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COMMENTARY

SPRING CLEAN OF DICTATORS

A democratic revolution is sweeping North Africa and the Middle-East. It began in Tunisia last December and quickly spread to Egypt, Algeria, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain, and now to Syria. Protests for democratic reforms have begun to take shape in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait as well. It is clear that a fourth wave of democratization has begun, even though not all these countries are likely to be transformed into multi-party democracies. Some of these struggles might not succeed, even massive amidst popular revolts. Even then, one thing is clear: the Arab world is in a new historical phase of democratic transition.

In a chronological sense, it all began with post-election crisis in Ivory Coast in West Africa where an authoritarian President refused to leave office even after he lost the Presidential election. Instead of handing over power to the winner of the election, Laurent Gbagbo got the country's Constitutional Court declare himself the victor. Meanwhile, Alassane Quattara, the winner of the election, who happened to be the leader of the opposition, was sworn in as the President and he was immediately recognized by the international community. But that did not bring the standoff to an end. Even after mediatory efforts by neighboring countries, Gbagbo refuses to leave office and stays in power by force. An authoritarian ruler in power for thirty years is defying the popular electoral

verdict, as if there is no life for him outside Presidential office and palace. Ivory Coast is in the brink of a civil war.

In contrast, Tunisia and Egypt have succeeded in getting rid of their long-time dictatorial Presidents with relatively less political and human cost. When Ben Ali in Tunisia went on exile on his own amidst a mass protest movement, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt was forced to leave office after weeks of popular protests. However, the Egyptian success was not easy. Mubarak and his bureaucratic and military cronies were making plans to stay in power by any means necessary. There was even the likelihood of martial law being declared to protect the unpopular Mubarak regime. Amidst growing and determined popular opposition campaign for democracy and regime change, the US and Western allies appeared to have decided to dump their long standing ally. That perhaps was the decisive immediate factor that ultimately facilitated the relatively painless departure of Mubarak and his family from power. The post-Mubarak Egypt is now in a phase of democratic transformation. A process of constitutional and political change in place, creating space for political freedom, multi-party democracy, human rights and media freedom, and free and fair elections.

The way in which events are unfolding in Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria

seem to be quite different from both Tunisia and Egypt. There, authoritarian rulers are refusing to step down and have even been using the armed forces and the police to unleash a massive crackdown on pro-democracy protest movements. Repression has worked in

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these countries in the past as well. The authoritarian ruling cliques are obviously counting on the efficacy of brutal repression for survival. Will the popular movements for democratic change in these countries have the will, capacity and energy to survive and eventually force their dictators out of power?

Meanwhile, the international military involvement in the Libyan crisis has altered the nature of the on-going crisis in North Africa and the Middle East dramatically. The UN Security Council endorsement and some support from a few Arab countries have given legality and some political legitimacy to the US, British and French -led military campaign in Libya. The Western military might crush Gaddafi's military machine within a few weeks. Yet, a West-led regime change is not likely to accord any political legitimacy to either the fledgling democracy movement in Libya or the post-Gaddafi political order. A client regime of the West in Libya will hardly be a model for democratic movements in other African and Middle Eastern countries. Another Iraq in the region can actually be not in the interest of the newly-emerged and unprecedented historical opportunity for democratization in Africa and the Middle East.

The Western military involvement in Libya occurred against a fast moving chain of events in Libya where the democracy movement was running the imminent risk of being crushed by Gaddafi's ruthless military machine. Even then, a fundamental question, which the West has not yet recognized, remains. It is about democratization of a set of authoritarian states which, except Syria, has so far enjoyed the status of clienthood of the West, enjoying its political, military and economic support, despite decades of continuing repression of their own citizens. These are also corrupt and tyrannical regimes which the West tolerated for its own strategic reasons. The remaining modern dictators are not likely to

leave power in the way Ben Ali and Mubarak did. With the threat of external military intervention, they might even gain new support and legitimacy to stay in. More tragically, democracy movements might even run the risk of losing internal popular support.

What would be the option for democracy movements, now under threat by a strange combination of their internal adversaries and external allies? The option perhaps is for them to tell Barak Obama, Ban Ki-moon, David Cameron, Nicolas Sarkozy and Abu Musa to address the issue politically and at an international level. What they should tell big powers and Ban-ki Moon is to summon a UN Security Council meeting to discuss not strategies of military intervention on their behalf, but how to strategize appropriate political interventions to weaken the dictators and strengthen the democracy movements. Democratization of North Africa and the Middle East is a global issue and promoting it through Western military power might spell disaster to the fourth wave of democratization...

Turning spontaneous democratic mass movements seeking political change into armed conflicts with authoritarian regimes, as the example of Libya now shows, is not the best way to facilitate democratic transition that of course involves regime change and retirement of dictators and their cronies. These are also regimes quite used to brutal repression of opposition and resistance. They have powerful armies which they will not hesitate to use against their own citizens. But, as developments in all these countries also show, there are serious cracks in the regimes. Non-military strategies to deepen those cracks into political crisis along with people's peaceful uprisings are what President Obama and his European allies should now explore, before it is too late. Handing over the Libyan operation to NATO would hardly be a sane policy. ■

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Beyond the Sacred Journey: Varieties of Pilgrimage Practices at the Sri Pada Temple

HISTORY AND THE ENTERPRISE OF KNOWLEDGE

Amartya Sen

The text of Amartya Sen's inaugural address at the 61st session of the Indian History Congress.

In an often-quoted remark, Henry Ford, the great captain of industry, said, "History is more or less bunk." As a general statement about history, this is perhaps not an assessment of compelling delicacy. And yet Henry Ford would have been right to think, if that is what he meant, that history could easily become "bunk" through motivated manipulation.

This is especially so if the writing of history is manoeuvred to suit a slanted agenda in contemporary politics. There are organised attempts in our country, at this time, to do just that, with arbitrary augmentation of a narrowly sectarian view of India's past, along with undermining its magnificently multireligious and heterodox history. Among other distortions, there is also a systematic confounding here of mythology with history. An extraordinary example of this has been the interpretation of the Ramayana, not as a great epic, but as documentary history, which can be invoked to establish property rights over places and sites possessed and owned by others.¹ The Ramayana, which Rabindranath Tagore had seen as a wonderful legend ("the story of the Ramayana" is to be interpreted, as Tagore put it, not as "a matter of historical fact" but "in the plane of ideas") and in fact as a marvellous parable of "reconciliation",² is now made into a legally authentic account that gives one community an alleged entitlement to particular sites and land, amounting to a licence to tear down the religious places of other communities. Thomas de Quincey has an interesting essay called "Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts". Rewriting of history for bellicose use can also, presumably, be a very fine art.

I note the contemporary confounding of historical studies in India as the starting point of this lecture, even though I shall not be directly concerned with addressing these distortions: there are many superb historians in India to give these misconstructions their definitive due. Instead, I shall be concerned with outlining some methodological issues that relate to the subject of truth and falsehood in general history. I will also try to develop and defend a view of history as "an enterprise of knowledge". There will be occasional references to contemporary debates (because I shall illustrate the general

points with examples from Indian history), but the overall focus will be on more general themes.

There will be occasions, in this context, to take a fresh look at India's persistent heterodoxy, which includes not only its tendency towards multireligious and multicultural coexistence (a point emphasised in Rabindranath Tagore's "vision of India's history"), but also its relevance for the development of science and mathematics in India. For history is not only an enterprise of knowledge in itself, it cannot but have a special involvement with the history of other enterprises of knowledge.

The view of history as an enterprise of knowledge is, of course, very old-fashioned: I am not trying to innovate anything whatsoever. However, this and related epistemic approaches to history have taken some hard knocks over the last few decades. These have come not so much from sectarian bigots (who have barely addressed issues of method), but in the hands of sophisticated methodologists who are not only sceptical of the alleged virtues of modernity and objectivity (often for understandable reasons), but have ended up being deeply suspicious also of the idea of "truth" or "falsehood" in history. They have been keen, in particular, to emphasise the relativity of perspectives and the ubiquity of different points of view.

Perspectives and points of view, I would argue, are indeed important, not just in history, but in every enterprise of knowledge. This is partly because our observations are inescapably "positional". Distant objects, for example, cannot but look smaller, and yet it is the job of analysis and scrutiny to place the different positional views in their appropriate perspectives to arrive at an integrated and coherent picture. The elementary recognition of the "positionality" of observations and perceptions does not do away with ideas of truth and falsehood, nor with the need to exercise reasoned judgment faced with conflicting evidence and clashing perspectives. I shall not here reiterate the methodological arguments I have presented elsewhere, but will discuss their relevance to the interpretation of Indian history.³

Indeed, describing the past is like all other reflective judgments, which have to take note of the demands of veracity and the discipline of knowledge.⁴ The discipline includes the study of knowledge formation, including the history of science (and the constructive influences that are important in the cultivation of science) and also the history of histories (where differences in perspective call for disciplined scrutiny and are of importance themselves as objects of study). I shall be concerned with each.

I should make one more motivational remark. I address this talk primarily to non-historians, like myself, who take an interest in history. I am aware that no self-respecting historian will peacefully listen to an economist trying to tell them what their discipline is like. But history is not just for historians. It affects the lives of the public at large. We non-historians do not have to establish our entitlement to talk about history.

Rather, a good point of departure is to ask: why is history so often invoked in popular discussions? Also, what can the general public get from history? Why, we must also ask, is history such a battleground?

Knowledge and its use

Let me begin by discussing some distinct motivations that influence the public's interest in history.

1. Epistemic interest: The fact that we tend to have, for one reason or another, some interest in knowing more about what happened in the past is such a simple thought that it is somewhat embarrassing to mention this at a learned gathering. But, surely, catering to our curiosity about the past must count among the reasons for trying to learn something about historical events. An ulterior motive is not essential for taking an interest in history (even though ulterior reasons may also exist often enough).

The simplicity of the idea of historical curiosity is, however, to some extent deceptive, because the reasons for our curiosity about the past can be very diverse and sometimes quite complex. The reason can be something very practical (such as learning from a past mistake), or engagingly illuminating (such as knowing about the lives of common people in a certain period in history), or largely recreational (such as investigating the chronology and history of India's multiplicity of calendars).⁵ Also, the historical questions asked need not be straightforward, and may even be highly speculative.⁶ Whether or not it is easy to satisfy our curiosity

(it may not always be possible to settle a debate regarding what actually happened), truth has an obvious enough role in exercises of this kind. In fact, curiosity is a demand for truth on a particular subject.

