalgic nativism' (Gayatri Spivak's terms) neutralizes the *processes* of hybridity in a manner that masks socio-cultural hierarchies (p.168). Against such maneuvers, Salgado proposes the affirmation of an 'agonistic hybridity' that she finds in the work of Jean Arasanayagam, in which the *labours* of the creative writer to invent oneself which, at times, can also lead to *laboured* writing, signal a literary resistance to the prescriptions of identity generated by the hegemonic narratives of the nation, whether exclusionist or inclusionist, 'patrician' or postmodern. A primary goal of *Writing Sri Lanka* is, therefore, to realign some of the key critical premises that frame our discussions of nation, ethnicity and cultural work today.

Language, Nation and Violence

With this goal in mind *Writing Sri Lanka* chooses to dislodge prescriptions of authenticity and allegiance towards 'varied and constrastive ways of belonging' (p.11); dislocate Sri Lankan writing in English and its reception from polarized views of resident or expatriate (p.21); focus on how, quoting Shohat and Stam (*Unthinking Eurocentrism*, 1994), 'cultural syncretism takes place both at the margins and between the margins and a changing mainstream'(p. 38); and how 'being' is constituted through a process of 'becoming' (p.166). Language, nation and violence are marked as key registers in the representation of the postcolonial Sri Lankan nation.

The use of the colonial tongue is a central preoccupation in the work of postcolonial literatures and the use of English for cultural work in Sri Lanka is no exception. Salgado argues that uncertainty shapes its regulatory discourse (p. 22) and illustrates her position by highlighting many contradictory statements in the critical appraisals of the use of English in Sri Lankan creative writing. These range from charges of elitism to statements about the writer's alienation, to a celebration of the hybridized play of language as indeed grounded in Sri Lankan 'realities'. *Writing Sri Lanka* would have benefited, perhaps, from a little more time spent on taking into account the dates of these varying critiques which span a twenty year period to mark how attitudes to language and sociolinguistics have a historicity in Sri Lanka that has, in turn, shaped the reception of its literature in English. If as Salgado notes, the varied critical approaches to the use of English in this creative writing 'register the ways in which linguistic markers of difference are scripted to serve specific readings of national culture, and when taken collectively, reveal that English in Sri Lanka does not in fact have a stable cultural base, centre or constituency at all' (p.23), this takes as its point of departure a postmodernist understanding of

language-identity. Such a postmodernist approach did not animate Sri Lankan criticism in the 1970s when 'biculturalism,' for instance, was only looked at as a split between 'alien' and 'indigenous' (p.36) rather than as a *usefully* unstable locale.

The bulk of the book deals with how Sri Lankan novelists depict questions of nation, violence and sexuality. Salgado provides an extremely important and timely reappraisal of the work of James Goonewardene. Responding to the political trajectories unleashed not only by the 'Sinhala Only' Act of 1956 but also the 1971 JVP insurrection which had a profound influence on him, Goonewardene's works such as *The Awakening of Dr. Keerti and Other Stories* (1976) and *One Mad Bid for Freedom* (1990) are shown to chart the author's deep misgivings of the nationalist course the country had taken (p.43). Salgado also notes his weaknesses: the manner in which Goonewardene collapses cultural difference onto a physical one, replicating a colonial biological essentialism that reviles the native (p.53); his moralistic depiction of Third World 'overpopulation' in *The Tribal Hangover* (1995), and his generalizations on 'the formulation of the "mass mind" petrifying it into a transhistorical marker of national identity.' (p.54) These moves effect a dystopian world difficult to digest. But Salgado scrupulously perseveres to re-assess the Manichean allegories of mass violence in this work as prescient of the violence that would mar the country and its psyche from 1983 onwards. She also refuses to dismiss Goonewardene's failures for the cautionary tale they hold: of 'the complex ways in which antinationalism can be internally coded to work in the service of precisely that which it seeks to subvert.'(p.57)

With the work of Punyakante Wijenaike, Minoli Salgado offers not so much a mapping of the author's work in tandem with critical readings of it (the methodology that largely framed the chapter on James Goonewardene), but through readings of her own. Using the concepts of the uncanny and unhomely which effect a spectral presence that unsettles, erupts and disrupts, Salgado analyzes Wijenaike's novels, set mainly in *walauwa*/manor houses, as those within the genre of melodrama. Absences that menace and confused blood lines haunt these dwellings (pp.62-7). As Antionette Burton notes elsewhere, the frequency with which women writers have turned to the metaphor of the home 'to stage their dramas of remembrance' indicates how influential and gendered the cult of domesticity is, and the gendered nature of the patriarchal household itself. (Burton (2003) *Dwelling in the Archive*, London, OUP, p. 6) How Punyakante Wijenaike, in a radical turn, disrupts the foundational assumptions of such households by highlighting taboo sexualities and relationships, and conversely, in a prescriptive turn maps urban life in the wake of terrorism to privilege Sinhala ethno-nationalism is highlighted in *Writing Sri Lanka.*

Jean Arasanayagam's work, which dwells on 'the violence of enforced difference'(p. 74) is shown to stand in contrast. Through a discussion of her use of landscape idiom, whether it is the sensuous and poisoned Garden of Eden or the spatiality of the refugee camp, Salgado highlights Arasanayagam's work as both a 'critique of the reification of territory' and a negotiation of her physical and cultural belonging to it (p. 83). She also notes that while Arasanayagam's work resists 'ethnically marked readings it has [...] been consistently so positioned by some critics' (p.83). This does sum up the majority readings of Arasanayagam, which also take their cue from her repeated return(s) to the same subject of self-identity-nation. But at times these same readings have posited other dimensions of Arasanayagam's work, most notably her deployment of gender, sexuality and motherhood in the construction of her 'post-national textual self.' If, as stated at the beginning of *Writing Sri Lanka*, it is important to shift prescriptions of authenticity and allegiance towards 'varied and constrastive ways of belonging', feminist readings of Arasanayagam's work are in line with such a move. It is true that these readings may privilege gender as an intersecting identity in Arasanayagam's larger bargaining with the nation/territory. However, their different emphasis opens up Arasanayagam's work to be read in ways that are not always only about ethnic/national difference.

Salgado draws her discussions of Sri Lankan authors domiciled in the country to a close with an analysis of Carl Muller's work. She comments on its inherent paradoxes: the 'carnivalesque linguistic subversion' to be found in *Jam Fruit Tree* (1993); the ethno-national conservatism in *Children of the Lion* (1997). Genealogy, as a profoundly postcolonial preoccupation (p.92) figures as a main theme and trope in Muller's novels, the textual performativities of which play themselves out specifically on women's bodies and sexuality. Salgado notes that whereas the women in *Jam Fruit Tree* display a sexual agency that subverts the stereotype of colonized women as passive sexual subjects (p.96), the re-inscription of the Mahavamsa tales as timeless and transhistorical in *Children of the Lion* makes for a troubling representation of the female subject. While the former endorses hybrid bloodlines, the latter's emphasis on female virginity supports an 'anxiety for ancestry' that impels Muller to provide graphic accounts of the sexual pain and rapes of

these women by lions, war lords and kings who comprise the founding fathers of the Sinhala nation as *proof* of ancestry (p.99). Salgado argues therefore for a re-appraisal of Muller's sexism as an ideological effect that exceeds gender, rooted rather in ethno-nationalism. Gender and nationalist thought are now well understood as intersecting and overdetermining positions, so that Salgado's call appears to be largely about a matter of emphasis. (However, it would not be irrelevant to ask what is at stake, what is lost and gained, in deploying one emphasis over another.) Opting herself for a stress on the ethno-national, Salgado provides a detailed discussion of the author's major texts (including the one considered 'unmistakably' about Burghers) as those which legitimize the nation as Sinhala Buddhist, effected through textual maneuvers, amongst others, by which Tamils are shown to fail at assimilation with the Sinhala majority.

Migrant Locations and the Nation

Part Three of *Writing Sri Lanka* concentrates on a group of writers considered Sri Lanka's foremost migrant novelists: A. Sivanandan, Shyam Selvadurai, Michael Ondaatje and Romesh Gunasekera. Arguing that they inhabit a borderline, Salgado discusses their locationality as 'simultaneously a liminal and interstitial site of resistance, intransigence and political translation.'(p.109) She draws attention to the many intersectionalities that link the work of Sivanandan and Selvadurai. Both are realist writers. Both experienced ethnic violence. Both develop texts that reveal social contradictions through distinctions of class, ethnicity and gender. (p.110) But the differences between the two are as significant. Sivanandan, a Marxist, emphasizes class, Selvadurai, a gay activist, sexuality. Another difference lies, according to Salgado, in how Sivanandan's novel *When Memory Dies* (1997) occupies overlapping temporalities of the performative (with its repetitions and interruptions) and the pedagogic (accumulative, historically sedimentary) which makes for an instability around the cultural significations he employs. It is argued that Selvadurai, on the other hand, relies on the pedagogical which essentializes ethnic difference to foreground adolescent perspective and sexuality (p.112).

Representation

These varied emphases, textual strategies and discursive contradictions in Sri Lankan creative writing in English and its critical reception take us to the heart of the issues around representation. The debate over the 'accuracy' of the 'historical record' in *When Memory Dies* is a case in point. Memory, emphasized in the novel's title itself, is an unstable register, an interpretive position that resists, interrogates and even distorts the dominant historical record. Dwelling on how critics like Regi Siriwardena denounced the 'distortion' of historical events in the novel, particularly in the suggestion that the July '83 ambush of thirteen Sri Lanka army soldiers by the LTTE was accompanied by a rumour that Buddhist priests were killed in Jaffna which led to the 'riots', Salgado writes of such a 'slippage' as a discursive contradiction in the novel which creates an interpretive gap between readers who know the 'real story' and those outside/foreign who do not. Salgado shows fiction here to produce knowledge that is unstable in its enunciation even as it gains in a 'subaltern reclamation of a suppressed past' and politics of co-existence (p.118). But equally noteworthy is that the vicissitudes of memory, shaped by fantasy, desire, subsequent events, and fusion of old and new ones (Kaplan Ann E., (2005) *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature,* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, p.42) are often deployed by writers to show how memory really works. Salman Rushdie's Saleem Sinai who, in *Midnight's Children*, proves to be an unreliable witness in this regard comes to mind. What characters like these repeatedly and importantly do is warn the reader of representation as always different and deferred from the real.