2. Practical reason: Historical connections are often invoked in the context of contemporary politics and policies. Indeed, present-day attitudes in politics and society are often strongly influenced by the reading - or misreading - of the history of past events. For example, sectarian tensions build frequently on grievances (spontaneous or cultivated) linked to past deeds (real or imagined) of one group against another. This is well illustrated, for example, by the recent massacres in Rwanda or former Yugoslavia, where history - or imagined history - were often invoked, concerning alleged past records of hostilities between Hutus and Tutsies, or between Serbs and Albanians, respectively. Since these uses of history are aimed primarily at contemporary acts and strategies, the counteracting arguments which too invoke history, though in the opposite direction, also end up being inescapably linked to current affairs. Given the dialectical context, we may be forced to take an interest in historical disputations on battlegrounds that have been chosen by others - not ourselves. For example, in defending the role of secularism in contemporary India, it is not in any way essential to make any claim whatsoever about how India's Mughal rulers behaved - whether they were sectarian or assimilative, whether they were oppressive or tolerant. Yet in the political discussions that have accompanied the activist incursions of communal politics in contemporary India (well illustrated, for example, by the rhetoric that accompanied the demolition of the Babri Masjid), a heavily carpentered characterisation of the Mughal rule as anti-Hindu was repeatedly invoked. Since this characterisation was to a great extent spurious and based on arbitrary selection, to leave that point unaddressed would have, in the context of the ongoing debate, amounted to a negligence in practical reason, and not just an epistemic abstinence. Even the plausibility or otherwise of the historical argument that some of the juridical roots of Indian secularism can be traced to Mughal jurisprudence (a thesis I have tried to present in my paper, "Reach of Reason: East and West"), even though a matter of pure history, ends up inescapably as having some relevance for contemporary politics (even though that was not a claim I made).⁷

The enterprise of knowledge links in this case with the use of that knowledge. However, this does not, in any way, reduce the relevance of truth in seeking knowledge. The fact that knowledge has its use does not, obviously, make the

enterprise of acquiring knowledge in any way redundant. In fact, quite the contrary.

3. Identity scrutiny: Underlying the political debates, there is often enough a deeper issue related to the way we construct and characterise our own identities, in which too historical knowledge - or alleged knowledge - can play an important part. Our sense of identity is strongly influenced by our understanding of our past. We do not, of course, have a personal past prior to our birth, but our self-perceptions are associated with the shared history of the members of a particular group to which we think we “belong” and with which we “identify”. Our allegiances draw on the evocation of histories of our identity groups.

A scrutiny of this use of history cannot be independent of the philosophical question as to whether our identities are primarily matters of “discovery” (as many “communitarian” thinkers claim),⁸ or whether they are to a significant extent matters of selection and choice (of course, within given constraints - as indeed all choices inescapably are).⁹ Arguments that rely on the assumption of the unique centrality of one’s community-based identity survive by privileging - typically implicitly - that identity over other identities (which may be connected with, say, class, or gender, or language, or political commitments, or cultural influences). In consequence, they restrict the domain of one’s alleged “historical roots” in a truly dramatic way. Thus, the increasing search for a Hindu view of Indian history not only has problems with epistemic veracity (an issue I discussed earlier), but also involves the philosophical problem of categorical oversimplification.

It would, for example, have problems in coming to terms with, say, Rabindranath Tagore’s description of his own background as “a confluence of three cultures, Hindu, Mohammedan and British”.¹⁰ No less importantly, it cannot but be in some tension with the sense of pride that an Indian may choose to have, irrespective of his or her own religious background, at the historical achievements of, say, Ashoka or Akbar, or Kalidasa or Kabir, or Aryabhata or Bhaskara. To deny the role of reasoned choice, which can draw on the knowledge of the past, can be a very serious loss indeed. Even those who want to identify with India’s historical achievements and perhaps take some pride in them (a legitimate enough concern) must also examine critically what to take pride in, since it is easy to be misled into a narrow alley through incitements to ignore India’s capacious heterodoxy in favour of a constricted sectarian identity.

While discovery and choice compete as the basis of identity, knowledge and choice are essentially complementary to each other. Engagement with issues of identity enriches the enterprise of knowledge and extends its reach.

Science and Intellectual Heterodoxy

Let me now move to a more active view of the enterprise of knowledge, and turn to the history of science, which is among the historical subjects of study. As has already been argued, history is not only an enterprise of knowledge, its subject matter includes other enterprises of knowledge. The issue of heterodoxy, to which reference was made earlier, is particularly important here. Indeed, I would argue that there is a general connection between intellectual heterodoxy and the pursuit of science, and that this connection deserves more attention than it tends to get.

Heterodoxy is important for scientific advance because new ideas and discoveries have to emerge initially as heterodox views, at variance with established understanding. One need reflect only on the history of the scientific contributions of, say, Galileo or Newton or Darwin, to see the role of heterodoxy in the process. The history of science is integrally linked with heterodoxy.

If this interpretation is correct, then the roots of the flowering of Indian science and mathematics that occurred in and around the Gupta period (beginning particularly with Aryabhata and Varahamihira) can be intellectually associated with persistent expressions of heterodoxies which pre-existed these contributions. In fact, Sanskrit and Pali have a larger literature in defence of atheism, agnosticism and theological scepticism than exists in any other classical language.

The origins of mathematical and scientific developments in the Gupta period are often traced to earlier works in mathematics and science in India, and this is indeed worth investigating, despite the historical mess that has been created recently by the ill-founded championing of the so-called “Vedic mathematics” and “Vedic sciences”, based on very little evidence. What has, I would argue, more claim to attention as a precursor of scientific advances in the Gupta period is the tradition of scepticism that can be found in pre-Gupta India - going back to at least the sixth century B.C. - particularly in matters of religion and epistemic orthodoxy. Indeed, the openness of approach that allowed Indian mathematicians and scientists to learn about the state of these professions in Babylon, Greece and Rome, which are

plentifully cited in early Indian astronomy (particularly in the Siddhantas), can also be seen as a part of this inclination towards heterodoxy.

Observation, Experience and Scientific Methods

Indeed, the development of Indian sciences has clear methodological connections with the general epistemological doubts expressed by sceptical schools of thought that developed at an earlier period. This included the insistence on relying only on observational evidence (with scepticism of unobserved variables), for example in the Lokayata and Charvaka writings, not to mention Gautama Buddha's powerfully articulated agnosticism and his persistent questioning of received beliefs. The untimely death of Professor Bimal Matilal has robbed us of the chance of benefiting from his extensive programme of systematic investigation of the history of Indian epistemology, but his already published works bring out the reach of unorthodox early writings on epistemology (by both Buddhist and Hindu writers) in the period that can be linked to the flowering of Indian science and mathematics in the Gupta era.¹¹

Similarly, the expression of hereticism and heterodoxy patiently - if somewhat grudgingly - recorded even in the Ramayana (for example, in the form of Javali's advice to Rama to defy his father's odd promise) presents methodological reasons to be sceptical of the orthodox position in this field.¹² Indeed, in *A Vision of India's History*, Rabindranath Tagore also notes the oddity of the central story of Rama's pious acceptance of banishment based on "the absurd reason... about the weak old king (Rama's father) yielding to a favourite wife, who took advantage of a vague promise which could fit itself to any demand of hers, however preposterous." Tagore takes it as evidence of "the later degeneracy of mind," when "some casual words uttered in a moment of infatuation could be deemed more sacred than the truth which is based upon justice and perfect knowledge."¹³

In fact, Javali's disputation goes deeply into scientific methodology and the process of acquiring of knowledge:

There is no after-world, nor any religious practice for attaining that. Follow what is within your experience and do not trouble yourself with what lies beyond the province of human experience.¹⁴

As it happens, the insistence that we rely only on observation and experience is indeed a central issue in the departures in

astronomy - initiated by Aryabhata and others - from established theological cosmology.

The departures presented in his book *Aryabhatiya*, completed in 421 Saka or 499 A.D., which came to be discussed extensively by mathematicians and astronomers who followed Aryabhata (particularly Varahamihira, Brahma-gupta and Bhaskara, and were also discussed in their Arabic translations), included, among others: (1) Aryabhata's advocacy of the diurnal motion of the earth (rather than the apparent rotation of the sun around it), (2) a corresponding theory of gravity to explain why objects are not thrown out as the earth churns, (3) recognition of the parametric variability of the concept of "up" and "down" depending on where one is located on the globe, and (4) explanation of lunar and solar eclipses in terms respectively of the earth's shadow on the moon and the moon's obscuring of the sun. Observational arguments, based on what Javali calls "the province of human experience", are central to the departures initiated by Aryabhata in these and related fields (more on this presently). In the enterprise of knowledge involving the natural sciences, the intellectual connections between scepticism, heterodoxy and observational insistence, on the one hand, and manifest scientific advances, on the other, require much further exploration and scrutiny than they seem to have received so far.

History of Histories and Observational Perspectives

The observational issue is important also for the particular subject of history of histories, or metahistories (as we may call them). Given the importance of perspectives in historical writings, history of histories can tell us a great deal not only about the subject of those writings, but also about their authors and the traditions and perspectives they reflect. For example, James Mill's *The History of British India*, published in 1817, tells us probably as much about imperial Britain as about India. This three-volume history, written by Mill without visiting India (Mill seemed to think that this non-visit made his history more objective), played a major role in introducing the British governors of India (such as the influential Macaulay) to a particular characterisation of the country. There is indeed much to learn from Mill's history - not just about India, but more, in fact, about the perspective from which this history was written. This is an illustration of the general point that the presence of positionality and observational perspective need not weaken the enterprise of knowledge, and may in fact help to extend its reach.¹⁵

James Mill disputed and rejected practically every claim ever made on behalf of Indian culture and intellectual traditions, but paid particular attention to dismissing Indian scientific works. Mill rebuked early British administrators (particularly, Sir William Jones) for having taken the natives “to be a people of high civilization, while they have in reality made but a few of the earliest steps in the progress to civilization.”¹⁶ Indeed, since colonialism need not be especially biased against any particular colony compared with any other subjugated community, Mill had no great difficulty in coming to the conclusion that the Indian civilisation was at par with other inferior ones known to Mill: “very nearly the same with that of the Chinese, the Persians, and the Arabians”, and also the other “subordinate nations, the Japanese, Cochin-chinese, Siamese, Burmans, and even Malays and Tibetans” (p. 248). Mill was particularly dismissive of the alleged scientific and mathematical works in India. He denied the generally accepted belief that the decimal system (with place values and the placed use of zero) had emerged in India, and refused to accept that Aryabhata and his followers could have had anything interesting to say on the diurnal motion of the earth and the principles of gravitation. Writing his own history of histories, Mill chastised Sir William Jones for believing in these “stories”, and concluded that it was “extremely natural that Sir William Jones, whose pundits had become acquainted with the ideas of European philosophers respecting the system of the universe, should hear from them that those ideas were contained in their own books.”¹⁷

A Contrast of Perspectives

It is, in fact, interesting to compare Mill’s History with another history of India, called *Ta’rikh al-hind* (written in Arabic eight hundred years earlier, in the 11th century) by the Iranian mathematician Alberuni.¹⁸ Alberuni, who was born in Central Asia in A.D. 973, and mastered Sanskrit after coming to India, studied Indian texts on mathematics, natural sciences, literature, philosophy, and religion. Alberuni writes clearly on the invention of the decimal system in India (as do other Arab authors) and also about Aryabhata’s theories on earth’s rotation, gravitation, and related subjects. These writings contrast sharply with Mill’s history from a dominant colonial perspective, well established by the beginning of the 19th century. The interest in Mill’s dismissive history in imperial Britain (Macaulay described Mill’s *History of British India* to be “on the whole the greatest historical work which has appeared in our language since that of Gibbon”¹⁹) contrasts with extensive constructive interest in these Indian works among Islamic mathematicians and scientists in Iran and in the Arab world.

In fact, Brahmagupta’s pioneering Sanskrit treatise on astronomy had been first translated into Arabic in the 8th century by Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Fazari, and again by Alberuni three hundred years later in the 11th century (since Alberuni had certain criticisms of the previous translation). Several Indian works on medicine, science and philosophy had Arabic rendering by the 9th century, and so on. It was through the Arabs that the Indian decimal system and numerals reached Europe, as did Indian writings in mathematics, science and literature, in general.

Indeed, history of histories, particularly about science, can tell us a great deal about the nature of political and social relations between the different countries (such as Iran and Gupta India, on the one hand, Britain and colonial India, on the other). As it happens, Alberuni’s history also provides interesting illumination on scientific discussions within India, and particularly on the constructive role of heterodoxy in this context. Even though Alberuni himself tended to reject Aryabhata’s theory regarding the diurnal motion of the earth, he describes patiently the Indian arguments in defence of the plausibility of Aryabhata’s theory, including the related theory of gravity.

Conservatism, Courage and Science

It is, in this context, particularly interesting to examine Alberuni’s discussion of Brahmagupta’s conservative rejection of the exciting departures proposed by Aryabhata and his followers on the subject of lunar and solar eclipses. Alberuni quotes Brahmagupta’s criticism of Aryabhata and his followers, in defence of the orthodox religious theory, involving Rahu and the so-called “head” that is supposed to devour the sun and the moon, and finds it clearly unpersuasive and reactionary. He quotes Brahmagupta’s supplication to religious orthodoxy, in *Brahasiddhanta*:

Some people think that the eclipse is not caused by the Head. This, however, is a foolish idea, for it is he in fact who eclipses, and the generality of the inhabitants of the world say that it is the Head that eclipses. The Veda, which is the word of God from the mouth of Brahman, says that the Head eclipses... On the contrary. Varahamihira, Shrishena, Aryabhata and Vishnuchandra maintain that the eclipse is not caused by the Head, but by the moon and the shadow of the earth, in direct opposition to all (to the generality of men), and from the enmity against the just-mentioned dogma.²⁰

Alberuni, who is quite excited about Aryabhata’s scientific theories of eclipses, then accuses Brahmagupta (a great

mathematician himself) for lacking the moral courage of Aryabhata in dissenting from the established orthodoxy. He points out that, in practice, Brahmagupta too follows Aryabhata's methods in predicting the eclipses, but this does not prevent Brahmagupta from sharply criticising - from an essentially theological perspective - Aryabhata and his followers for being heretical and heterodox. Alberuni puts it thus:

...we shall not argue with him [Brahmagupta], but only whisper into his ear:... Why do you, after having spoken such [harsh] words [against Aryabhata and his followers], then begin to calculate the diameter of the moon in order to explain the eclipsing of the sun, and the diameter of the shadow of the earth in order to explain its eclipsing the moon? Why do you compute both eclipses in agreement with the theory of those heretics, and not according to the views of those with whom you think it is proper to agree?²¹

The connection between heterodoxy and scientific advance is indeed close, and big departures in science require methodological independence as well as analytical and constructive skill. Even though Aryabhata, Varahamihira and Brahmagupta were all dead for many hundred years before Alberuni was writing on their controversies and their implications, nevertheless Alberuni's carefully critical scientific history helps to bring out the main issues involved, and in particular the need for heterodoxy as well as moral courage in pursuit of science.

To conclude, I have tried to illustrate the different ways in which history has relevance for non-historians - indeed the general public.

First, there are diverse grounds for the public's involvement with history, which include (1) the apparently simple attractions of epistemic interest, (2) the contentious correlates of practical reason, and (3) the scrutiny of identity-based thinking. All of them - directly or indirectly - involve and draw on the enterprise of knowledge.

Second, history is not only itself an enterprise of knowledge, its domain of study incorporates all other enterprises of knowledge, including the history of science. In this context, it is easy to see the role of heterodoxy and methodological independence in scientific advance. The intellectual connections between heterodoxy (especially theological scepticism) and scientific pursuits (especially big scientific departures) deserve more attention in the history of sciences in India.

Third, metahistories - or histories of histories - also bring out the relevance of an appropriate climate for the enterprise of knowledge. The pursuit of knowledge not only requires an open mind (the contrast between Alberuni's scientific interest and Mill's colonial predispositions radically differentiate their treatments of the same subject matter), it also requires an inclination to accept heterodoxy and the courage to stand up against orthodoxy (Alberuni's critique of Brahmagupta's criticism of Aryabhata relates to this issue). The plurality of perspectives extends the domain of the enterprise of knowledge rather than undermining the possibility of that enterprise.²²

Since the rewriting of Indian history from the slanted perspective of sectarian orthodoxy not only undermines historical objectivity, but also militates against the spirit of scientific scepticism and intellectual heterodoxy, it is important to emphasise the centrality of scepticism and heterodoxy in the pursuit of scientific knowledge. The incursion of sectarian orthodoxy in Indian history involves two distinct problems, to wit, (1) narrow sectarianism, and (2) unreasoned orthodoxy. The enterprise of knowledge is threatened by both.

Endnotes

¹. The confusing story of a recent statement by a Director of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) announcing exact knowledge where Rama, the avatar, was born (not surprisingly precisely where the Babri Masjid stood - from which the property rights for building a temple exactly there is meant to follow!), combined with the assertion that the Masjid itself had no religious significance (followed by an embarrassed dissociation of the ICHR itself from these remarkable pronouncements), illustrates the confounding of myth and history.

². Rabindranath Tagore, "A Vision of India's History" (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1951), p. 10; this essay was first published in Visva-Bharati Quarterly, 1923.

³. See "Positional Objectivity," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1993. I have also illustrated the methodological issues involved in the context of Indian history in *On Interpreting India's Past* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1996), also included in Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, eds., *Nationalism, Democracy and Development: Reappraising South Asian State and Politics* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁴. I have discussed the demands of descriptive discipline in "Accounts, Actions and Values: Objectivity of Social Science," in C. Lloyd, ed., *Social Theory and Political Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

⁵. I have tried to argue elsewhere that the history of Indian calendars also provides some insights on the lives of the people and particularly on the state of science and mathematics at different times, and can even illuminate the political ideals that may be indirectly reflected in devising new calendars. The last is well

illustrated, for example, by Emperor Akbar's initiation of a synthetic solar calendar in the form of Tarikh-ilahi, in 1584, and its continuing influence on the Bengali san (on these issues, see my "India through Its Calendars," *The Little Magazine*, 1, 1, May 2000).

⁶. A good example of an interesting but rather bold speculation is Rabindranath Tagore's conjecture about a story in the epics that "the mythical version of King Janamejaya's ruthless serpent sacrifice" may quite possibly stand for an actual historical event involving an "attempted extermination of the entire Naga race" by the dominant powers in ancient India (Tagore, *A Vision of India's History*, p. 9).

⁷. Amartya Sen, "Reach of Reason: East and West," *The New York Review of Books*, July 20, 2000.

⁸. See Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edition, 1998), for a fine presentation of the "discovery" view of identity, and in particular of the thesis (among others) that "community describes not just what they have as fellow citizens but also what they are, not a relationship they choose (as in a voluntary association) but an attachment they discover, not merely an attribute but a constituent of their identity" (pp. 150-2).

⁹. I have discussed the role of choice in the selection of identities and in the determination of priorities in my Romanes Lecture at Oxford, *Reason before Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), and in my Annual British Academy Lecture (to be published by the British Academy): for a shorter version, see "Other People," *The New Republic*, September 25, 2000.

¹⁰. See Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man* (London: Unwin, 1931, 2nd edition, 1961), p. 105.

¹¹. See particularly Bimal Matilal, *Perceptions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

¹². Even though I shall not discuss in this paper the role and reach of Arjuna's disagreements with Krishna's high deontology in the Mahabharata, and in particular in the Bhagavad-Geeta, that too is philosophically an important departure; on this see my "Consequential Evaluation and Practical Reason," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 97 (September 2000).

¹³. Tagore, *A Vision of India's History*, p. 22.

¹⁴. The translation is taken from Makhanlal Sen, *Valmiki Ramayana* (Calcutta: Rupa, 1989), pp. 174-5.

¹⁵. On this general subject, see my "Positional Objectivity" (1993), and also "Accounts, Actions and Values: Objectivity of Social Science" (1983).

¹⁶. James Mill, *The History of British India* (London, 1817; republished, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 225-6.

¹⁷. Mill, *The History of British India*, pp. 223-4.

¹⁸. For an English translation, see Alberuni's *India*, translated by E.C. Sachau, edited by A.T. Embree (New York: Norton, 1971).

¹⁹. Quoted in John Clive's introduction to Mill, *The History of British India* (republished, 1975), p. viii.

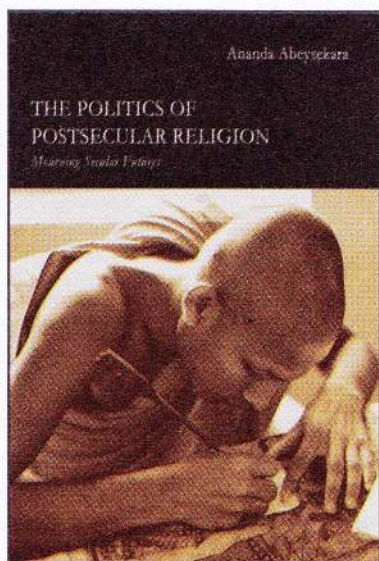
²⁰. Alberuni's *India*, pp. 110-1.

²¹. Alberuni's *India*, p. 111.

²². On this see also my "Accounts, Actions and Values: Objectivity of Social Science" (1983) and "Positional Objectivity" (1993). ■

Professor Amartya Sen won the 1998 Nobel Prize in Economics.

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“PROTEST LIKE AN EGYPTIAN” – IN WISCONSIN

Judy Waters Pasqualge

(the slogans in quotation marks are from signs held by demonstrators)

As events in Tunisia and Egypt unfolded early this year, there must have been many people around the world who hoped for such things to happen in their own countries, myself included. On 3 March here in Sri Lanka, *The Island* printed an article on the editorial page by an Indian ecologist; he wrote: “And the Americans need Tahrir Square more than anyone else to liberate their country from the forces of tyranny and wars ...”¹ He couldn’t have been more correct. Unfortunately, he, and much of the Sri Lankan press, avoided (and continue to avoid) coverage of a movement that had started in Madison, Wisconsin, a whole month earlier.