Minoli Salgado closes her book with chapters on Michael Ondaatje and Romesh Gunasekera. Arguing against the charge of Orientalism in Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (1982), she draws attention to its fabulous, hybrid (the text itself is novel/autobiography) and satirical forms that in reality invites the reader to note the 'impossibility and inappropriateness of mimesis.'(p.132) The effect of this is to unsettle the authority of all systems, the corollary of which is to show that contexts are themselves provisional and contingent. Engaging with the debate between Qadri Ismail and Radhika Coomaraswamy on whether the ending of *Anil's Ghost* (2000) reinforces an ethnicized Buddhist nationalism or Buddhist humanism, Salgado argues that both miss the point. She offers an alternative reading of the eye painting ceremony as hybrid, syncretic and subaltern. Arguing that the ritual is within Mahayana, not Theravada Buddhism, that the new statue is made to face the war torn north and not the rising sun from the east as traditionally required, Salgado reads in Ondaatje's location of Mahayana ritual in the south of the country a radical act of dislocating nationalism's narratives (p.141). Her readings of Romesh Gunasekera's novels in turn emphasize their effect of provisionality rather than fixities of the past or projections of a linear, teleological future. Salgado concedes (in agreement with local critics) that *Heaven's Edge* (2002) for instance contains a touristy

mediation of place by evoking a sensuous visuality of the terrain, of oral pleasure, consumption and timelessness, itself a product of leisure; and a 'strangeness of surroundings [that] serve to endorse the unity of self.'(p.164) But she also argues that all of this opens up the possibility of resistant readings to territorialization. *Heaven's Edge* is deliberately set on an unnamed island and the alienation enforced is by a landscape reconfigured by war into a place where 'belonging is no longer yet possible.' (p.164)

Writing Sri Lanka is an important intervention in the study of Sri Lankan literature in English in particular and postcoloniality in general. More suited for an academic reader, the book offers detailed, alternative, and significant readings of the major Sri Lankan writers in English of our time. The structure of the book creates a distinction between writers domiciled in Sri Lanka and those living abroad which somewhat undermines Salgado's stated objective of going beyond an internal/external binary in the critical reception of this work. Such a re-alignment of locationality may have been better served from an arrangement which deliberately juxtaposed the writers rather than separating them into distinct categories of resident/emigrant. Occasionally the internal/external binary erupts through Salgado's own readings, indexical of its discursive power. Assessing the manner in which Manique, a Sri Lankan emigrant in Australia narrates the story of the island in James Goonewardene's *The Tribal Hangover* in a short space of time – an undertaking marked in the novel itself as 'a nearly impossible task' (Goonewardene (1995) *Tribal Hangover*, Delhi: Penguin, 1995, p.81) Salgado states that Manique's narrative is an 'external perspective [which] informs the depiction of pack mentality' in the novel (p.55). But all of this goes to show that *Writing Sri Lanka* is an important book precisely because it struggles and engages with complex issues that shape the discursivities around Sri Lankan literature in English and its critical reception. It insists, correctly, that location does matter and that it is not a neutral place. It provokes us to think about the function of creative writing and criticism at a time of crisis, and be aware of how ostensibly different reading practices can end up reinforcing the same thing. It encourages us to re-assess our writers, and in particular notes their resistance to territoriality as ethical turns. At the same time it provokes us towards an understanding that territoriality is not the only determining factor in how difference is mediated. It follows that the *idea* of a national literature itself becomes charged. For these, as well as its rich and detailed discussions of the works of Sri Lankan authors writing in English, *Writing Sri Lanka* is an essential book for students and scholars of Sri Lankan literature in English and postcolonial studies. ■

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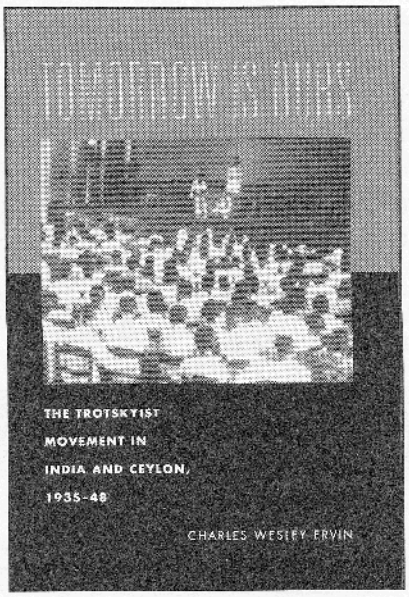
TROTSKYISM IN INDIA AND CEYLON

Rohini Hensman

Charles Wesley Ervin. *Tomorrow is Ours: The Trotskyist Movement in India and Ceylon, 1935-48.* Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2006, xiii + illustrations + 366 pages.

Tomorrow is Ours is an impressive account of the emergence of the Trotskyist movement in Ceylon and India, ending soon after Independence in both countries. The first chapter sketches the historical background: Mughal India, the rule of the East India Company, the consequent de-industrialisation of India, the 1857 insurrection followed by the takeover of India by the British government, the building of the railways and genesis of the textile industry, and the origins of the national movement. This is followed by a summary of debates within the Marxist movement on the national and colonial question, the nature of the impending revolutions in the colonies, and the united front vs. the popular front, all constituting an essential theoretical background to the ensuing account.



The next chapter follows the development of a Trotskyist group in London, initiated by Philip Gunawardena, which in 1935 founded the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) in Ceylon. They engaged in union organizing and electoral politics, and when the Trotskyist Fourth International (FI) was formed in 1938, established contact with it. The Stalinist minority in the party was expelled, and later became the Ceylon Communist Party. Meanwhile, small Trotskyist groups had formed in India, and there was a proto-Trotskyist group in the Congress Socialist Party. After LSSP leaders were arrested, their press seized and their meetings banned in 1940, the party decided that the revolution in Ceylon could develop only as part of the Indian revolution, and sent LSSP organizers to work with Trotskyists whom they had already contacted in India. Chapter 3 deals with this phase, which was initiated by a secret meeting attended by the jailed party leaders with the help of their jailor whom they had recruited!

In May 1942, after Colombo harbour was bombed by Japanese forces and the LSSP leaders escaped from jail, the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India was formed, and later acknowledged as the Indian section of the FI. M.G. Purdy, a Trotskyist from South Africa who had decided to live and work in India, was excluded because he supported the Allies in the war, and formed his own Mazdoor Trotskyist Party of India. When the Congress leaders were jailed after their 'Quit India' call in August 1942, the BLPI supported the movement, mobilizing students and workers. But the CPI, which in accordance with Stalin's line supported the British in the war, helped to get BLPI leaders arrested, although some escaped to Calcutta. The sections in Madura and Madras scored major successes in union organizing. At the BLPI's first delegate conference in 1944, a minority motion proposing a less centralized organization was defeated, and a Central Committee consisting of four Ceylonese and one Indian was elected. Contact was maintained with Trotskyists from the US and Britain during this period.

Chapter 6 deals with efforts to convert the LSSP from a mass organization into a cadre party, which resulted in a growing rift between the 'Bolsheviks' led by Doric de Souza, who wanted to build a Leninist party of professional revolutionaries, and the 'Mensheviks' led by Philip Gunawardena, who wanted to nurture its trade union base. The rift was exacerbated by state repression and the arrest of several older leaders. Philip accused Doric of being a police spy, leading to violence and a de facto split. In India too there was a split, with V.C. Shukla forming the Bolshevik Mazdoor Party. The post-war situation is taken up in Chapter 7. In the Constituent Assembly elections, the BLPI supported candidates who endorsed the Quit India struggle. In 1945, the BLPI endorsed mass demonstrations in Calcutta protesting against the trial of leaders of the Indian National Army, and in 1946, when the naval mutiny took place in Bombay, the BLPI was the first to call for a general strike in

support of it, whereas the Congress, Muslim League and CPI tried to restore peace. In August 1946, communal rioting in Calcutta left over 6,000 people dead and shook the British administration. A minority in the BLPI wanted it to drop the characterization of the Muslim League as a reactionary feudal party 'since that would only drive the Muslim masses deeper into communalism,' but the majority opposed this.

Chapter 8 goes back to the factional struggle in Ceylon, with the old guard, released from jail, reviving the LSSP in 1945 and ignoring the Regional Committee (RC) of the BLPI. The CC of the BLPI responded by expelling Philip Gunawardena and N.M. Perera, and the former went public with his accusation that Doric de Souza was a police spy. When the LSSP later proposed unity with the Ceylon section of the BLPI, it was made conditional on Philip either apologizing to Doric for calling him a police spy, or submitting to a court of enquiry. Kamalesh Bannerji came from India as a 'court of one', declared there was no basis for the accusation and therefore demanded an apology. Philip refused, upon which the CC of the BLPI expelled him, and the LSSP effectively parted company with the BLPI. Meanwhile, successful union work was going on in Bombay, Bengal and Tamil Nadu; talks with the Revolutionary Communist Party of Saumyendranath Tagore, which was to the left of the CPI, failed to result in unity because of differences over issues such as the nature of the Soviet Union. The most spectacular success of the BLPI, described in Chapter 9, was in Madras, where they took over unions, organized strikes, and developed a large working-class base. Anthony Pillai became a trade union leader of national stature, and was elected to the General Council of the All-India Trade Union Congress.

In the run-up to Independence, dealt with in Chapter 10, communal riots intensified. The BLPI conference resolution in 1947 held that 'the religio-communal partition of India is an unbelievably regressive act,'; the party, along with Trotsky, continued to believe that only a proletarian revolution could liberate India from colonialism up to and beyond August 15. Only at the BLPI conference in March 1948 did the majority finally vote to recognize the political independence of India, a position subsequently endorsed by the FI. In Ceylon, the LSSP recognized the achievement of political independence in 1948, although the economy continued to be dominated by imperialism. The final chapter describes the post-Independence debate in the BLPI over entry into the Socialist Party. The idea was at first rejected, but in 1948 the party decided unanimously to enter as a long-term strategy, against the directive of the International Secretariat of the FI. The SP refused a merger, specifying that the BLPI would have to dissolve, sever connections with the FI and apply for individual membership. The BLPI accepted these conditions, and some members rose to high positions in the SP and its union, the Hind Mazdoor Sabha. But in 1949 the SP adopted a new constitution making it a mass party, thus marginalising Trotskyists in its membership. The SP's electoral debacle in the 1951 parliamentary elections and merger with the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party completed the annihilation of the BLPI. But other Trotskyist groups survived and, together with former members of the BLPI, regrouped in the mid-1950s to form a new Trotskyist party.

This is a fascinating story, meticulously documented and well told. The only major lacuna is the absence of any reference to Hindu nationalism, its activities in the nineteenth century, the formation of the Punjab Hindu Sabha just prior to the establishment of the Muslim League, the formation of the Hindu Mahasabha and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) thereafter, and the presence of Hindu nationalists like Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai in the Congress itself. There is no reference to the fact that the notion of Muslims and Hindus constituting 'two nations', and the proposal for partition and population transfer, came first from the Hindu nationalists before it was adopted by the Muslim League nor to RSS leader Golwalkar's endorsement in 1938 of the 'purging' of German Jews. Consequently, the misleading impression is created that Jinnah, the Muslim League and Muslims were mainly responsible (with the British) for partition and the bloodshed that accompanied it. Apart from this, the book is an important addition to the history of the Left in this period. A rare collection of photographs of some of the leaders, biographical notes on the major figures in the movement, and the 1942 Programme of the BLPI add to the value of the account.

However, Ervin clearly has not written this book merely as a work of scholarship; he is equally engaged with the theory and politics of the movement he describes. Here his achievement is less even. His discussion of the united front, where communist parties retain their autonomy and independent organization but ally with other organizations for a specific purpose, and the popular front, where their separate identity is compromised, is clear and useful. Stalin's wild swings from one extreme, for example when he advocated that the Chinese Communists join the Kuomintang (the 'popular front'), to the other, when he opposed a united front between the communists and socialists against fascism, are convincingly exposed as disastrous for the working class in both cases. Ervin also points out the absurdity of the BLPI denial of India's political independence even after 15 August

1947, due to its belief that the bourgeoisie would never be able to win independence from Britain. But he stops short at drawing the logical conclusion about the theory of permanent revolution.