While I am used to, and thus not surprised at, seeing instances where more than 100,000 people turn out in protest in the US – whether it be over war, civil rights, or women’s rights – the movement starting from Wisconsin may seem startling in its subject matter. That subject concerns labour rights, and in particular issues regarding trade unions and collective bargaining. For sure, victory in this battle will require long and sustained efforts, and it is hard to imagine the actual toppling of the US government. Still, the good news out of Wisconsin concerns the international exposure of conservative policies and strategies; and it concerns the development of a national campaign that, for example, saw support rallies in all 50 states on 26 February (with 125,000 people in Wisconsin’s capital, Madison), and one that has referenced events in the Middle East, and in turn has picked up a lot of international support. Photos of a poster held by one man in Egypt were prominently displayed by protesters who sat in at Madison’s Capitol building – “Egypt Supports Wisconsin Workers: One World, One Pain.”²

The state of Wisconsin, situated between Minnesota and Lake Michigan and directly north of Illinois, has historically been a progressive and pro-labour state. The precursor of the huge, national American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) was founded there in 1932, and the teachers’ union WEAC (Wisconsin Education Association Council) is one of the most effective nationally.³ In the

midterm elections in November 2010, Wisconsin Democrats lost their majorities in the state Assembly and Senate, with the Senate majority leader and caucus leader, and the Assembly speaker, losing their seats. Republican Scott Walker beat Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett by 5.7% to become governor. Wisconsin joined 20 other states where Republicans hold all three institutions. With Republicans taking office in early January, unions started to contact their members, including the 175,000 state public-sector employees.⁴

“The Mubarak of the Midwest”

Governor Scott Walker (1967-) was formerly the executive of Milwaukee County (2002-2010), where he instituted the first mass-scale private school voucher experiment in the US.⁵ Before that he was in the state Assembly (1993-2002), and worked for the American Red Cross in marketing and fundraising (1990-1994). He is an evangelical Christian, against choice and for welfare reform.

During the election campaign he made no mention of collective bargaining, and promised bipartisanship and job creation. His campaign’s second largest donation was given by Koch Industries (\$43,000), an oil and gas conglomerate run by two brothers who support groups such as the Cato Institute, Americans for Prosperity, the Competitive Enterprise Institute, and the Tea Party. They also donated \$5 million to the Republican Governors Association, which in turn gave \$65,000 to the Walker campaign and \$3.4 million for a campaign against his opponent.⁶ As events unfolded in February, a blogger in Buffalo called Governor Walker, pretending to be one of the Koch brothers. During the 20-minute, recorded call, the governor joked that Koch had a vested interest in his proposals regarding labour, said that he might use financial and legal threats against Democratic opponents and layoff state employees, said that he might be another Ronald Reagan, and that he and advisors had thought of planting troublemakers in the crowd of demonstrators. He admitted to the latter on Fox TV on 24 February.⁷ The governor’s reputation has been seen on signs held by demonstrators that reference “Hosni Walker,” “Remove Walker” (in Arabic), “We Want Governors Not Dictators.”⁸

“United We Bargain, Divided We Beg”

With the state of Wisconsin running a budget deficit of some \$165 million in the two-year period 2009-2011, and with a deficit of perhaps \$3 billion projected for the next period, Governor Walker announced his ‘budget repair bill’ proposals on 11 February.⁹ The budget problems in Wisconsin should be viewed in terms of both the state context and national trends. First, by law, most states and municipalities must balance their budgets; this means that they cannot borrow money to cover operating budgets, but may do so to cover long-term investments, such as infrastructure. During this current Great Recession that started in 2007, many states saw a decline in their tax receipts (due to decreased personal incomes and property values), and an increase in the demand for social services, including unemployment, food and heating assistance. Between 2007 and 2009, state revenues fell by 13%. During the period 2009 to 2011, for all states, the average annual budget gap was \$140 billion (21% of total state commitments). In early 2009, soon after President Obama came into office, the US Congress passed legislation to cover about 1/3 of the deficit in state funds; these provisions run out in 2011.¹⁰

Second, several statistics on US labour are instructive. The US unemployment rate officially stands at around 9%, but is actually over 16% (some say over 20%). As a sector, state and local governments are the largest national employer. Counted among these workers are public school teachers, health care and sanitation workers, police and firefighters.¹¹ About 36.2% of public employees are unionized, and 6.9% in the private sector.¹² It is, thus, not surprising that public-sector workers and their unions are a high target on the conservative agenda. Budgets aside, public-sector unions historically tend to support public-sector spending, and the Democratic Party.¹³ With the Republican election gains in 2010, what happens in Wisconsin became crucial.

Third, a key tactic in the national conservative assault on public-sector unions is the campaign to promote the myth that public employees are better off than private-sector workers – that they are overpaid, with too many benefits. This is often done by simply comparing wages and benefits in the two sectors. This approach, however, ignores the fact that public-sector workers tend to be older and better educated, and to hold more professional and managerial jobs; in reality they earn about 4% less than those in the private sector.¹⁴

Fourth, with regard to Wisconsin, while the state faces a budget deficit, the previous Democratic governor faced a \$6 billion deficit. In addition, soon after coming into power, Governor Walker obtained \$140 million in tax breaks for multinational corporations doing business in the state. He also turned down federal money available for transportation and for the extension of broadband into rural communities. His partisanship for out-of-state corporations, road-building interests that oppose high-speed railways, and certain telecommunications companies became clear.¹⁵

In this larger context, the governor’s proposals for public-sector workers can only be seen as political, and as reflective of the national conservative agenda. The budget repair bill would allow such workers to bargain only on wages (not on benefits such as health care and pensions), and on wages only up to the rate of inflation; only police and firefighters would be exempt. The bill would also require unionized workers to vote each year to retain union representation, with a 51% vote required. Lastly, workers would have to contribute 5.8% of wages to their pension plans (up from 0.2%) and 12.6% of wages for health care (up from 5.6%). Other provisions in the budget repair bill would enable the governor/legislature to sell public property in no-bid deals and to restructure health insurance.¹⁶

“Who’s Disgusting? Union Busting”

After presenting these proposals on 11 February, Governor Walker refused any discussion with Democrats or unions, and it was clear that the intention was to pass the bill in both houses very quickly.¹⁷ With the Assembly having 60 Republicans to the Democrats 38 (plus one Independent), and the Senate with a 19-14 Republican advantage, the odds did not seem good. The catch was a Senate requirement that 20 members have to be present for votes involving expenditures.

In early February news of the proposals started to become public, and on the 11th the Governor threatened to call out the state National Guard (NG) if there was any trouble during demonstrations (which had not yet started). It should be noted that the last time the state’s NG was called out was in 1866. One former NG member responded that the Governor did not understand that the NG “is not his own personal intimidation force to be mobilized to quash political dissent.” The Associated Press picked up the governor’s remark, and the story in Wisconsin went national.¹⁸

With the assembly's finance committee set to start hearings on the bill on Tuesday, 15 February, with a possible vote on the 17th, that week saw an escalation of events. On Monday 800 students from Madison East High School walked out. With others they marched into town shouting "Kill this bill." About 1,000 people went to Walker's suburban Milwaukee home. On the 15th about 10,000 people marched on the state Capitol during the day, with 8,000 attending a night rally. References to Egypt were made from the start; in addition to the above slogans, another was "If Egypt Can Have Democracy, Why Not Wisconsin?"; some people dressed like King Tut. Within days, circulating in the crowd, were copies of a one-page statement of support issued by Kamal Abbas, the general coordinator of Egypt's Center for Trade Unions and Workers Services. On the 15th also, a group of former and current players of Wisconsin's football team, the Green Bay Packers, came out in support. The team is the only fan-owned, nonprofit football team in the US, and had just won the Super Bowl in January. On the same day, the National Football League Players Association came out in support of Wisconsin's state workers. That night, the local education union, Madison Teachers Inc., called on teachers to call in sick the next day and come to the Capitol to lobby. People started to sleep in at the Capitol building.¹⁹

Wednesday the 16th saw some 30,000 people virtually close the downtown Madison area. With schools closed, thousands of high school and university students marched. People came from all over the state, and from Illinois, Minnesota and Kansas. 20,000 teachers attended a night rally. Plans were made for further action, with prominent roles being played by WEAC, the American Federation of Teachers - Wisconsin, and the Teaching Assistant Association at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (TAA).²⁰

The next day, the 14 Democrats in the state Senate announced that they would boycott proceedings, to prevent the required 20-member presence necessary for a vote. The senators left the state to avoid possible steps against them, and went en masse to Illinois. The sleep-in continued. There were rallies every day, with 50,000 showing up on the 18th, along with Jesse Jackson. With the protest of Democrats in the Assembly being echoed from within and outside the building, the Republicans adjourned sessions until the 22nd. The weather was freezing; one sign read, "I Didn't Think Cairo Would Be So Cold."²¹

With Governor Walker claiming that the email he was receiving was largely supportive of the bill, some 80,000 people turned out for a rally on Saturday the 19th. The Tea

Party tried to organize a counterdemonstration, but only several thousand attended. The TAA held teach-ins throughout the weekend. Important support came in a joint statement by the Green Bay Packers defensive captain and team leader.²² By this time, a nearby pizza shop had received phone calls placing pizza orders, using credit cards, for demonstrators in the Capitol – calls from all 50 states, and from more than 50 countries, including Morocco, Haiti, Turkey, Belgium, Uganda, China, New Zealand and even a research station in Antarctica.²³

During the next week, activities continued, with Madison public schools closing for a last, fourth day on the 21st. On Friday the 25th the Assembly passed the bill by 51-17 using a procedural tactic that upped the ante. At 1:00 a.m. the Assembly speaker abruptly stopped the debate and called for an immediate vote without roll call. At the time, 28 Democrats, 2 Republicans and 1 Independent were absent and so did not vote; the bill was passed in 17 seconds.²⁴ Later in the day Governor Walker made a threat that if the Democratic senators did not return he would consider laying off 1,500 workers. Also that day, statements of support came from the executive director of the National Basketball Association Players Association and from Milwaukee Buck team member Keyon Dooling.²⁵

Everyone was waiting for Saturday the 26th. About 125,000 demonstrated in Madison, the largest demonstration in state history, and support rallies were held in all 50 states. A photo collection of the events that day showed protesters with signs that read: "Wisconsylvania," "Republicans Against the Bill," "Union Busting is Anti-American," "It's About Real People vs. Really Rich People," "Don't Walker on Me," and "Enjoying Your Weekend? Thank a Union." One man held a sign that said: "Born-Again Fundamental Baptist Pro-Lifer TURNED Democrat — Thanks Scott Walker."²⁶ On Sunday police tried to carry out a government order to clear the Capitol building, but about 1,000 people refused to go. From the 28th the governor ordered access to the Capitol be restricted, despite state law requiring it be open to all. Talk began circulating about calling a general strike if the bill was passed.²⁷

During the first week of March the Senate majority leader raised the possibility of expelling the absent Democrats, and on the 3rd the Senate voted 19-0 to hold them in "contempt of the Senate." Other suggestions included reprimands or censuring. The governor ordered law enforcement officials to detain the Democrats and bring them to the Senate (impossible to do since they were not in the state). A judge

ordered the people sleeping in at the Capitol to leave the building during nights; the judge also ruled that the state had violated free speech and assembly rights by restricting access to the building. On the 3rd the Wisconsin Professional Police Association (11,000 members) denounced the measures taken by the Republicans against the Democrats.²⁸ Under the state Constitution, they could only be arrested for a crime, with no civil prosecutions allowed during a legislative session or for 15 days before or after one; the senators had not been charged with a crime; there was no crime.²⁹ On the 4th Governor Walker sent notices to at least 13 unions warning of possible layoffs. Finally, it came to light that the Obama administration was not happy about the Democratic National Committee's active involvement in the events in Wisconsin.³⁰

At the rally on Saturday the 5th, filmmaker Michael Moore walked with local firefighters. In a speech to the crowd, he said that he felt he had to come and thank the demonstrators. The crowd chanted, "Thank you. Thank you." He said that America was not broke; there was a lot of money, but it had been transferred via the 2008 bailout "in the greatest heist in history, from the workers and consumers to the banks and the portfolios of the über-rich." The crowd chanted, "We have had it." "I refuse to live in a country like this," said Moore, "and I'm not leaving."³¹

Early on the 9th Senate Republicans voted to fine the Democrats \$100 for every day they were absent. That evening, in a surprise move, they removed the collective bargaining proposals from the budget bill, thus circumventing the 20-member quorum requirement, and passed the measures by 18-1 (one Republican voted against). At the Capitol the crowd shouted, "You are cowards," and "The whole world is watching."³² Thus, the Senate had acted without having hearings or debate, without following state law regarding open meetings, without notifying Democrats, and done it in less than two hours.³³

The next day, after three hours of debate, and after police had to remove people sitting in front of the Assembly doors, the Assembly passed the new bill by 53-42, with demonstrators yelling, "Shame, shame, shame." Outside, people yelled, "Whose house? Our house," and "Strike." Then, 8,000 people entered the building. That night the state Democratic Party received \$300,000 in donations, raising the total to \$800,000 in five days.³⁴

On Saturday the 12th a rally was held to welcome the 14 Democratic senators back to the state. A record crowd of almost 150,000 showed up, with Jesse Jackson, Susan

Sarandon and Tony Shalhoub also attending. From across the state, farmers came, into Capitol Square riding on tractors, and echoing the slogan of the Wisconsin Farmers Union and the Family Farm Defenders: "Pull together." As Democrats spoke, the crowd shouted, "Thank you. Thank you." They massively yelled: "This is what democracy looks like."³⁵

"Just Say NO to Union Busting!"

In the few weeks since the right to collective bargaining was lost in Wisconsin, developments have truly proved the continued existence of paradox – what was lost by way of shady legislative practice, a seeming defeat, may serve to lead to wins on an even larger scale. Who would have imagined that the enthusiasm generated in January by the win of the Green Bay Packers would be mirrored just weeks later in unprecedented mass actions.

As one writer noted, even talk of a general strike is significant, and there are posters in Madison and Milwaukee calling for one. The need to prepare for such action has been endorsed by the South Central Federation of Labor (97 unions that represent 45,000 workers), with the head of the Madison firefighters saying he would support one.³⁶ People are referencing the great days of labour and unions in the 1930s. Some are pointing to the Days of Action by public employees in Ontario in the mid-1990s. The Communication Workers of America is working on a national "no-business-as-usual day" for 4 April.³⁷

The day after the rally on the 12th, a campaign was solidly launched to recall eight Republican state senators. The collection of a required number of petition signatures would force a new election, which could only be held after 3 November. On the 12th and 13th, 600 people were trained by 25-30 trainers in the specifics of collecting the signatures; in the next few days ¼ of the necessary signatures had been obtained. Four days after the rally state Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald with two other senators attended a fundraising event in Washington, DC, on their own behalf, held by the corporate lobbyist group BRG. As the event was going on in the office on 13th Street NW, some 1,000 people came into the building, shouting "Recall."³⁸

Another action is underway to target the financial backers of Governor Walker. A huge funder was a group of executives at M & I Bank (\$46,308), the largest bank in the state, which has received \$1.7 billion in federal bailout money. With state unions having about \$1 billion in the bank, the "Move Your Money Campaign" is now underway. On 10 March, as several

hundred people gathered at a branch opposite the Capitol, the president and several members of the firefighters union went in and withdrew \$200,000. The crowd chanted: "You got bailed out, we got sold out." Since the Bank of Montreal is in the process of buying M & I, unions have appealed to the Canadian Labour Congress for cooperation. The campaign has picked up support from the Sheet Metal Workers International Association, and United Steelworkers is reviewing its banking portfolio. It should be stressed that, nationally, unions have on deposit more than \$6 trillion in retirement plans, pension funds, stock plans and reserve funds.³⁹

Events coming up that deserve attention include an election for one of the state's Supreme Court justices. Incumbent right winger David Prosser is running against Assistant Attorney General JoAnne Kloppenburg. The primary is on 5 April, with the vote on 3 May. Also at stake on the latter day are three state Assembly seats that were held by Republicans who joined the Walker administration.

The heat is clearly on the Republicans. In the state Senate an attempt was made to discount the votes of Democrats on legislation in the committee stage. The public outcry against this forced Republicans to back down. And, if opinion polls are any indication, fewer than 1/3 of Wisconsinites now support Walker, with more than half of people saying they would replace him if they could.⁴⁰

In a recent turn of events, on 18 March, a Madison county judge issued a restraining order on putting into effect the legislation regarding collective bargaining, set for the 25th. The county district attorney had filed suit claiming the Senate Republicans had violated the 24-hour notice provision regarding public meetings. While the Republicans could pass the law again, they are appealing the court decision.⁴¹

"We Hear You Wisconsin"

Everyone knows now that what is happening in Wisconsin is only one geographic application of the national conservative agenda, and awareness is escalating on the need for national action to fight it. Other states face the introduction of Republican labour legislation seeking to destroy the public-sector unions. In Ohio the state Senate has passed a bill to prohibit collective bargaining on health care benefits and pensions. In Indiana 38 House Democrats have left the state to avoid a vote on a bill. In Idaho the House and Senate have taken collective bargaining away from 12,000 unionized public school teachers; the teachers can no longer bargain on class

size and workload, tenure has been eliminated, union contracts have a one-year limit, and seniority is no longer a factor in case of layoffs. In Michigan Republicans are trying to pass legislation that would grant the state emergency authority to break union contracts, and in Iowa the target is bargaining over health care benefits.⁴²

It gets worse. Twenty-two states already have right-to-work laws on the books; this means that a worker can refuse to join an existing union by merely refusing to pay union dues; bills have been introduced in 12 other states. Other efforts seek to prohibit unions from using dues to support election campaigns, and to privatize services. And in a really scary scenario, and with the support of Jeb Bush and Newt Gingrich, moves are on to pass national legislation to allow states to declare bankruptcy. A bankrupt state could void current labour agreements and ignore pension obligations.⁴³

And it gets better. The concept of big government (meaning spending on social services) has been detached as a derogatory label for Democrats. As former US Senator Russ Feingold said of the tactics by Republicans in Wisconsin, this is "big government at its worst. No private employer can do what the governor proposed, nor should it." And an AFSCME member who works at a Wisconsin prison called Republican moves a "Big Government power grab," adding that: "There is no bigger government than the one that takes away an individual's rights and freedoms."⁴⁴

And, most importantly, under scrutiny, nationally, are the history, ideas and strategies of US progressives. Stereotypes of government or government workers as being corrupt, of private vs. public-sector workers, of all unions being corrupt, are being challenged. Issue campaigns that rely only on media and public relations tactics, and not on organizing, are being questioned. The lack of funding by liberal foundations for labour issues is being challenged.⁴⁵ It is time that such side shows are thrown out. The bigger picture is emerging – the need to revive manufacturing, to restore rural communities, to tax on a progressive basis, and to hold banks and speculators accountable.⁴⁶ The issues are economic ones, at stake is poverty, and, finally, these are starting to outweigh issues of specific group identification.

It can be said that the stronger, the more successful, the movement in the US, the better off will be people around the world. The paradox lives on here, too – that movement will, in turn, be stronger for the international support being seen now.

Keep up on the information: labornotes.org, thenation.com, defendwisconsin.org, firedoglake.com, theuptake.org, moveon.org, studentactivism.net, democracynow.org, iww.org.

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Rap star Eminem tells auto workers to never give up in video message

Detroit Free Press

DETROIT—The delegates attending the United Auto Workers’ three-day bargaining convention in Detroit were treated to a rousing, inspirational message Wednesday from rap star Eminem. In a moving, three-minute video, Eminem implored UAW members to never give up.

“You took our country from its infancy into industry,” Eminem said in the video. “Your name still carries with it the idea of a nation built on steel, muscle and sweat.”

The video was filled with images of Detroit’s buildings, factories and houses and was narrated by Eminem.

“You know that nothing is accomplished *without hard work and sacrifice*,” Eminem said. “You’ve built us; you’ve moved us.”

The UAW also replayed the highly acclaimed Chrysler 200 commercial that aired during the Super Bowl. This version of the commercial ended with short appearances from Al Iacobelli, Chrysler’s vice president of employee relations, and UAW Vice President General Holiefield. Afterwards, hundreds of UAW delegates chanted: “One more time, one more time.” The UAW replayed the commercial.

LANKA @ 63: THE 'MILITARY BUSINESS MODEL' OF POSTWAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake

On 4 February Sri Lanka celebrated its 63rd birthday. After nearly three decades of armed conflict, it is now one of South Asia's calmest and fastest-growing countries. Its social indicators, apart from the northeast zone, remain the best in the region, and its strategic location is inviting investment from both Asian giants, China and India. Its stock markets are booming, its growth rate bouncing at around 8%, and tourists are back to enjoy sun, sand, sea and the island's natural beauty. Along with big sister India, Lanka is the only other country in the South Asian region with an unbroken if rather tattered democracy since independence from the British Raj in 1948, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently congratulated the government when it released a Standby Agreement (SBA) loan tranche despite the high ratio of public debt to GDP.

As many economists know, however, stock-market booms do not necessarily correlate with socioeconomic peace, equity and justice, or the real economy. On Independence Day, the main opposition United National Party (UNP) marched in protest against authoritarianism, attacks on and disappearances of media personnel and human-rights defenders, and the incarceration of former General Sarath Fonseka, the chief architect in the victory against the LTTE. Major Tamil political parties, too, boycotted the celebrations, as they have done for decades, in protest against the government's failure to share power, particularly with minority communities. The opposition's protest march was attacked by mobs, reportedly backed by the minister of public relations, as police stood by in the highly militarized city that was recently wired with close circuit TV cameras to ensure regime security.

One of the most striking developments in postwar Lanka is its paradoxical militarization of the government, economy and society. Even though it has been two years since the end of the war, emergency rule remains in place and the defence sector, including the budget, has not been down-sized, right-sized or restructured for peacetime operations, but rather has been on a constant rise. The army constitutes over 210,000 personnel in a country with less than 20 million people;

nonetheless, the army, in addition to the significant navy, air force and national defence forces, continue recruiting. The current budget allocates 20% of GDP for defence expenditures – far more than other South Asian neighbours. Colombo insists that Lanka is a safe tourist destination, and asks foreign governments to lift travel warnings; but it still maintains Emergency Regulations (ER), keeps up counterterrorism rhetoric with the assistance of dubious 'terrorism' experts, and buys expensive surveillance equipment such as CCTV cameras to monitor traffic jams, rather than investing in a people-friendly public transport system, in a city that *The Economist* intelligence unit deemed one of the ten worst cities to live.