Marx is quoted as casting doubt on the success of the socialist revolution in Europe so long as bourgeois society was 'in the ascendant' in the rest of the world, and Lenin as believing that a national liberation movement was equivalent to a bourgeois revolution. But Trotsky argued in *The Permanent Revolution* that the bourgeoisie of the colonies was incapable of carrying out a bourgeois revolution; only the proletariat in power could carry out the tasks of the bourgeois revolution, including independence, which would then put a transition to the socialist revolution on the agenda. Surely it is clear by now that the bourgeoisie of India has indeed carried out a bourgeois revolution? If this is denied because the democratic part of the revolution is still incomplete, we could ask, when has the bourgeoisie ever carried out a democratic revolution? From the prototypical French Revolution onwards, it has made concessions to the plebeian masses when it needed their support, but had no qualms about crushing those same masses later on. Democracy has always had to be fought for, won, and defended by working class struggle. In that sense the term 'bourgeois democracy' is incorrect and dangerous; by dismissing democracy as a bourgeois institution, it has misled workers into allowing themselves to be robbed of their democratic rights in the name of socialism, instead of understanding socialism as an expansion of democracy beyond the limits that can be attained under capitalism. Indeed, installing, guarding and expanding democracy in all spheres of life (e.g. the family, community, workplace and union), and at all levels, from the local to the global, is one of the main tasks in the transition from the bourgeois revolution to a socialist revolution. But as we see in India and Sri Lanka, where democracy is very partial even sixty years after Independednce, it takes decades, not years, to accomplish this task.

Another crucial debate within the socialist movement is that over the national question. There seems to be near-universal acceptance among Marxists of Stalin's definition of a nation as a 'historically-constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture' (p.143). It is doubtful whether there exists any nation on earth answering to these specifications, but this monocultural ideal of a nation is certainly cherished by fascists everywhere, including the Nazis; achieving it would entail marginalizing or, better still, eliminating minorities by methods ranging from assimilation to ethnic cleansing and genocide. Yet this is the definition of a nation we must keep in mind when evaluating the Lenin-Luxemburg debate on the right of nations to self-determination, defined as the right to a separate state.

Apart from a reactionary minority, Marxists from Marx and Engels onwards had supported national independence for the colonies. While West European countries acquired their colonies abroad, Russia annexed the lands adjacent to it, and the debate arose in connection with a clause in the programme of the Russian Marxists dealing with these peoples. Lenin, emphasizing that the clause referred specifically to Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century, when it and its neighbouring countries were going through national movements, insisted on the right of nations like the Ukraine to have separate states, and contended that denial of this right would merely strengthen Great-Russian nationalism. Luxemburg disagreed even with the phrase 'right of nations to self-determination,' which dated from an international congress in 1896, asking, who determines the will of the nation? She was right: the 'self' pertains to the individual, and self-determination of the individual is inseparable from democracy. But who determines the nation's 'self'? Unless there is a free and fair referendum, with adequate opportunity for discussion beforehand, any decision claiming to be that of the 'nation' is bound to represent the will of particular ruling-class males of the dominant community. As such, 'national' self-determination would rule out individual self-determination, and thus democracy! National liberation, independence and secession make sense; national self-determination does not. Moreover, Luxemburg contended, in countries like Poland, 'national self-determination' would be detrimental to the interests of the working class.

Luxemburg made it clear that socialists, being opposed to all oppression, were duty bound to oppose national oppression. Lenin, on his side, conceded that the prime consideration was self-determination of the proletariat, and that 'No Russian Marxist has ever thought of blaming the Polish Social-Democrats for being opposed to the secession of Poland'. Both were opposing nationalism, Lenin in imperialist Russia, Luxemburg in oppressed Poland. So why did the disagreement arise? It surely arose due to the fact that both tried to elevate a contextual policy into a universal one. In all the imperialist countries, it was vitally important to oppose imperial delusions among workers; this is still true, for example with respect to the US occupation of Iraq. On the other hand, arguing for Shia, Sunni and Kurdish 'self-determination' in Iraq can only foster disastrous sectarian

strife and promote the divide and rule policy of U.S imperialism.

Confusion on this issue came back to haunt the BLPI. Debating the communal issue in 1944, it concluded that India consisted of various nationalities, such as Bengalis, Punjabis, etc., but that the Muslims, a dispersed national minority, could not be regarded as a nation. The CPI, wrongly but more consistently, argued that Muslim self-determination was a just demand: after all, the cultural difference between Hindus and Muslims could well be seen as greater than that between, say, Tamil-speaking and Telegu-speaking caste Hindus. The certainty that partition and its aftermath would be disastrous for the working class movement would have been a more correct reason for opposing partition. But this would have required giving up the 'right of nations to self-determination' as a policy valid for all time and in all cases (something that Lenin explicitly argued against at one point) – indeed, giving up the nonsensical notion of national self-determination altogether – and recognising that support for any struggle for separate statehood depends on the circumstances in which it occurs.

However, this would also have required definite policies to fight against the particular oppression of sections of the population and working class, and this was lacking. Although the comrades of the BLPI were commendably free of communalism, ethnic supremacism and nationalism, Ervin points out that the issues of caste and communalism were not even mentioned in their programme. Nor, he might have added, was the oppression of women. This was undoubtedly a weakness.

It would have been good if some of these issues had been discussed at slightly greater length in *Tomorrow is Ours*. But the very fact that the author raises them in the context of concrete historical circumstances is illuminating. We see the carnage that results from the creation of a popular front in China, the failure to build a united front in Germany, and the implementation of the right of nations to self-determination in India. Lessons can be learned and mistakes avoided in future – but only if there is a critical examination of these policies. The greatness of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky lay in their development of theory and politics to grapple with the reality around them. Marxist theory and politics will prosper only when their followers do likewise. ■

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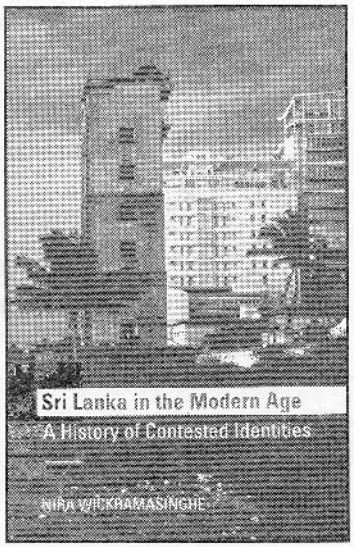
CONTESTED IDENTITIES

Laksiri Jayasuriya

Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities by Nira Wickramasinghe (London: C. Hurst and Co., 2006, 352 pages).

This volume is a neatly crafted, well documented historical narrative written for an audience which includes the general reader. In providing a valuable social history of the British colonial state in the 19th and 20th centuries as well as the post independence period (1948-), a distinctive feature of this work is that it offers a 'history from the bottom', characteristic of subaltern politics and postcolonial accounts of 'fragments'. More specifically, it aims to democratize historical writing with a people-centred history – a history of people and communities – as against the conventional social and political history or accounts of 'state building'. Furthermore, this study is cast in a distinctly antipositivists discourse which draws heavily on the postmodernist theorizing of some Sri Lankan 'anthropologist/historians', but minus the penchant for the obfuscation of language.



The author as a historian is driven by two dominant motifs: one is to articulate the voice of the 'different' as manifest under 'postcolonialism' which also includes the late colonial state (1931-48); the other – a broader historical agenda – is the quest for a historiography that challenges some of the assumptions of the dominant narratives of nationalism. The latter is one that envisages a 'nation state', but which does not reject modernity or discard the achievements of the modern state. This foray into 'culture and politics' is indeed an ambitious project and invariably confronts the juxtaposition of modernity alongside questions of political memory, claims of authenticity derived from the past.

In Part I (Chapters 1-4) – by far the most valuable and interesting part of this work – the author proceeds to deconstruct the sense of the authentic by probing identity politics as a product of the British colonial experience, Identity, as manifest in the lived experience of people is understood as the sense of self, circumscribed by one's group memberships defined by categories such as caste, class, gender, and race/ethnicity. Social categorization as a way of representing 'colonial difference' was a distinctive feature of colonial statecraft and governance, and also central to identity politics.

The colonial state's 'techniques of rule' such as census, enumeration and mapping of territory, individuals and communities acquired political significance through demands of representation. Importantly this also created an identity politics which the author argues led to the unfolding of a racialised ethnic identity which continues to engulf all aspects of present day Sri Lankan society. By focusing on identity, particularly its social construction, the author endeavours to portray that recent social and political history has been driven by an identity/politics rather than by a *politics* of difference. This, of course charts a different course, distinct from the processes of state building in the context of a changing political economy exemplified in the standard historical writings of this period, especially from the late colonial state onwards.

A distinctive feature of this volume is the novel and insightful way of depicting recent political history as 'identity politics' by drawing pointed attention to the otherwise ignored 'fragments' of society. To demonstrate the various manifestations of identity politics, the author draws heavily on her previous study: *Dressing the Colonized Body: Politics, Clothing, and Identity in Sri Lanka* (Orient Longman 2003). In this work the author presents a compelling historical account of how identity is revealed through dress – especially women's clothing – taken as the source of what it means to be a colonized body in colonial Sri Lanka. Relying heavily on this earlier study, the author takes a single series of events

about clothing and shows how identity is manifest in everyday life. By weaving this fascinating tapestry, the author incorporates a feminist perspective into the Sri Lankan historical discourse by treating gender as a historiographic category. Clearly, unlike other histories, the author conceptualizes 'history' as a vehicle for locating people and communities with political agency and giving them a presence.

Part II (Chapters 5-8) looks at over five decades of post independence as a legacy of the late colonial state, the socio political context which laid the groundwork for later bitter ethnic conflicts. These are seen as being enmeshed in the collective identities of cultural nationalism, mainly between Sinhala and Tamil nationalism, while not wanting to eschew the politics of state formation surrounding notions of democracy, equality, and rights, the historical narrative of this period captured in terms of the social movements, the clash of groups and communities in the civil society, reiterates the dilemma of nation building. In brief, the civil society, comprised of a complex social dynamic of voluntary associations and social groups, is depicted as confronting, if not challenging, state policies and an institutional framework surrounded by powerful bureaucracies and political elites.

The author rightly alludes to 'a sense of divide between civil society ... and the political society' (p. 328), but fails to raise questions bearing on the interplay between the civil society and the state sector which includes the economy and structural forces in society. Nor does the author acknowledge that these two sectors can be mutually constitutive of each other. The neglect of state formations also reveals a notable shortcoming and a failure to recognize the influence of the political economy and intersection of class, ethnicity, and gender in the transformation of Sri Lankan society. In this regard we need to remind ourselves that 'only the state presents us with a content that is appropriate for the prose of history but also contributes to it' (Hegel quoted in Ankersmit 2001). Nevertheless, by departing from the conventional historiography of the Sri Lankan historical discourse, this study makes a significant contribution to the discipline of history in Sri Lankan society. ■

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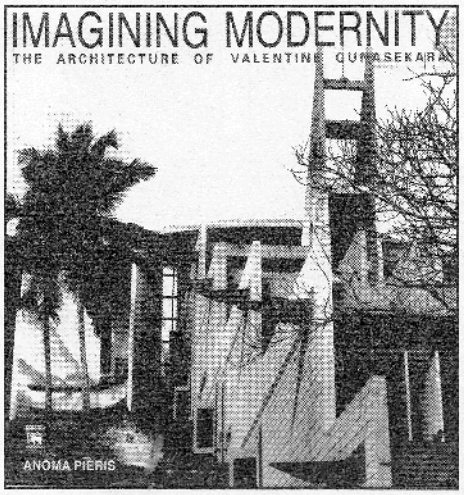
DESIGNING FOR THE FUTURE

Nira Wickramasinghe

Imagining Modernity. The Architecture of Valentine Gunasekara by Anoma Pieris (Pannipitiya, Stamford Lake (Pvt) Ltd and Colombo: Social Scientists Association, 2007),

Valentine Gunasekara describes how as a child he was mesmerized by the beauty of a monastery at Varana especially the manner in which 'the landscaping and irrigation works had been integrated with the elements of the cities'(p. 17). Later he would study architecture at the Architectural Association (A.A.) in London and become the modernist architect and anti-hero upon whom Dr Anoma Pieris casts a fragmentary gaze in her book *Imagining Modernity. The Architecture of Valentine Gunasekara.* The author, a lecturer in the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at the University of Melbourne who was trained at Moratuwa, MIT and the University of California, writes about architecture with brio while at the same time exploring Sri Lanka in the mid-1960s and 1970s –one of the most understudied periods of recent social and political history.