The Defence Ministry has taken under its wing offices responsible for urban development; land reclamation, development and construction; waterways; and the registration of NGOs. While civilian administrators and expertise from the business community are increasingly marginalized, former or serving military officers are being appointed to key central, local government and foreign-service positions. The government has also been investing heavily in expensive technologies of surveillance, such as closed circuit television security cameras is biometric identity cards. Meanwhile, civilian administrators and expertise is increasingly marginalized, to the detriment of knowledge-based, people-centred economic development policy-making. One can now see the postconflict economy following the former Indonesian model of military business. Under Suharto, the Indonesian military was given corporate representation in the government. Each military branch had its own foundation, which operated businesses in finance management, the travel industry, agribusiness, manufacturing and resource extraction. Similar patterns are evident now in Lanka, where the air force is operating flights to Jaffna, and military elites are being placed on the board of an elite (and controversial) golf club, called Water's Edge.

Postwar militarization is also indexed in seemingly harmless images of army personnel selling vegetables to bring down escalating food prices. In the navy, personnel are taking

tourists on dolphin-sighting tours off the southern coast, and other armed-services personnel are engaged in additional commercial operations. Recently, Minister of higher education, S. B. Dissanayake, announced that the army would give undergraduates 'soft-skills training' in response to student protests against deteriorating conditions in the under-funded public universities. Rather than further politicising and militarizing higher education what is needed in a White Paper on Higher Educational Reform and investment in independent research and development.

"Military Inc.," a book about the business interests of the military in Pakistan, authored by Dr Ayesha Siddiqi, a former director of research of the Pakistan Navy, also helps contextualize Sri Lanka's postwar military business development trajectory, particularly in the context of growing economic and security cooperation between Sri Lanka and Pakistan, indexed in the recent visits of Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and Chief of Armed Forces, General Kayani to Lanka. President Rajapakse and his brothers had earlier visited Pakistan. At the same time, "Pakistan week," which featured food, fashion, arts, Sufi music and Pakistan's rich culture and history was also celebrated recently in Colombo, inaugurated by Sri Lanka's first lady and the Pakistani ambassador on 20, February 2011.

Subtitled "Inside Pakistan's Military Economy," Dr Siddiqi's book analysed a taboo subject the range and depth of the Pakistan military's business interests. Dr. Siddiqi coined the term MILBUS (military business), to describe a military's business operations and activities. She defines 'Milbus' as 'military capital' used for the personal benefit of the military fraternity'. She estimates that the military's private business empire was worth as much as £ 10 billion in 2005. Retired and serving officers own 12 million acres of public land in a country where poverty is extreme among landless peasants run secretive business conglomerates, and manufacture everything from cement to cornflakes. Ms. Siddiqi also notes that these economic interests of the military have been a major factor in the ambitions of the Generals who have ruled the country for more than half of its 60-year history. Pakistan has a history of military rule, extensive military interests in business, along with multiple ethno religious conflicts that have compounded the country's poverty and conflict trap, now further complicated by the US led "war on terror."

Mission Creep

Militarisation is often accompanied and legitimated by the assumption that the country's civil society and

business community are unpatriotic, incompetent or corrupt, or all three, and what is needed is a benevolent dictatorship or the military – or both for a country's development. This logic, that the military can do a better job at tasks performed by civil society or the business community, is clearly dangerous; in the past, it has been used to legitimate military coups and/or military rule. Sri Lanka experienced just such a coup attempt in 1962.

Military businesses thrive thanks to invisible state subsidies in the form of free land, the use of military assets, and loans to bail them out when they run into trouble, as Dr. Siddiqi has noted. Military business also gives rise to corruption and is not economically rational, especially in the context of already high public debt. In Indonesia today, as the military is being reformed and State subsidies withdrawn under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, military businesses have folded. That democracy can sometimes be inefficient and tedious is no reason to dismantle it. During its 63 years of independence, Sri Lanka has weathered two armed conflicts: the first in the south, against the Marxist-Maoist JVP; the second in the north, against the LTTE. Both conflicts contributed to dramatically transforming civil-military relations and the quality of democracy. Sri Lanka might have won its 'war on terror' for now, but the root causes that escalated into the 25-year conflict have yet to be addressed. Neither has the process of comprehensive post-war settlement or reconciliation begun. In fact, the much-hyped growth rate and development trajectory might be widening the gap between rich and poor, and thereby deepening the roots of social conflict.

In the current context, Sri Lankans might not tend to discuss militarization, because they are indeed grateful for the sacrifices that the military made to defeat the LTTE. However, militarisation, poses the real danger of military mission and mandate creep. Almost two years after the end of war, in the context of the failure to repeal Emergency Regulations, it is clear that it is ironically the political leadership of the country that is steering the postconflict militarization and transformation of civil-military relations, in a manner detrimental to democratic institutions and traditions. This might be politically expedient and lucrative for the regime in the short term, but the primary purpose of a well-trained military is to fight external threats to a country. The blurring of civil-military roles will dilute this focus. Especially when coupled with emergency rule, it will concentrate and centralize power in the presidency; it will also confer a level of impunity to the police and armed forces, encouraging them to disregard civilians' basic rights.

Already, the detrimental effects of militarization can be seen in Lanka. In the name of 'city development' and gentrification, the military has been used to displace poor people in urban areas. Examples include building a New Port City in Colombo for a Formula One race track, building supermalls and five-star hotels. Along the A-9 road to Jaffna, the military runs tea shops, competing with recently returned impoverished internally displaced people (IDP). In the war-ravaged north and east, it has acquired extensive public and private lands under the banner of providing 'security' and is setting up large farms to grow vegetables and fruits in the Mannar District. The ramifications of this however, have left Tamil and Muslim farmers landless, as some of their lands, now occupied by the military, have been ear-marked for business ventures, including a coal-fired power plant, tourism projects and agro industries.

Lanka seems to be following the Pakistan model where military business and national development policy process is closely linked. In Sri Lanka at this time key civil administration posts, including that of provincial governor remain in the hands of the military, particularly in the north east and the revolving door between high military office and private security business is increasingly lucrative. At the lower end, military business competes with small-scale business and vegetable traders and farmers, who meanwhile complain that they are being put out of business because they cannot compete with the military, which is subsidized. It is increasingly clear that there is need for structural adjustment and downsizing of the defense sector and budget. While downsizing a military presents challenges, since not all may join lucrative UN peace keeping operations overseas, using navy personnel to farm in Uswetakeiyawa, however successful and bountiful the produce may be, is a waste of the time of highly trained military cadre and taxpayers' monies and is not economically rational.

Security Trap

Despite a heavy *concentration of military personnel* (40,000 army, 10,000 police), the security situation in Jaffna, the cultural heartland of the Sri Lankan Tamil community, has been deteriorating. Recent weeks saw a series of killings, forcing the former Jaffna district MP of the Tamil National Alliance, M. K. Shivajilingam, to suspect armed forces' complicity. How can killings take place without their knowledge?' he asked. 'We feel someone is organising and overseeing these incidents to keep the people of Jaffna in a climate of fear.'

The large military presence in Jaffna contributed to the besieged population's sense of insecurity. It is well known that in Jaffna former LTTE leaders are working with military intelligence. Minister Douglas Devananda, a leading ally of the government and one whose paramilitary cadre were also implicated in the killings, has declared that the killings are not simply the result of random criminal activity. The largest bank robbery in Colombo was traced to army deserters, of which there are 50,000, and security personnel have been implicated in timber theft on public and private lands and motorways.

The question is: has or how soon will militarization reach the tipping point and become counter-productive in the absence of human and social security particularly in the northeast? Post-conflict, rather than reaching out to the Tamil-speaking communities and making recovery and reconstruction a priority, the government, after initially denying access, has now sub-contracted reconstruction work to international donors and UN agencies. The Indian government, which is facing its fair share of corruption scandals over construction delays, particularly with regard to the Commonwealth Games and the Ardash project, is to construct housing for the internally displaced in the north. When will the disaster survivors get homes? Meanwhile, the Sri Lanka government keeps on spending billions on wasteful tamashas such as Bollywood awards nights; the Independence Day Dayata Kirulla Exhibition; and paying an international advertising and public-relations firm, Bell Pottinger, to burnish the government's tarnished postwar image. The government is also bidding to host the Commonwealth Games in 2018 in Hambantota, which could cost the state coffers as much as US\$ 10 billion. Rs. 400 million has already been spent to formulate the bid, and there are plans to build a Golf course in Hambantota!

One should not forget that the lack of transparency and delay in aid operations after the 2004 tsunami meant that disaster victims were kept homeless for years, and this contributed to the return of conflict. The government should, therefore, focus on enabling local government in the northeast to coordinate, monitor and evaluate recovery and reconstruction projects to ensure that they are completed in the specified time. Although Colombo claims to steer a 'middle path' between the socialist closed-market economy and the neoliberal paradigm that increases inequality and conflict, what we see is a highly unequal, militarized and skewed neoliberal development model. While select sectors of the economy – the security business, tourism and gambling are benefiting many other sectors are de-developed and impoverished by the current development model and paradigm. Finally, populist

nationalism glosses the sell off and or mis-appropriation of public lands, assets and natural resources. Meanwhile, a tourism-centric development policy is benefitting members of the ruling family, related crony capitalists and segments of the security establishment.

Juggernaut

In the past decade, a culture of militarization has developed in the South Asia region due to a number of internal and external factors, particularly as a result of the US led global 'war on terror' in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This is despite the fact that the region has the highest poverty count in the world. China's rise, expanding military budget and 'string of pearls' strategy in the Indian Ocean have, no doubt, fuelled the process, while *Arming without Aiming*, a book recently published by the Brookings Institute in Washington, has critiqued India's military modernization spending spree. Militarisation in Lanka has only been further legitimised with Asia becoming wealthier and emerging as a global economic centre. The central problem is that militarisation is being used to safeguard a skewed economic development model beneficial to the Rajapakse regime and its cronies. At the same time a new military elite loyal to the defence secretary and the president's brother is also being nurtured, lending them access to administrative jobs, state lands and business opportunities.

Policy planning is afoot for big-budget infrastructure projects to turn Lanka into a development 'hub' in areas of maritime capability, aviation, commerce and trade, power and energy, and knowledge. Sri Lanka, with the help of the IMF and foreign donors, plans to spend around US\$1.5 to 2 billion a year on road-and-rail development, power production, port facilities, and water and sanitation. But how sustainable many of these large capital intensive infra-structure projects are and who would benefit from them is questionable. Lanka is currently dotted with half-built, unused and abandoned 'infrastructure'-development projects constructed without adequate research and understanding of peoples' development needs and priorities, and without consultation and coordination with communities for which they were built. White elephant infrastructure in the absence of comprehensive and integrated urban or rural development planning and expertise merely contributes to the already high public debt. The current policy seems to be if there is a buyer for public assets, let's sell!

Violence in Jaffna despite the heavy military presence shows the limits of the military paradigm for security, economic development and sustainable peace. Already there is evidence that we may be reaching the tipping point of militarization. A military juggernaut once set in motion might not be easily reigned in, while often those who set it in motion also suffer the consequences. Sustainable security can only be achieved by deepening democracy and embracing inclusive development. Otherwise, the regime's dream of turning Lanka into the 'wonder of Asia' could morph into an Asian nightmare. Lanka is not Egypt or Tunisia, but sooner or later militarisation will be challenged as people come to notice that the traditions of democracy are gradually being eroded to create a national-security state and a ruling dynasty.