Gunasekara started his career building houses for the 'generation of the 1940s and 1950s,' the men and women who succeeded the colonial intelligentsia in the early post-independence years and described by Senake Bandaranayake as the 'first generation of modern intellectuals', products of free education and Sri Lankan universities. Many of them who studied at the University College or Colombo and Peradeniya Universities, were more or less bilingual although generally more at ease conversing in English, well versed in western classical literature, and more cosmopolitan, however, than Sri Lankan in their outlook. It is the decline of the values they embodied and in some cases the nostalgic return of some individuals to a real or imagined 'Sri Lankan ethos' that this book narrates through the story of one 'uncommon' individual–to borrow Eric Hobsbawm's expression.

This book is a clear demonstration that in the postmodern world we gain from an understanding of the potency of the fragment as a diagnostic site for exploring the conditions of a whole system. Gunasekara's life and ideas help us understand what is gone forever and what is left. In this sense the study complements historical and anthropological studies (from Michael Roberts writings to the more recent works of H.L Seneviratne) that have charted the rise of counter-elites in the mid fifties culminating in the Sinhala Only act and the political and cultural reconquest of the Sinhala majority. Until now the period from the mid-1960s to the close of the 1970s has remained shrouded in a haze, uncritically praised or condemned, except perhaps in the perceptive writings of Newton Gunasinghe on class structure during the 1970s which describe how by the mid-1960s the 'new class alignments that commenced in 1956 had acquired a crystallized character'. As a postmodern architectural scholar, Pieris' approach is evidently different. Grounded in material culture her study unearths the identity dilemmas and crises faced by the '1940s-1950s generation', friends, colleagues and clients of Gunasekara overtaken by a new generation of professionals and intellectuals more akin with the nationalist spirit of the day and at odds with a rebellious youth, product of a monolingual education.

Popular memories of the 1970s remain. For today's urbanized middle classes who grew up or came of age during those years the 1970s bring back memories of frugal times–import control, queues for bread, eggs and textiles – and often bitter recollections of a time of scarcities. But were these perceptions only those of a few suffering from an austerity with which they were unaccustomed? The book under review which looks chiefly at the middle classes, therefore acts as a reminder to scholars to begin digging boreholes into the daily lives of the common people as well and look afresh at the

elements, the strata, the tensions and the pressures we find there.

The past, wrote Lefort, is not really the past until it ceases to haunt us and we have become free to rediscover it in the spirit of curiosity. Anoma Pieris does precisely this when she casts her postcolonial lens on the fate of the middle classes in the 1960s and 1970s and their engagement with issues of space and identity. While her focus is on the place of modernism in architecture through the career of one of its most talented representatives, Valentine Gunesekara, her canvas is in fact much larger. She writes with authority and elegance on the social and institutional frameworks that ultimately marginalized modernism in Sri Lanka and led to the triumph of tropical regionalism epitomized by the works of Geoffrey Bawa. Her book, as the title indicates, shies away from the middle term that generally occupies economic and political analyses and brilliantly encompasses both the meta-narrative of modernity and the detail (Gunasekara's life choices) to uncover the dynamic bases of architecture.

For historians interested in the material culture of societies, materialized manifestations of societies always seem more revealing and enduring descriptors of their attributes and tensions than the ephemera of properly 'political' analysis. In this vein Pieris' sharp analysis of the industrial exhibition of 1965 sheds light on the profound social and political changes that were taking place during those years. The exhibition where Russia and China took pride of place was a site of a divisive cold war alliances and underscored Ceylon's ultimate bid for non-aligned status. It opened up a decade of social and ethnic strife consequent upon the Sinhala Only legislation and a gradual marginalization of non-Sinhala Buddhist political and cultural voices and spaces. While Bawa responded to the growing ethnocentric agenda of the state by borrowing from both feudal and colonial vernacular traditions, Gunesakara maintained a fierce alliance with modernism. His client base was after all young men and women who 'were among the first generation to be educated at the new university of Peradeniya, home grown intellectuals who embraced modernity in the post-independence years'. Interestingly this group rejected both the colonial legacy of the Victorian picturesque and the ideas and values of the rural majority. They did not want to live in anything that resembled a 'walauwa' or a British home but instead yearned for the modernity of transatlantic designs. In 1965 Gunasekara and his wife Ranee traveled to the US on a Rockefeller travel grant. The experience of meeting with architects from Princeton to California changed his approach to architecture. He was particularly impressed with the work and personality of Louis Kahn who was involved in designing the Assembly building in Dhaka. He was also introduced to systematic design and the pre-fabricated kit, quite a different approach from the labour intensive practices that still prevailed in Ceylon. The trip to the US deeply influenced his designs and methods that quite early reflected and reinscribed his own values which were those of egalitarianism, modern aspirations and religious faith (Catholicism).

This book reveals how identity politics provoked an identity driven architecture and demonstrates how architecture like other creative forms mirrors and reflects social and class tensions of a period. The 1960s in Ceylon/Sri Lanka were the site of 'anti modernist vernacular sensibilities and regionalist representation during the postcolonial period' (p.7). The next decade reoriented Sri Lankan architecture toward sustainability. Pieris explains that the country then abandoned the modernist aesthetic for a strong regionalist vocabulary based on a postmodern form of eclectism. But it was a warped type of postmodernity which did not rely on the transient and fleeting but instead attempted to recapture authenticity through pastiche and allusion. Initially this approach was confined to a small Westernized elite and beyond the imaginaire of the rest of the people caught up in a nationalist fervour; later, however, when applied to public buildings such as the Ruhuna campus and the parliament it gained wider acceptance. Nostalgia was here to stay.

By the 1970s it seems that the tastes of a middle-class that had espoused modernism were gradually being reshaped by a hegemonic state. Modernism had only a few defenders and the L shape house was the answer to scarcity. Gunasekara's position was further undermined by global events. The oil crisis of 1973 led Sri Lanka and other South Asian governments to shift to an economic strategy of import substitution. This was particularly damaging for Gunasekara who saw concrete as offering opportunities to shape a new architectural expression. The import of structural steel and cement was severely curtailed and led to a halt on new technologies, materials and private enterprise in the industrial sector. Instead the stage was set for a contemporary interpretation of vernacular architecture with its basis in local technologies and materials. In Sri Lanka society was more and more polarized along ethnic lines, and values such as secularism, and universality were considered anti-national. Pieris argues that the demise of Gunasekara and his marginalization mirror the sidelining and eclipse of Westernized middle class lifestyles and values and their final defeat before the more powerful forces of nationalism.

Pieris's argument, while sound, needs to be nuanced and sometimes tempered. She describes in this book a small group of Westernized men and women who opted for modernism and were later displaced by the forces of nationalism. The generation of the 1940s-1950s or what she calls 'a narrow social group that was forming between the colonial elite and the rural populations' had, within it a number of different streams, a feature that does not sufficiently appear in this otherwise deeply thought out book. Although Pieris herself acknowledges that members of this middle-class 'poised between East and West appropriated the trappings of modernity but kept their familial and religious values intact' she is in fact limiting her narration to the demise of the Christian/Catholic middle classes. Pieris might have distinguished them from the westernized Buddhists whose defeat was not total since they were closer to the Bengali middle classes of the pre-independence period whose strategy Partha Chatterjee described as encouraging the Westernization of the 'material sphere' while protecting the 'spiritual sphere'. They were similarly different from the westernized classes of pre-independence Sri Lanka who called 'England home' , mimicked the West and were derisively called the Brahmin class by Martin Wickramasinghe. Coincidentally Martin Wickramasinghe's youngest son's house in Nawala was designed by none other than Gunasekara. What some of the members of the middle-classes in the 1960s and 1970s aspired to then, was an alternative modernity, a vernacular modernity as it were which was not necessarily parochial or culturally exclusive. Among the westernized middle-classes, men and women made different moves, adopting what may appear to be irrational choices - modernism in their homes and exclusive cultural politics in the public sphere - or modernism in the home coupled with non-sectarian political values. It is these nuances that I missed most in Pieris' work which otherwise has few unsubstantiated moments.

This book has indeed many riches and the reader can 'poach' to use de Certeau's expression whatever he/she is most interested in. It is composed of four discrete chapters. The first chapter, Modernity and Technology contextualizes the professional development of Gunasekara through Ceylon's Industrial Exhibition of 1965 - a turning point that charted the beginning of a more socialist orientation in building. The second chapter Redefining Home discusses the influence of American postwar housing design on an emerging Asian middle class who had rejected the colonial bungalow and were seeking new forms of social self-fashioning. The author grapples with the notion of vernacular cosmopolitanism imagined by rural migrants into metropolitan areas. Her fourth chapter, Interpreting Community, discusses how a minority Catholic religious community in a predominantly Buddhist country addressed the national climate of the post-independence period through a reformation of church architecture. Her fourth chapter examines the building type that was produced and transformed by the regionalist discourse and publication culture: the resort hotel. Anoma Pieris contrasts the commodification of the resort for western consumption that swept through most creations of the tropical regional schools and contrasts them with Gunasekara's own efforts at hotel design.

Valentine Gunasekara refused to idealize the past and instead designed for the future. He rebelled against the nostalgic trend that revived a vernacular borrowed from both the indigenous and colonial past. In that sense Pieris - who critiques the manner in which regionalism has succumbed to the universal forms of globalization - is clearly sympathetic to his project. But although she writes about Gunasekara with affection and empathy she never eulogizes his work or persona. Her book is an attempt at understanding his oeuvre and appreciating the difficult choices he made. Persons interested in architecture and modernism as well as social scientists and discerning readers will appreciate the quality of the writing and the subtlety of argument in this beautifully crafted book.

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BACK IN THE MAIN TEXT

Robert Crusz

Erasure of the Euro-Asian: Recovering Early Radicalism and Feminism in South Asia, Kumari Jayawardena, Social Scientists' Association, Colombo, 2007

In a recent letter to a Sunday newspaper, A. M. Williams lamented the absence of a formal Burgher presence in all matters pertaining to the governance of Sri Lanka today and went on to say:

> One need not speak of the many achievements or contributions that the Burghers have made throughout history in Ceylon and Sri Lanka and still continue to do. One must also not forget that these contributions were not made by the Burghers for the Burghers but for the entire country and all ethnicities that live here (*Sunday Leader*, 12/08/2007, p.34).

The assertion that we 'need not speak' about what the Burghers achieved, seems to assume not only that everyone knows that Burghers contributed to the modern history of Sri Lanka but also how important those interventions were. This is far from being the case.

Burgher contributions to the modern history of Sri Lanka are largely ignored or not given any prominence in the history books. Kumari Jayawardena claims in the very title of her new book that they have been 'erased' – erasure being a deliberate act. When the Burghers are mentioned, one-liners and short paragraphs about them are the most common. Sometimes there is a whole chapter dedicated to them (e.g. Fernando 1972, McGilvray 1982, Brohier 2002). Jayawardena herself has a chapter about them in her book *Nobodies to Somebodies* (2000). Whole books with the Burghers as their subject are rare (e.g. Brohier 1994, Muller 2006). The most common works are those which have the Burgher community as the cultural and social backdrop to works of fiction, biographies and auto-biographies by Burgher writers like Carl Muller, Michael Ondaatje, and Jean Arasanayagam (née Solomons). Scholarly academic works devoted *entirely* to the socio-political history of the Sri Lankan Burghers are the rarest. The authors of the most significant recent book – *People Inbetween* (Roberts et.al. 1989) - categorically state that theirs is 'not a definitive history of the Burghers but ... a contribution towards such histories' (ibid, p.24). It was however, the only scholarly work which had the Sri Lankan Burghers at the very centre of its focus, until now.

In her new book, *Erasure of the Euro-Asian*, Kumari Jayawardena brings her own ethnic identity into the spotlight in a work which seeks to restore the central role played by South Asian men and women of mixed European and Asian ancestry, mainly in Sri Lanka, in the mid-19th to mid- 20th century period of transition from colonial rule to independence. This is a work which is in keeping with the trajectory of her socio-historical scholarship over the decades. Much of her major works are seen as pioneering research and some of them are now the standard text on the subject. She began with *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon*, followed by *Ethnic and Class Conflicts in Sri Lanka*, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women in South Asia during Colonial Rule* and *Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka*. From the clues scattered in these works, it was to be expected that she would one day pay attention to her racially mixed Euro-Asian community, not simply in a bland stone-age to space-age narrative, but in a critical examination of its role in the modern history of South Asia, particularly in Sri Lanka. For instance as far back as 1972, she laid out the groundwork for her later excavations when she analyzed the rise of the '*multi-racial* Ceylonese Middle Class' (emphasis added) and its role in relation to British colonial rule. She identifies the radical section of this class – mainly 'professional men who had come into contact with foreign political and social movements and were active in fostering various campaigns in Ceylon, including the Buddhist revival, the temperance and political reform movement, and working class agitation (Jayawardena 1972, p74). Except in the case of A.E. Buultjens and his role in

Buddhist revivalism and trade unionism, she does not focus in detail on the Burgher/Eurasian component of these radicals in this instance. She rectifies this gradually in her later work and completes the task in this new book.

Erasure of the Euro-Asian has been written against the background of Jayawardena's long experience of being a leading socialist and feminist scholar, educationist and activist who has often been at the receiving end of bitter criticism from some quarters of the so-called 'nativist' indigenous intellectuals of Sri Lanka, some of them her own socialist fellow travelers. Whether or not this has anything to do with her being of mixed Sinhala – English origin is the million dollar question. Her parents were the Dr. A. P de Zoysa from Sri Lanka and Eleanor Hutton from England. The more generous explanation could be that it is because in her early work she specialized in exploring how issues of ethnicity overshadowed class struggles and gave birth to Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. Perhaps it is an analysis like the following which irked her critics:

> In this situation, where a Sri Lankan consciousness could not arise, the need of the new class for an identity that it could espouse vis-à-vis the foreign rulers and foreign economic interests, was met by a revival of older identities based on the familiar traditional categories of religion, caste and ethnicity. Rather than being swept away by the winds of nationalism and national unity, the older forms of identity were given a new lease of life, resulting in communalism, casteism, a distortion of history, a revival of myths of origin, and hero-myths along with the creation of visions of a past 'golden age'. (Jayawardena, 1985/2, pp. 141)

As she shows in *Erasure*, her experience of being at the receiving end of criticism is nothing new. Her claim is that the radical and pioneering work of nation building by some leading 19th century South Asian Euro-Asians was erased from the history books due to their mixed-race origins. But she makes the important point that this was not only a matter of prejudice on the part of the British and the local colonized Asians. Jayawardena shows how 'it was not their *marginality* – namely the pursuit only of Euro-Asian sectarian issues – but their *centrality*, emphasizing questions concerning the *whole of society*, that characterized their utopian vision of a better world' (*Erasure*, p 282.) The Euro-Asians were 'subversive hybrids' who were seen as a serious threat to the political stability of the colony on the one hand, and the aspirations of the indigenous population to sole post-colonial political and economic power on the other. This was mainly because of the crucial coupling of their mixed identity with their westernized / European manners and customs, their intellectual prowess, and their knowledge about, and adoption of, the rhetoric and practices of the class struggles and revolutionary movements against imperialism and colonialism which swept through Europe and the colonies in the 19th century. They were:

> [...] radical, with a Utopian-like vision of a democratic plural society of the future. They emerged as catalysts for modernization and social change, and were, on occasion, proto-nationalist and feminist, participating in the vanguard of the early anti-colonial challenge. (Jayawardene 2007, p2)

Kumari Jayawardena is very much a modern Sri Lankan Euro-Asian cast in this mould. 'Euro-Asian' is a term coined by her to include those of mixed European and Asian origin in South Asia, in both the paternal and maternal line of descent, to get round the confusing array of terms used to signify such people – e.g. Eurasian, East Indian, Anglo-Indian, Anglo-Ceylonese, Euro-Ceylonese, Burgher, Dutch Burgher, Portuguese Burgher, and so on. It also circumvents other names for these people which were considered derogatory - mulatto, half-blood, half-caste, mechanics, micks, railway stock, planter stock, Tommy stock etc. Also it saves her from the wrath of those families and communities who, for instance, might accuse her of calling them 'Eurasians' when they claim to be 'Burghers' and vice-versa. Within each group there are hierarchies and caste-like divisions of people who are sensitive about what they are called. She therefore avoids all the fuss with her neologism. Part 1 with its first three chapters, nearly a third of the book, is a detailed piece of scholarship and writing which describes this naming and the emergence of the Euro-Asian communities with their uneasy attempts at assimilation into mainstream South Asian society from Portuguese times onwards. Here she covers Euro-Asian communities in Singapore and Indonesia as well. It is however Part Two (Euro-Asian Radicalism and Modernism) and Part Three (Gender, Patriarchy and Nation) which are her main concerns and comprise the heart of the book.

Modernist Radicals

Kumari Jayawardena begins her work of recovery by tracing and assessing the impact of world events, from the late 18th and the 19th centuries, on South Asian colonies. The American Revolution of 1776, the French Revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848, Latin American independence movements, revolts in the West Indies, resistance to colonization in parts of India like the Punjab, unrest in Ireland,

struggles for reform in Britain (Chartism, franchise rights, struggles for a free press, free trade and laissez-faire policies), the counter movements from Utopian Socialists and Marxists against capitalist society, the labour agitation and trade unionism struggles in Europe, challenges to Christian orthodoxy from Baptists, secularists, Darwinists, theosophists, free thinkers, – all of these 'shook the ideological foundations of traditional society' and were 'considered subversive by the ever-vigilant colonial rulers who monitored the influence of such movements on colonial society' (ibid, p86).

Jayawardena traces the Euro-Asian radical lineage in South Asia from Henry Derozio and the *Young Bengal* movement in India in the first half of the 19th century to Charles Lorenz and the *Young Ceylon* group in Sri Lanka in the later part of the century. Through their newspapers, periodicals, societies and associations, they kept abreast of the revolutionary world events. In India, the 'Derozians' challenged traditional Hindu society and the colonial political system from their bases in Kolkata and wider Bengal. They took up various issues for social and political reform and campaigned against patriarchy, polygamy, caste injustices, forced labour, female subordination, banning of widow remarriage, political conservatism, idolatory, 'tyrants and priests', and the denial of access to the civil service to Indians. 'They started the process which inspired and heralded other Indian nationalist and reform movements of the late 19th century'(ibid, p110). However Jayawardena points out that these later Hindu and Muslim nationalists were 'politically militant but socially reactionary'. They 'spoke out for political change and Home Rule, but hesitated to espouse secularism or to critique local social practice .....Only a small minority of ideologues were able to combine secularism, nationalism and social change – among the pioneers being the Derozians' (ibid, p125). Jayawardena shows how it was this crucial combination of Derozio's radicalism in both the political and social spheres which led to his being denied his true place, if not being completely ignored, by the history of this era in India. It was a similar case in Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka, it was the Irish medical doctor, Christopher Elliot whom Jayawardena credits with being one of those who initiated the agitation for radical reform in the colony in the 1840's. Influenced by the political revolutions in Europe, the British Chartist movement and the revolt in Ireland, Elliot was the proprietor and editor of the *Colombo Observer* newspaper, through which he challenged the colonial government and its British lackeys. He called for constitutional reform with representative government and political rights for *all* the people. He accused the government of Ceylon as being 'as much despotic as that of Russia'. The newspaper also became the main source of news and information for local dissidents about the revolutionary movements in Europe and in the colonies. This news reached Kandy where the armed revolt of Puran Appu took place in 1848. Governor Torrington made specific reference to the role of Elliot (that he was 'getting up agitation all over the country') and the Colombo radicals, who via the *Observer* conveyed the news from France to the Kandyan areas.

These Colombo radicals included Euro-Asian proctors and advocates - one of the few professional groups who were not government servants. They were free citizens who were able to express independent opinions. Their practice in provincial towns put them in touch with the mass of the people. They challenged government policies, denounced the racism of resident Europeans, took up political causes and became part of the struggle for citizens' rights. Among them was the Euro-Asian lawyer Richard Morgan. Considered a friend of the poor and the oppressed, he was actively involved in the reform movement. He critiqued the caste system and its influence in judicial affairs, and in 1843 he led the formation of the 'Friends of Ceylon', a society open to 'Native or European-born', which agitated for more representative legislature and the achievement of self-government. They were joined in their struggles, petitions and appeals to the House of Commons in Britain by the merchant capitalists calling for 'no taxation without representation', and in condemning the financial policies and lack of expenditure on public works of the colonial government. Morgan went on to take the Burgher seat, one of the six 'Unofficial' seats in the Legislative Council, and in later life accepted high judicial positions which compromised his earlier radical positions. But the dissident traditions he advocated in his youth along with Elliot and others, inspired Euro-Asians like Charles Lorenz and the *Young Ceylon* group.

Lorenz was a product of the Colombo Academy (today's Royal College) begun by the colonial government in 1835. Quoting from *People Inbetween*, Jayawardena describes how the Academy was responsible for forming the minds of the brightest local students. Dominated in its early years by nearly 60 percent of Euro-Asian students, the academy schooled its students in the Classics, British history, the works of the Enlightenment, and in the pantheon of English literature. While creating 'the ideal of the Cultured Gentleman', the 'well-read Man', the 'Moral Man', and the man of 'Rounded Respectability' (descriptions borrowed from *People Inbetween*), the Academy more importantly created men who

could stand up for themselves and 'express opinions on political matters'. The school produced:

> students with the ability to question orthodoxy, to disagree with their peers, and to have the courage to express their views even under conditions of colonial rule. Among such students [....] were James de Alwis, Muttu Coomaraswamy, Richard Morgan and Charles Lorenz – all of whom were to make their mark in the Legislative Council. (Jayawardena 2007, p 146)

Lorenz was a protégé of Christopher Elliot. He "eagerly imbibed" Elliot's progressive liberal ideas and joined him in protests against government policies–starting in 1848 when Lorenz appeared at a public meeting against oppressive taxes. Lorenz learnt his radical journalism from Elliot's *Ceylon Observer*, and in 1850, along with Frederick Nell, Louis Nell and Charles Ferdinands, started the literary journal *Young Ceylon*. Jayawardene considers the journal's appearance as 'a watershed in the island's political history'. It discussed literary subjects, advocated social and political reform and the modernization of society. More importantly (as she quotes from *People Inbetween*) 'it was saturated with and permeated by a Ceylonese patriotism'. Euro-Asians began to consider themselves as 'Ceylonese' by the late 19th century and some of them argued for a 'cross-ethnic Ceylonese identity' which would 'subsume and dissolve the particularistic identities held by Burghers, Sinhalese, Colombo Chetties, Moors, Tamils, Malays and others' (Roberts et. al., 1989, p178). This Ceylonese identity was pushed in the *Examiner* which was bought in the 1860's by a group of Euro-Asians – the first newspaper in the colony to come under Ceylonese management. Frederick Nell and Charles Lorenz were among its first editors and it soon became a serious critical publication with distinct political and social messages.