Last week, Army Commander Lieutenant General Jagath Jayasuriya, delivering a keynote address at a workshop organized by the Engineering Department of the University of Moratuwa in a five star hotel in Colombo on "Strategic Dimensions of Cyber Warfare", noted that cyber warfare is an emerging threat to the entire world. Although the physical war waged for 30 years had ended in Lanka, it was noted that warfare does not come to an end by eliminating terrorists from Lanka as the 'cyber war' or the war on the information highway continues. He did not mention Egypt, Tunisia and Libya where cyber activism has helped topple military dictatorships. Is the current Colombo regime 'fighting windmills'? Or 'war crimes'?

Increasingly, Sri Lanka's welfare state democracy that once placed the island at the top of the social development index in the developing world despite low per capita income is being replaced by a militarized neoliberal developmental state, cloaked in nationalist rhetoric that has little to do with the spirit or practice of the teachings of the Buddha or *ahimsa*. Sri Lanka still has the best social indicators – health, literacy, education – in the region. This is due to its immediate postcolonial investment in social infrastructure and the welfare state, not in the defence sector. Now that the war is over, Lanka needs to once again lead the way in South Asia. It has to demilitarize and reinvest in human security and social development, particularly in education, and enable power sharing among the island's diverse ethnoreligious communities. ■

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RIGHT SPEECH AND FOLLIES AND FANTASIES IN THE SRI LANKAN CONFLICT

Robert Sidharthan Perinbanayagam -

He reunites the people who are divided or strengthens the unity of those that are united. He is happy to see agreement and harmony among people and these are the qualities which he spreads among people through his words. He does not speak harsh language. He speaks words that are gentle, soothing to hear, loving, touching the heart, courteous, affectionate and agreeable to many.

This is the right speech.
Anguttara Nikaya

In an often quoted line Marx remarked, “History repeats itself first as tragedy, second as farce” and years later, Henry Ford, not known exactly either for his scholarship or his political wisdom, nevertheless said wisely “We want to live in the present and the only history that is worth a tinker’s damn is the history that we make to-day”. In considering these two views about history and applying them to events in Sri Lanka, it is clear that we must amend Marx to: “History” is being written in Sri Lanka today by fools and fanatics and is leading to immense tragedy. Rather, in Sri Lanka to-day, it is Ford’s dictum that we must take seriously: the only worthwhile history is the history we make today.

The conflict in Sri Lanka between the Sinhalese people and the Tamil people, it is claimed, began soon after the country gained its independence from Britain in 1948. In 1956, the conflict accelerated with the election of a Sinhala nationalist government headed by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and came to a head with the passage of what is commonly known as the “Sinhala Only Act”. From thenceforth, there were non-violent confrontations, violent confrontations, pogroms against the Tamils and eventually the violent confrontation spearheaded by the Tigers on behalf of the Tamils and the Sri Lankan State. This conflict has been ideologized both before and after the emergence of the violent confrontation by various myths and fantasies that are mutually contradictory and, needless to say, have only a remote connection to facts. Nevertheless, they have taken a decisive role in the continuation of the conflict, however unacceptable or absurd the claims are. I propose to give a summary of a few these fantasies and myths and confront them with the facts on the ground and examine not either their historical accuracy or their epistemological acumen – but rather their *relevance* to the construction of a modern Sri Lankan

nation state and suggest a few steps that can be taken to that end.

The Myths in the Air

It is fruitless at this stage of the relations between the Sinhalese and the Tamils to wonder which side began one of the most persistent follies and fantasies that have bedeviled the political discourse. Nevertheless, it is best to begin with the Sinhala discourse on nationalism and rights since they are the majority with control of the major institutions of the society — journals, newspapers, universities, courts of law, legislatures radio and television, and, above all, a standing army, thereby having the institutional power with which to assert and defend their discourse. I will examine one such myth – using the word in the anthropological sense — recounted in the Mahavamsa, the claim of rights based on a primordial occupation of the island. This is based on the claim that a Prince from India named Vijaya descended from an unnatural union between a lion and princess, came to an island inhabited by savages and, by one means or another, took possession of the island and brought civilization to it. Further, it is claimed that the Buddha visited the island and blessed it as the home of his creed and entrusted its kings and its inhabitants with the responsibility to protect and safeguard the religion. The historical veracity of these claims apart, let us, for argument’s sake, grant all of these claims except the story of bestiality. Again, let us not challenge the claim that these events occurred 2500 years ago. Since then successive kingdoms have come and gone and many invaders too have come, tarried for a while and left too. The last invader left in 1948.

If the events are taken as indisputable, the question arises as to their relevance today. One of the main arguments of the Sinhala nationalist discourse is that since the *current* Sinhala people are descended from these early invaders they should have certain special rights that are not available to others who inhabit the island. This includes the enshrinement of Buddhism as the “state religion”, Sinhalese as the official language and a pre-eminence given to the Sinhala culture. Just or not as these claims may be, it is fallacious to *base* these claims on the basis of a primordial occupancy of the land and the right of inheritance. *This theory applies only to private property in the shape of land and goods and not to political rights.* In many defenses of the claims of

the Sinhalese, the rules applicable to private property are smuggled into the argument. The implication is that insofar as the present-day Sinhalese are descended from Vijaya and his merry men, they are exclusively *entitled* to the land. Another aspect of this claim is the acceptance of a theory of patrilineal descent: the original fathers who came with Vijay, according to the *Mahavamsa* married Pandyan princesses as well as commoners from the Pandyan country. In this line of argument, matrilineal descent must be discounted!

The Buddha's visit and his offer of the religion to the island, as recounted in the *Mahavamsa*, are treated as a "gifts" or "bequests" in the literal sense of these terms and, therefore, transmitted over the generations to those who are now called Buddhists. Here again, the religion is treated as a form of property that is passed from one generation to another and anyone who "owns" it can claim special rights over others and have not only special responsibility towards it, but can claim special rights based on such ownership. Of course religion cannot be "owned" and Sinhalese were not the only Buddhists. Buddhism had a serious presence in the Tamil country too and when the Saivite revival occurred many Buddhists reconverted to Saivism while others left the region and settled in the nearest Buddhist country – Sri Lanka, and probably in the Jaffna peninsula within the island.

The Tamils have their own version of this discourse of primordially. They do not have a hard text like the *Mahavamsa* on which to found their claims and had to resort to other conjectures. One is the appeal to mythology: Ravana from the *Ramayana* story is adduced as the original king of "Lanka": he was a Saivite and from the descriptions in the relevant texts, he was dark-complexioned and was, therefore, a Dravidian. The reliance on the *Mahavamsa* to base current political claims is bad enough, but to use the story of Rama and Ravana, is, in a sense, worse. The historical basis of the *Ramayana* has never been established and even taking it as myth, it is of doubtful value because there is no basis for the claim that the Sri Lanka of today is the "Lanka" in the story. The inherent implausibility of a King of Sri Lanka going to Ayodhya to kidnap an "Aryan" princess and an army of thousands coming all the way to Sri Lanka, marching through thick jungles, should be obvious even to a cursory reader. The story of the *Ramayana* is no doubt a myth constructed to deal conceptually with relations between the invading Aryan-speaking tribes and the native ones. Historians and mythologists have demolished the claim that the island across the Palk Straits is the Lanka of the *Ramayana*. (H.D. Sankalia, for instance). "Lanka" probably meant "land across the water – even a river — across which the Dasyus lived, separated from the invaders. Again even if this version of the "history" of the Tamils in Sri Lanka can be granted for argument's sake, it is still as totally irrelevant for the construction of a modern Sri Lankan nation as the stories

in the *Mahavamsa*. Incidentally, *Yalpana Vaipa Malai* details another story that should give some ammunition to the Sinhala nationalists: Yalpanam was given as a *donation* or *grant* to the Yarl-player (lute player) called Yarlpadu by the Sinhala king Wasaba! If this story has any merit, it means that the territory that came to be known as Yarlpananam was under the control of Wasaba. If it can be given, it can also be taken back since no royal grant is given in perpetuity but only for services rendered.

While this claim of Tamils as primordial inhabitants of the island has been one strand of the Tamil discourse, the other thread has been the claim of "traditional homelands." These claims were made in the fifties of the last century and used to describe a limited territory, the North and East of the island as such a homeland. Besides demographics, a hard document was available to make this claim — the Cleghorn minute. Cleghorn was a British civil servant who after years of service on the island had concluded that there were two distinct "nations" in the island, one Tamil, which occupied the Northern peninsula and the Eastern seaboard and the Sinhalas who occupied the rest. This document is of dubious value since we really don't know what Cleghorn meant by the word "nation". Then, as now, this is an ambiguous concept and the referent is uncertain. If however one grants the Tamil interpretation of the significance of this document, for the sake of argument, it has no merit in the construction of a modern nation state. In fact I think the Tamil leadership made tactical error in basing their struggle on a claim to territory rather than basing it on human rights and citizenship. The Tamil claim too, is, once again, as with that of the Sinhalese, based on a claim of primordial property rights. Such a claim does not take into account the changes that have taken place since the Cleghorn minute was written. The people who lived there at the time of e Cleghorn's observations are no longer there and for the claim of the Tamil nationalists to have any weight, they must be presumed to have passed their rights to succeeding generations as property.

The Sinhala claims and the Tamil claims in this regard have been endlessly debated with each side seeking to demolish the argument of the other with dubious data and specious logic — best called chauvinistic — and anachronistic stereotyping. Every fact on the ground that any nation-builder must recognize is that the island is inhabited by a variety of people distinguished by ethnicity, language-preference, religion, region, caste and even historical presence. They are all here now and they have no intention of leaving. It would be an excellent state of affairs for a country to have no such significant differences — like Sweden, Norway, Greenland or Iceland, etc. In Sri Lanka, that is not the case and we have to learn to live with it and make the most of it to construct a workable nation-state.

What then are the facts on the ground?

1. If the island contained only Govigama Sinhalese Buddhists, all of them owning enough fruitful land, and all of them forever young and beautiful, there would perhaps be no need for political machinery in the island! The ground is, in fact, constituted by many subdivisions: Sinhalese, Muslims, Tamils, Burghers, Malays, not to speak of Veddhas, Sinhala Veddhas, Tamil Veddhas as well as assimilated Veddhas. Further, there are low country Sinhalese, Kandyan Sinhalese, Eastern Tamils, Jaffna Tamils, Vanni Tamils, Muslims of different sects and ethnicities; and Burghers, Dutch and Portuguese, not to speak of Sinhals with Portuguese names, and others of ambiguous ancestry. Then, there are Buddhists with varying commitment to the doctrine, Christians of many denominations and varying commitments, Hindus of many stripes and perhaps a smattering of atheists, agnostics and animists. They will always be there in the island and they can be neither obliterated or their rights undermined by “majority vote”. Deny them their claims, and the state will be forever faced with resistance of some sort or another. The situation on the ground in the island, for good or ill, is not then an ethnically, religiously, or linguistically homogeneous system. The majority may be Sinhalese and they could continue to win elections, but the construction of a viable nation is not a matter of winning elections. Rather, it is the construction of national system in which the various heterogeneous elements arrive, not at homogeneity or even a harmony, but at a working consensus. This only means that, neither legally nor in practice, is any one is allowed to become a victim of deliberate discrimination and exclusion.