Lorenz followed Morgan to occupy the Burgher seat in the Legislative Council - one of the six 'Unofficials' – the others being a Sinhalese, a Tamil and three Europeans. Established in 1833, the Legislative Council, by the 1860's had become 'outmoded and out-of-step' with the colony's rapid economic progress and was considered 'unrepresentative of the emerging bourgeoisie which included many highly qualified professionals'. The Unofficials called for an increase in their numbers and argued for political reform and representative government. When a vote of censure on the government was passed opposing military expenditure being borne by the local government and not the imperial government as in other colonies, the Unofficials walked out when the vote was overturned later.

Lorenz resigned from the Council after this and focused his efforts on leading the movement for political emancipation by forming the Ceylon League in 1865. Jayawardena argues that it was 'the first such organization to criticize the authorities' (p161). It accused the colonial government of encroaching on the constitutional privileges of British subjects and asked people not to trust in its sense of justice. It called for agitation to defend 'our rights', arguing that the time 'has arrived' for a 'constitutional resistance'. Jayawardena quotes from Blazé (1948), that the Ceylon League 'won the support of all classes, and succeeded in creating a general appreciation of the need for constitutional reform', and that Lorenz, 'more than any other man....began the movement for the political emancipation of the Ceylonese' (Jayawardena 2007, p 162).

The Erasure

Citing examples from contemporary Indian historical works Jayawardena, devotes a short but tightly packed section to show how the role of Derozio and the Young Bengal movement was under-played and even erased from Indian history. But strangely she does not undertake such an exercise to illustrate her point about erasure when it comes to her analysis of the late 19th and early 20th century radical contributions of Sri Lankan Euro-Asians. Perhaps she feels it is more important to attend to her work of recovery rather than waste pages pointing out the lacunae and the downplaying by mainstream Sri Lankan history. For instance, taking just two examples, it is interesting to analyze the place given to the people and organizations mainstreamed by Jayawardena – such as Elliot, Lorenz, *Young Ceylon*, the *Ceylon Observer*, the *Examiner*, the Friends of Ceylon, and the Ceylon League, in two major works of Sri Lankan history – *The History of Ceylon*, Vol. III, (eds. K.M de Silva et al, 1973) and *A History of Sri Lanka* (K. M. de Silva, 1981/2003). Reading Jayawardena, it is clear from their writings, their actions, their newspapers and their organizations, that these Sri Lankan Euro-Asians were radical and utopian for their time. Using strong, positive words and phrases like, 'bold in their challenges', 'part of the struggle for citizens rights', 'in the forefront of agitation', 'most influential radical leader', 'a watershed in the island's political history' etc., Jayawardena leaves no doubt in the reader's mind about their 'centrality' to the agitations for social and political change and the vibrancy of the times. Hence it is interesting that K. M. de Silva sets out to analyse the 'causes of (the) *tepidity*' (emphasis added) of the politics of the period after concluding that:

> In striking contrast to the vigourous resistance offered by the Buddhist movement to the encroachment of Christianity in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the island's formal politics lacked any sense of purpose and animation (de Silva, 1981/2003, p 356).

He goes on to say that 'There was no demand from Sri Lankans themselves for representative government, and the colonial government of the day made the most of this'. (ibid. p359).

It is clear that de Silva does not consider the Euro-Asians as being Sri Lankan. de Silva does commend Dr Christopher Elliot for his 'remarkably outspoken journalism' and credits him with leading the agitation for reform of the Legislative Council in the 1840's, 'to make it genuinely representative of the people at large.....but the radicalism of his demands ensured their speedy rejection by the colonial authorities' (ibid, p357). de Silva concedes that the revival of the 'pressure for reform' in the 1850's came from 'European merchants and planters ....and from the Burghers' but goes on to stress that the colonial government rejected their attempts to increase the Unofficial representation in the Legislative Council on the grounds that they were only expressing the 'narrow views of class interests' and not that of the 'great body of the people'. Colonial Governors 'made much of the fact that there was no agitation from the people at large for an elective system of representation' (ibid, p358). de Silva concurs that their radicalism was in pursuit of self-interest, while for Jayawardena, it was a genuine radicalism, pursued in the interests of a wider 'Ceylonese' identity.

In this context, de Silva argues strongly that the British journalist William Digby's two pamphlets of 1876 and 1877 'were enormously influential' in making the case for constitutional reform. But Jayawardena does not mention Digby in this vein – as being so influential. She makes no reference to these two pamphlets. And from his point-of-view, de Silva makes no mention of Richard Morgan, The *Colombo Observer*, Lorenz and Young Ceylon in this political context of the mid to late 19th century. The term 'Burgher' appears so rarely in his book that de Silva does not even include it in his index. In the early part of 1991, K. M. de Silva and Michael Roberts had a heated exchange in the newspapers over de Silva's scathing review of *People Inbetween* (op.cit.1989). de Silva considered Lorenz as 'very much the odd man out in the Burgher elite' and went on to say "I believe the rest of the (Young Ceylon) group were peripheral figures and the group itself was not of any great significance in the wider perspective of the island's history' (*Ceylon Daily News*, March/April 1991)

In the larger *History of Ceylon*, Vol III (op.cit. 1973) with chapters contributed by different authors, the Burghers are discussed in a little detail but it is made clear from the outset that they were not 'conventional Ceylonese' but 'descendants of Europeans of unmixed blood or the descendants of Europeans who had had connections with native women' (L. A. Wickremeratne, ibid, p 167). Elliot, the Friends of Ceylon, *The Colombo Observer*, Lorenz, and the Ceylon League are mentioned in connection with the developments in the Legislative Council in the 19th century in a chapter written by K. M. de Silva, but the tone in which they are referred to is a mixture of condescension and reluctance to accept that these individuals and institutions were central to the campaigns for political and social change, while sometimes conceding grudging praise for their tenacity and intelligence (pages 233, 238-39).

The most striking 'erasure' made by de Silva is that of the role of A. E. Buultjens in the trade union movement. In *The Rise of the Labor Movement*, Jayawardena considered Alfred Ernst Buultjens (1865 – 1916) as 'the first prson to introduce ideas of trade unionism into Ceylon' (1972, p.80). In a detailed and extensive analysis, she argued that 'the earliest labour dispute which had the elements of a modern industrial dispute was the strike of printers that took place in 1893' and that 'it was the outcome of the propaganda in favour of trade unions that had been carried on by A. E. Buultjens and Dr. Lisboa Pinto (ibid, pp 93 - 94). Jayawardena's claim about Buultjens' importance in the birth of trade unionism has been consistent. She repeats it in *Feminism and Nationalism* (1986, p127); again in *Nobodies to Somebodies* (2000, pp 242 - 243); and now in *Erasure of the Euro-Asian* (2007, pp 169 – 177). de Silva mentions Buultjens once in his *A History of Sri Lanka* (1981 & 2003, p 347) but only as one amongst a few names mentioned in a sentence regarding the development of Buddhist schools and not in relation to trade unionism.

In the *History of Ceylon* Vol III, Buultjens is similarly mentioned in an almost identical sentence but is also afforded a footnote stating 'Buultjens, a Burgher, was Principal of Ananda College from 1890 to 1899, in succession to C. W. Leadbeater' (op.cit.,1973, p 203). In neither instance is it even hinted at that Buultjens 'renounced Christianity as a student in Cambridge in 1887, and converted to Buddhism' (Jayawardena,1986, p 127), and 'was active in Buddhist education, which he regarded as a national cause, and clashed with the colonial government and missionaries on this issue' (ibid, p174). Jayawardena's *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon* can be found as a footnote reference about four times in this *HOC* Volume III, twice in connection with the

temperance movement and twice in connection with trade unionism. Therefore her opinion about Buultjens could not have been missed. Indeed one footnote urges the reader to look up the book, citing the page numbers, 'for a comprehensive study of Goonesinha's impact on the politics of the nineteen twenties' (de Silva et.al., 1973, p 404). The Sinhalese A. E. Goonesinha, founded the Young Lanka League in 1915, the Ceylon Labour Union in 1922 and led the island's first general strike in 1923. There is no such urging to read the earlier sections where Jayawardena provides a comprehensive study of Buultjens' impact in the same context. It is also significant that the Young Lanka League is described by K. M. de Silva thus:

> The Young Lanka League might be described as the first 'radical' and 'nationalist' political association to be formed in Ceylon with a political programme which was overtly and defiantly opposed to the continuation of British rule in the island. (ibid, p 390)

Change the name of the League to 'The Friends of Ceylon' or 'The Ceylon League' and we get the other perspective provided by Jayawardena in *Erasure of the Euro-Asians*.

The Euro-Asian 'New Woman'

It is also interesting to note the differences between *Erasure of the Euro-Asian* and other significant works of history about the role played by the Euro-Asian woman Agnes de Silva, the wife of George E. de Silva, in the women's franchise movement of the 1920's. In the 1981 publication to celebrate 50 years of universal suffrage in Sri Lanka (ed. K.M. de Silva, 1981), Tilaka Metthananda makes the observation that at the general sessions of the Ceylon National Congress held in Kandy in 1925, 'a resolution on votes for women, submitted by the Mallika Kulanga Samitiya, was proposed by a Mrs Asline Thomas and seconded by Mrs. George E. de Silva (née Agnes de Silva) who was later to play a crucial role in lobbying for female suffrage when the Donoughmore Commission visited the island in 1928' (ed. K.M.de Silva, 1981, p67-68). Later, Agnes de Silva is again mentioned as one of the members of the Women's Franchise Union, formed in 1927, 'on the initiative of a group of affluent and influential Colombo-based women ...almost all of (whom) were wives of Congress politicians' (ibid, p. 68). Metthananda underplays their agency by stressing that the WFU had to be 'persuaded' to set aside their initial reluctance and send a deputation to give evidence before the Donoughmore Commission.

Going on to say that 'the reform programme they drafted was a modest and extremely cautious one' (ibid. p67), Metthananda asserts that 'the women of Sri Lanka were generally a lethargic group when it came to the assertion of political rights. This was well demonstrated during the visit of the Donoughmore Commission in 1927' (ibid, p70).

In contrast, in *Erasure of the Euro-Asian*, Jayawardena gives us a different slant on Agnes de Silva née Nell. Jayawardena is more forthright about her placing her at the forefront of the franchise movement stating, 'Agnes was a leader of the ...movement...and among the boldest of the middle-class women making claims to political equality' (Jayawardena 2007, p 230-231). Unlike Metthananda who does not expand on her assessment of Agnes de Silva playing a 'crucial role', Jayawardena sets out Agnes's radical Lorenz-Nell Euro-Asian pedigree and quotes her (citing Jane Russell 1981) as saying:

> Lord Donoughmore asked if we wanted Indian Tamil women labourers on the estates to have the vote, I replied: 'Certainly, they are women too. We want all women to have the vote'. (Jayawardena 2007, p232)

Further, when Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan made his notorious statement that giving women the vote would be like 'casting pearls before swine', Agnes de Silva hit back that it was prejudiced men who were the swine. Hers was in a hard-hitting provocative speech which was given full coverage in the press at the time (see ibid, p232). Metthananda refers to Ramanathan's remark and his anxiety to 'protect the sacredness of the home' (ed. K.M.de Silva, 1981, p 69). She makes no reference to Agnes de Silva's reply. In her 1990 article mentioned above, Metthananda makes no reference to Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan's cutting remark (nor to Agnes de Silva reply), but chooses to foreground his patriarchal concerns, stating that 'The most vehement opponent of women's franchise was Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan , the Tamil leader, who argued that it would lead to the destruction of domestic peace, purity and harmony that prevailed in the household' (eds. Kiribamune and Samarasinghe, 1990, p67)

Kumari Jayawardena co-authored (with Malathi de Alwis) the most comprehensive study to date of the women's franchise movement in Sri Lanka, appropriately titled 'Casting Pearls' (de Alwis/Jayawardena, 2000). Going back to the original sources, and analyzing every aspect of the movement in great detail, they give rightful prominence to Agnes de Silva and others, and show the passion and

dedication with which the women of the movement engaged with the issues – an engagement which was far from one which was 'lethargic', 'lacking in enthusiasm' and not showing 'any interest in political participation'.

Agnes de Silva is one of the many Euro-Asian women that Jayawardena recovers from the shadows of history. She sees all of them as belonging to the phenomenon of the 'New Woman', the emergence of who in both the West and the East (including the colonial world) was:

> one of the startling challenges to patriarchy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In Asia, she was the educated, bourgeois woman who was in the process of liberating herself from patriarchal domination, not only by joining women's associations, publishing feminist journals and demanding gender equality in terms of social and political rights, but also by asserting her personal independence and sexuality. (Jayawardena 2007, p 252)

Jayawardena describes how the pioneering spirit of Agnes de Silva continued in her daughters Anil de Silva and Minnette de Silva, the former "an early woman journalist, art critic and political activist" (ibid, p 234), and Minnette, Sri Lanka's first woman architect. Jayawardena quotes Neloufer de Mel (2001) that through the choices she made in her life, Anil de Silva defied the boundaries of "the prevailing Puritanism and nationalist rhetoric" which were the "important rubrics of respectability" of the times (ibid, p 234). Choices like becoming a journalist in London in the 1930's and writing critical articles about the culture and social practices of Sri Lanka, living abroad and marrying a foreigner (for which she was bitterly attacked in the nationalist Sri Lankan press), becoming secretary of the Indian People's Theatre Association – 'a vibrant leftist theater group' (ibid, p 235) and being actively involved with Indian and French communists at different periods of her life. Minnette was also an 'adventurous and creative pioneer' who 'went against the grain' (ibid pp 236 & 237). She studied architecture in India (at that time a strongly male world) and became 'not only the first local (and possibly Asian) woman architect, but also the first in Sri Lanka (in the 1950's) to pioneer a synthesis of modernism and tradition in architecture'(ibid, p237).

Jayawardena's recovery of the Euro-Asian 'New Woman" of the late 19th and early 20th centuries takes place against an extensive and detailed background chapter (ibid, Chapter 9, pp185-211) where she explores the making of myths about the 'oriental' and Euro-Asian woman – myths constructed around fantasies of the 'Orient' in Western culture during the colonial era, myths about the 'exotic', desirable and subservient oriental woman, myths expounding the beauty and sexuality of 'half-caste' women, and from the indigenous Asian side, myths about her immorality and impurity. Citing examples, Jayawardena argues that these stereotypes continue to be in vogue today - for example in the perception predominant in cultural practices like the Sinhala cinema, of the bad, immoral urban Burgher girl played against the good, chaste Sinhalese village girl.

The 19th century saw the spread of liberalism and movements for democratic rights, and with that 'the demands of western women for education, employment, franchise rights, and birth control increased' (ibid, p 213). These movements for women's rights, begun in the earlier century by women like Mary Wollstonecraft and her *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) in Britain, and Olympe de Gouge's *Declaration of the Rights of Women* (1791) in France, spread across the colonial world. Jayawardena argues that Euro-Asian women in South Asia, overcoming their negative stereotypes, led these movements, being 'among the first women to make a historic breakthrough, confronting traditional attitudes and patriarchal practices' (ibid, p 214). Their first advances were made in education and going to work outside the home. In India and Sri Lanka, pioneer Euro-Asian women teachers, nurses and doctors paved the way for women of other communities to excel in education and obtain employment. They were helped by the liberal attitudes to women expounded by radical Euro-Asian men, their journals and organisations, like for example Frederick Nell, Charles Lorenz, the *Young Ceylon* group, and Alfred Drieberg whom Jayawardena describes as 'a remarkable example' of 'early feminist consciousness among Euro-Asian men' (ibid, p 215). Drieberg wrote to his father from school in Britain, 'eagerly supporting that idea' that his sisters might also be sent to school there, referring to 'the good which would result from the foreign education they would get there' and continuing – 'I don't think it right that boys alone should be sent here from Ceylon – Why not girls ?' (ibid, p 215, quoting from Roberts et.al., 1989, p62). When the Cambridge Junior and Senior examinations were introduced in 1880, they attracted young Euro-Asian women who were the first to go in for higher education. Among the earliest was Hetty Drieberg who obtained second-class honours at the Cambridge Junior examination in 1881. The census data for the thirty year period 1881 to 1911 revealed the huge advances made by Euro-Asian women in literacy. While being significantly higher than that of Sinhala, Tamil and

Muslim women, they were even higher than that of the men of these communities.

These advances in literacy and secondary and higher education enabled Euro-Asian women to make inroads into the professions open to women at that time. They became school teachers, and also taught other women nursing, dressmaking, art, typing, secretarial and clerical work. Some of them became writers, poets and artists while others became successful business entrepreneurs. Others pioneered modernism in education by setting up schools for girls. Jayawardena sees the entry of Euro-Asian women into the Medical College 'as their most spectacular success'. It was opened to women in 1892 and Euro-Asian women like Alice de Boer, Winifred Nell, Claribel van Dort, Rachel Christoffelsz, Helen Kiddle, Ursula van Rooyen and Sylvia Ebert were among the first to qualify as doctors in the 1890's and early 20th centuries.

Jayawardena had already identified this 'New Woman' in Asia in her pioneering work *Feminism and Nationalism* (1986), but in her chapter on Sri Lanka in that book, she does not dwell on the ethnicity of the women she writes about. The nexus of her analysis is purely around gender and class. The term 'Burgher' appears just twice and only two Euro-Asian Sri Lankan women are mentioned – Winifred Nell in connection with women in higher education and entering the medical profession (p121), and Agnes de Silva (Nell) in connection with the women's franchise movement (p124). Similarly in *Nobodies to Somebodies*, in the chapter entitled 'The Debut of The Bourgeois Woman' (Jayawardena 2000, pp 277-297) her analysis focuses on class, caste and gender and not on ethnicity per se, even though she refers to Sinhala and Tamil bourgeois woman, and again mentions Winifred Nell and her niece Agnes (Nell) de Silva and cites Deloraine Brohier on the pioneer Burgher women doctors being the 'new women' of Sri Lanka. In contrast, the chapter in *Nobodies to Somebodies* entitled 'Burghers and Eurasians as Modernizers' (Jayawardena 2000), except for one sentence again about the pioneering Burgher women doctors, is entirely about class and the ethnic Euro-Asian males.

Jayawardena, amongst others, has been questioned for 'a non-articulation of a feminist analysis in [their] writings on ethnicity', despite being 'actively involved in several feminist organizations in the country' (de Alwis, 2003, p 19). This was when, in the 1970's and 1980's, Jayawardena engaged with 'class and communalism/ethnicity but not gender' (ibid.) in her writings, while being a founding member of such multi-ethnic feminist organizations like the Voice of Women and the Women's Education and the Research Centre (WERC). de Alwis asked 'why Sri Lankan feminism has taken so long to theorize the conjuncture between ethnicity and gender' (ibid, p16). Jayawardena, however, did tackle the question of gender and ethnicity in her later work (see Jayawardena 1992 a/b/c) and now again in Chapter 11 – of *Erasure of the Euro-Asian* entitled 'Racism, Revivalism and Gender') where she re-visits the familiar ground of the role of race, class and religion in the articulation of national identity that she had covered elsewhere. Here she shows again how the Buddhist revival of the 19th century, begun as a response against Christianity, later evolved into a campaign against everything western and European /Euro-Asian, resulting in the rise of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism which has come to dominate the socio-politics of the country ever since.

> The Sinhala-Buddhist revival sought to exclude certain 'alien' practices and customs, and to reactivate what was believed to be tradition, and in doing so, promote Sinhala patriotism. [...these] included preserving the 'purity' of the 'Aryan Sinhala' nation, combating Christianity and missionary education, and discouraging 'hybridization' and mixed marriages of Sinhala Buddhists to Christians, Euro-Asians and foreigners. (Jayawardena 2007, pp 252-53)

In this wake, questions of gender and nation became central issues. The responsibility of the 'respectable' Sinhala-Buddhist woman towards the nation was laid out and Euro-Asian women became particular targets of criticism:

> In contrast, however, to many nationalists of neighbouring countries, who projected ideas of the 'New Woman' and spoke of women's emancipation, the conservative Buddhists argued that what was needed was a return to tradition and old values, imposing a restraint on unacceptable types of 'modernity'. This was to counteract the 'corrupting' influences on local women of Christianity, missionary education and western values.....This involved two strategies: preservation of the 'purity' of local women and glorifying their beauty, while insisting on the immorality and unattractiveness of European and Euro-Asian women, whose looks and clothes became the target of vituperative comment. (ibid, pp 253-54)

Jayawardena explores the most personal aspect of her identity in the penultimate chapter of *Erasure* which deals with the issue of marriages of Sinhala-Buddhists to Europeans and Euro-Asians, of which she is a product. By the late 19th century, marriages and alliances across race and class barriers – European men with local women and local men to European women - 'were socially and even officially deplored' (ibid,

p258) even though theoretically 'there was freedom of choice in marriage' given that 'under colonial laws, one could (within stipulated age and consanguinity) marry a person of any class, caste, ethnicity or religion' (ibid, p 260). Jayawardena explicates in detail how, since Portuguese times, despite the strict caste stipulation in traditional Sri Lankan society, 'marriages... took place of local men of wealth and high social status and women of British, Dutch and Portuguese origin'(ibid, p 261). She goes on to identify 'the good and the great', mainly Sinhala families, in the socio-politics of modern Sri Lanka, whose ancestry can be traced to mixed marriages, with either Europeans or Euro-Asians. Her list is long and detailed, and includes, for example, the Bandaranaike, de Soysa, de Abrew, Don Carolis, Bawa, Coomaraswamy, Macan Markar, Ramanathan, and Saravanamuttu families.

Jayawardena goes into the detail of the vociferous criticism of these marriages in the Sinhala-Buddhist press and in public campaigns, from the late 19th century onwards in journals such as *The Buddhist*, newspapers such as '*Sinhala Jathiya*', and the writings of Piyadasa Sirisena and Anagarika Dharmapala. Jayawardena also quotes from the records of a meeting held in 1927 at the Colombo Tower Hall to denounce mixed marriages:

> The speeches referred to the harmful consequences of mixed marriages, such as the 'weakening' of the race, as the children of such marriages "always thought and acted according to western ideas as a result of the influence of the mother." Moreover such children "did no good to the Sinhalese nation." Another problem discussed at the meeting was that, if educated Sinhalese men married Europeans, "Sinhalese women of the educated classes would find no husbands." (ibid, p 271)

Jayawardena argues that 'unrecorded East-West partnerships occurred among all classes' in South Asia, and that 'the reality was different in that a "laissez-faire" attitude in choice of marriage partner became increasingly prevalent over the decades', so much so that over the centuries since Portuguese colonialism, 'racial mixing has continued with each generation, making South Asia an example of hybridization, which is a continuing process today' (p278).

Erasure of the Euro-Asian is a rare book and an important addition to the sparse bibliography on the Sri Lankan Burghers or Euro-Asians. Like Roberts et. al. in *People Inbetween*, Jayawardena does not claim this to be a definitive history of the Sri Lankan Euro-Asians. As the book's subtitle suggests, her intention is more precise and more focused. It can be argued that the mainstream history of Sri Lanka has characterized the social and political changes of the late 19th and early 20th centuries as 'tepid', 'melodramatic', 'lacking in purpose and animation' etc., and in the process downplayed and even erased the pioneering, radical and utopian nature of the central role played during that period by Sri Lankan Euro-Asians: Kumari Jayawardena has shown how the historical waters of that era were certainly hotter–if not exactly at boiling point –when it came to agitations for constitutional and political reform, social changes, and the celebration of a common Ceylonese identity. She certainly seems to have the more accurate reading of the temperature of those times and this book has achieved what she set out to do – to recover the Euro-Asian 'public intellectual' from the 'footnotes in small-print' and give him and her 'a new and acceptable face in the main text' (Jayawardena 2007, p288).

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ABIDING BY SRI LANKA

Premakumara de Silva

Abiding by Sri Lanka: On Peace, Place and Postcoloniality by Qadri Ismail University of Minnesota Press. 2005.

Qadri Ismail, former journalist, now Associate Professor of English at the University of Minnesota, has produced a provocative work to respond to the current understanding of the question of peace in Sri Lanka. The lack of peace in the country is commonly understood to be a consequence of a violent, 'ethnic conflict' between the Sinhala majority and the Tamil minority or, a conflict in binary terms, between two parties. This formulation, for Ismail, is too simplistic to understand the 'ethnic question' and does not help to produce lasting peace in the country. Hence, Ismail proposes that the question of peace needs to be understood as a 'politico-epistemological problem'. The formulation and deployment of "new concepts", perhaps quite urgently, as he has suggested may broaden the current narrowly focused debate on peace. Today, this must be the 'inescapable burden facing both the leftist and postcolonial thinkers of peace' (xiv).

As a literary critic, Ismail himself began to rethink or rather reformulate new conceptions of peace in his text, *Abiding by Sri Lanka*, by (re)reading of texts which were favourably written to entertain both Sinhala and Tamil nationalist audiences (e.g., K.M.de Silva's *Reaping the Whirlwind* –1998; A.J.Wilson's *The Break Up of Sri Lanka* – 1988), and the interventionist texts on peace in Sri Lanka (e.g., the work of UTHR(J), David Scott, Newton Gunasinghe, Kumari Jayawardena and Jayadeva Uyangoda). These works, for him, could be considered as intervening in the political debate in Sri Lanka from both left and right. In addition to that there are other texts on 'conflict'/'peace' (e.g., the work of I.B. Watson, Valentine Daniel and Jonathan Spencer) that don't abide by Sri Lanka. In Ismail's view such texts (largely culturalist, Western/ Eurocentric/ anthropological) see Sri Lanka as a (violent) place of difference (p. 224). By reading the Sri Lankan debate on peace, from both insider/outsider perspectives, Ismail asks a question about not just the necessity or practicality but the very ethicality of what is arguably the founding structural principle of representative democracy or majority rule. Though Ismail seriously takes the question of majority rule as an obstacle to lasting peace in Sri Lanka, he does not adequately explain how the new conception of 'peace' that he proposes should deal with the issue of democracy and minorities. Instead, as the book's blurb puts it: 'Ismail redefines (only) the minority perspective as a conceptual space that opens up the possibility for distinction without domination…' and, for him, that space produces 'peace' that abides by Sri Lanka. It is hoped such conceptualization requires a more daunting project for re(theorizing democracy. The *problem* rather the cause of lack of peace in Sri Lanka, as David Scott puts it is not hegemonic Sinhala nationalism or Tamil terrorism but democracy itself. So, if we want to achieve lasting peace in Sri Lanka such liberal democracy and all its assumptions need to be given up. This radical idea of Scott is briefly taken up in chapter 2 and in slightly greater length in the conclusion of the text and suggests that any attempt to speak to Sri Lanka will have to commence by demolishing the "epistemological space" of anthropology/ history and conceiving of a space for writing where the whole binary of insider/outsider remains unavailable.

How, then, can one speak to Sri Lanka's situation and its political "debate"? To do so, Ismail suggests one must turn to literature. As he designates it, this should be an attempt of the "postempiricist". In contrast to anthropology or history, as he understands in a specific sense, literature speaks to and abides by Sri Lanka. As Ismail puts it,

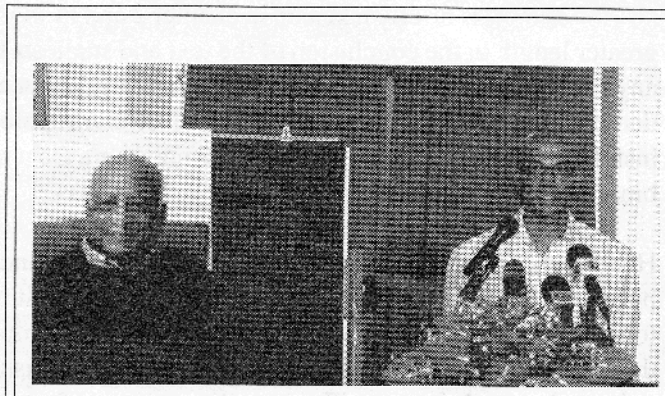
what can literature do that social science cannot? Literature, understood,if you allow me the conceit, not as a noun,but a verb, not as a material object, but as a method, as synonymous with reading and the text, allows one to learn from the problems it stages: at its strongest, most articulate,most imaginative, *it presents problems, and not answers* (xi: emphasis added).

This implies, unlike anthropology or other social sciences, the "problems" that literature presents do not demand interpretation or explanation or even analysis; what it demands is that intervention within the conceptual terrain of the Sri Lankan political debate, without trying to turn to Sri Lanka. One can inugurate such intervention by abiding by a place (for example: Sri Lanka).

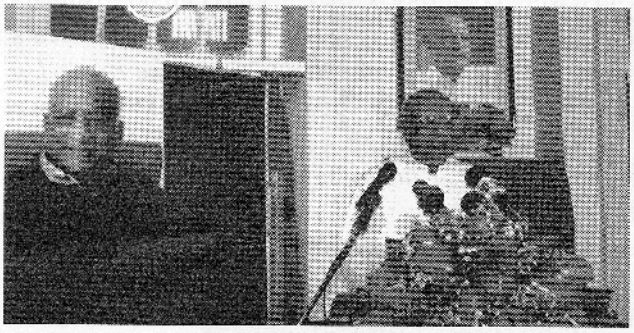
Ismail empathically says that his "study is directed at Sri Lankans," understood as those who abide by the country. It also addresses (in the strict sense) disciplinary practitioners and Westerners, and *wants them to change the way they conceive of Sri Lanka and their relation to it* (p.3). This study invites one not to continue to objectify Sri Lanka but to take on the difficult and challenging task of speaking to it, abiding by it.

For Ismail the " task is intellectual, not activist: interventionary, not interpretive" (27p.) and it cannot be done through empiricism (anthropology/history) but through "postempiricism" (literature). In this sense, postcoloniality whose contemporary state remains authorized by empiricism – must become postempiricist in term of re-evaluating its own relation to and reliance on history. The future of postcoloniality, as he proposes, would have to be the future of postempiricism. In other words what Ismail demands from us is to understand Sri Lanka non-empirically or more presisely understand it as a "text". In my view, Sri Lanka has to be understood not just as text but as a textual as well as empirical problem, a problem for liberal democracy itself. The question is does democracy inhabit peace? Can such thinking produce a 'lasting peace', in any sense, in a country like Sri Lanka.?

In chapter 1 he discuss the possibility of reconceptualizing the question of peace in Sri Lanka and to do that he proposes the need of retheorizing the concept of postcolonilality from the perspective of current (non-Eurocentric) disciplinary moment. Chapter 2 and 3 attempt to dehistoricize both Tamil and Sinhala nationalist histories by (re)reading the work of Kingsley de Silva and Jeyaratnam Wilson. In contrast to de Silva's and Wilson's nationalist reading of history, Ismail quite cleverly brings two fictional readings, Sivanandan's novel 'When Memory Dies' and "Rasanayagam's Last Riot", in Chapter 4, to make history irrelevant in understanding the question of peace in Sri Lanka. In doing so, Ismail redefines the minority perspective as a conceptual space that opens up the possibility for distinction without domination. This text without doubt has produced new conceptual/theoretical terrain for our understanding of peace and conflict abiding by a place, Sri Lanka. ■



Nimesh Muthiah, Wesley Muthiah's son speaks at the Commemoration meeting, for Wesley Muttiah & Sydney Wanasinghe.



Professor Tissa Vitharana presiding at the meeting

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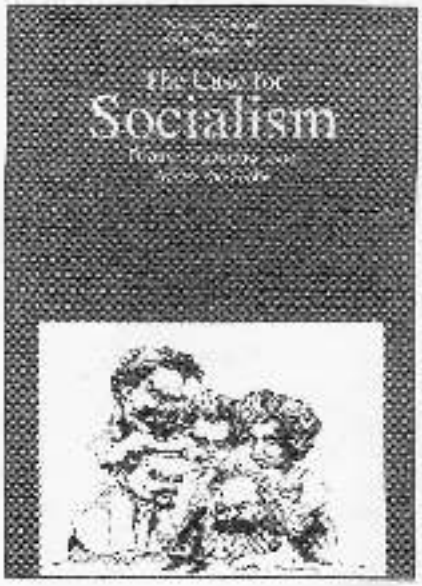

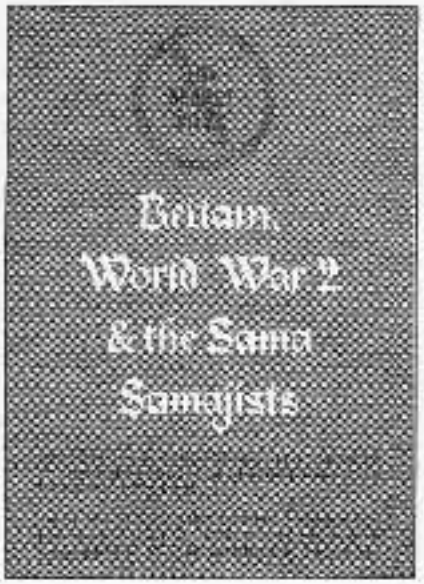

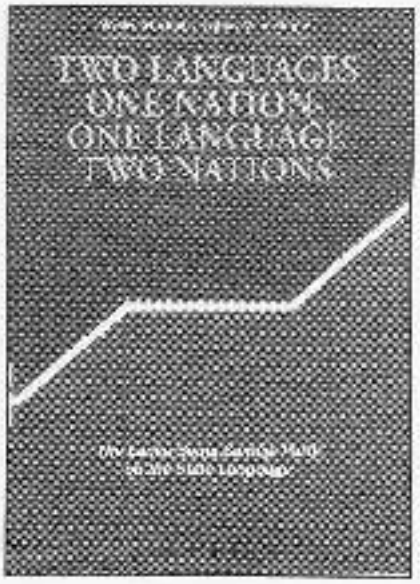

Wesley Muttiah and Sydney Wanasinghe were honored at a commemoration meeting organised by the Social Scientists' Association at the N.M. Perera Centre on 13th November 2007.

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