2. The island is not just an island in the ocean. It is part of the global economic system and is heavily dependent, whether we like it or not, on the world economic system the island not only dependent on exports but is also locked into the international monetary system. It has to send a large number of its workers and professionals to work overseas in order to sustain its economy. None of these facts is likely to change in the immediate future. A relatively powerless country, small in its natural resources, cannot, defy what I will call, without too much cynicism, “international morality” for too long (except for Israel!) The embededness of the island’s economic well-being in the international systems should necessarily influence, to some extent at least, the national policy it has to follow. If we do not do this everyone –Sinhalese included, will pay a heavy price in the short run as in the long one.

3. The next aspect of the situation in the ground is that demographically the island has a population that is distributed in such a way that while the majority of Sinhalese live in most of the provinces of the island, the Tamils, though concentrated in the North and Eastern regions, live also in the rest of the island. If one takes into account, the Tamils who live in the central highland, it appears more Tamils live outside the North

and East than in them. Further, these Tamils, not only live there, but also own property there and are committed to living there. This fact must be recognized. This is a fact that not only Tamil leadership should take into account but also the Sinhalese leadership, both the political one and the cognoscenti and the agitators in the media.

The ethnic “history” notwithstanding, any attempt to construct a nation must take these material facts and a few others perhaps too, – into account. Such accounting does not depend on the numerical superiority of one group over another. A working machinery must be found to accommodate as far as possible, the interests of all the divisions and sub-divisions the people of the island. Whether one belongs to a majority community or not, there will not be a relatively peaceful society unless the interests of everyone are taken into account. Majorities only decide elections among different people who differ on matters of policy not fundamental rights. They cannot, by the nature of the case, diminish or obliterate the interests of a non-majority or exterminate them, at least not these days. If a state tries to do that, there will always be resistance – armed or not. No functioning state can carry on with a permanently disgruntled group in its midst – moreover a group with strong ties to powerful outside forces.

In the present history of Sri Lanka, the moves that the state should take are relatively simple, and in terms of cost-benefit analysis, parsimonious:

- a) Make Sinhalese, Tamil, and English the official language of the country and implement this in *practice* in every possible way in all parts of the country. It is not enough to pass a law and leave it there.
- b) Recognize the regional concentration of people who consider themselves homogenous communities. Construct regional administrative systems with relative autonomy.
- c) Appoint Tamil-speaking people to all government offices.
- d) Undertaking a massive program of reconstruction and development of the land devastated and depopulated by mindless fanaticism of the militants and the ruthless repression by the state over the last thirty years—not just the last four years. Of course, war is war and war is hell and destruction and civilians do get killed and war has its own logic. But peace is also peace and peace and reconciliation demand reconstruction and rebuilding without any reservations – not pious statements and mischievous and destructive myths but practical and concrete steps. Further, it is time to stop fighting the last war and take radical steps to prevent further conflicts.
- e) Encourage the intellectuals and journalists and other scribes to systematically create an ideology and a *new* political myth that is truly inclusive of all the communities in the island – instead of doing the opposite as many are doing now. The

battle for a new nation must begin at the level of discourse, communication, agendas and above all, right speech and consequent actions.

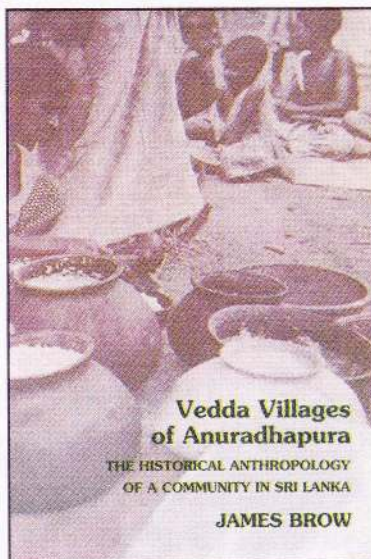
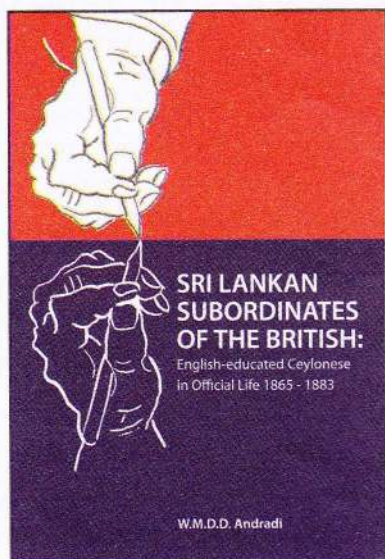
f) Discourage the preaching of exclusivist and supremacist ideology. This discourse is truly not necessary insofar as the Sinhala community is dominant enough in the country and is indeed counterproductive. It merely frightens the minorities without too many practical or psychic rewards for the community – except for these demented scribes. Indeed it puts Sinhala community constantly on the defensive, having thus to proclaim their uniqueness all the time! Whatever happens, the Sinhalese will always be supreme in the island. This is not going to change in the foreseeable future. Colvin R de Silva, lawyer, politician and versatile scholar, once remarked: "In this little country, history has given the Sinhalese race the position of being a majority with the characteristic of a minority. The Sinhalese nurse this sense of peril, a belief that, like the Jews, history has vested them with a role of maintaining their traditions." (New York Times Magazine, December, 13th, 1987) I think the Sinhalese can rest assured that their super-majority status can never be withered away. Marx notwithstanding, history does not repeat itself, either as tragedy or farce. History repeats itself only in the work of historians and more often in the tendentious and fevered imaginations of rabble-rousing scribes. *Every moment in the story of a nation is unique in its configurations and the problems they engender demand equally unique solutions.* I am certain that Cholas are not coming back any time soon to re-conquer the island nor are the Kalingas coming back to destroy Buddhist monuments. The Portuguese,

the Hollanders and the British are not coming back either, though, I am sure, that the many Christians in our midst are happy that they came and gave them a religion that they cherish. Further, the slight advantage that the Jaffna Tamils had in entering the professions and government service, thanks to the Christian missionaries, has evaporated completely. The Sinhalese are not in any danger of being overwhelmed by the Damilas or the Christians or the Muslims. There is no basis for having this "sense of peril" and this "minority psychology" that Colvin R de Silva discussed. It is the real minorities who feel this sense of peril: the slow assimilation of many members of the minority communities into the mainstream, as has happened in the past.

Overcoming this psychology will of course mean "be generous and kind to those in the minority" – not just the Tamils, but others too — and do everything possible to incorporate them into the nation, since the Sinhalese can well afford it. *To claim that some of the steps mentioned above are already under way is unacceptable; these steps must be taken with deep commitment and with enthusiasm in the practical realm, rather than in the form of pious declarations, sanctimonious editorials and unenforced legislative enactments.* It is not action alone but the right action that is the need of the hour. It is time to control the *Krodh* and put *Metha*, *Mudita* and *Karuna* into practice rather than proclaiming them in books, tracts and sermons – not to speak of wisdom. Diligently maintaining permanently disgruntled minorities is neither good politics nor a wise use of the material, intellectual and emotional resources of the nation. ■

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THE EMERGENCE OF PAROCHIAL PRIORITIES, PROVINCIAL POLITICS AND PATRICIAN PERSONALITIES

Minna Thaheer

The local government elections to select members of pradeshiya sabhas and some urban and municipal councils were held on 17 March 2011 in 234 local area. These included three municipal councils, 30 urban councils and 201 pradeshiya sabhas.

This was the first time (except for the Jaffna municipal elections in August 2009) that local government elections were held in the Northern and Eastern provinces since 1982-83. The local government elections in the Tamil and Muslim-dominated areas in the North and East were held amidst an ongoing process of post-war resettlement and rehabilitation work. They were also in a context of natural disaster, due to torrential rains and the resultant floods that produced yet another displacement of people. The multiplicity of displacements accompanied by the loss of livelihoods, destruction of harvests and crops in a predominantly agricultural area together, with a return to a dependency on dry rations, temporary shelters and the inevitable loss of morale, was not the most conducive atmosphere to gauge the political pulse of the populace in the North and East, where the elections involved the choice of representatives at the lowest and most accessible level of representation. It was, indeed, not the best possible time to gauge the popularity of the government.

The main parties contesting the elections in the Tamil and Muslim areas in the North and East were the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), United National Party (UNP), Ilankai Thamzh Arasu Katchi (ITAK/TNA), Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), National Congress (NC) and independent groups. The All Ceylon Muslim Congress (ACMC) contested under the UPFA banner.

Islandwide Results as Announced by Respective District Secretariats

Party	Votes Received	Percentage	No. of Councils	No. of Seats
UPFA	3,338,401	55.00	205	1839
UNP	2,032,891	33.89	9	892
JVP	1,81,220	3.01	0	57
SLMC	88,592	1.4	4	50
UPF	41,032	-	1	21
ITAK	71,171	2	12	76

The Sunday Times, March 2011.

All Muslim parties who contested these elections were in alliance with the ruling UPFA at the national level, although the SLMC and the NC opted to contest under their respective party symbols. This, of course, was to test their own strength in their own backyards, such as Akkaraipaththu of M.L.M. Athaullah (NC), and Nintavur of M.T. Hassan Ali (SLMC). Muslim politicians in the Eastern Province jealously guard their own turf. With the withdrawal of Ferial Ashraff from active politics, it was more than a turf war among the disciples of the charismatic founder of the SLMC, the late M.H.M. Ashraff. It was, indeed, a battle among the various claimants to the legacy of the Quaid-e-Azam of the Eastern Province Muslims, who envisioned a Muslim-centric islandwide political movement with its critical mass in the Eastern Province. The splintering of the SLMC was, indeed, the result of a battle for succession after the demise of its founder.

How did the Muslims of the Eastern Province respond? They have sent a clear and unequivocal message to their leaders. The objective of this article is to explain that message from discernible trends in the voting patterns and results.

The Tamils of the Northern and Eastern provinces have held on to their firm resolve of sticking to the party that they perceive as the most promising advocate to articulate both

their grievances and aspirations – the Tamil National Alliance. Contesting under the name Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK/ TNA), they won almost every single local government body that they contested in the North and the East, where Tamils command a majority. It must be noted that in the Eastern Province, Chief Minister Sivanessavelvan Chandrakanathan (a.k.a. Pillayan) and MP Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan, who led the Tamizh Makal Viduthalai Puligal (TMVP) and UPFA campaigns, made an ignominious exit, which surprised only a few. The Tamils of the North and East voted against the government during the presidential election and gave their mandate to the TNA in the parliamentary elections of April 2010. They only reaffirmed their will in the local government elections of 2011. They seek a solution to their main grievance, that of meaningful devolution of effective power to the provinces. The TNA, they believe, will help them achieve the goal of having a stronger voice in the process of governance in the form of participatory democracy in post-conflict Sri Lanka. The TNA has succeeded in being the main repository of Tamil hopes and aspirations.

As for Muslims in the North and East, it was an entirely different and a more complicated narrative, where the defectors and dissidents of the once powerful Muslim Congress became the ‘comeback kids,’ scoring resounding victories over the SLMC. This to some extent has destroyed the SLMC’s mistaken belief of a hegemonic hold on the Muslim constituency.

Parochial Loyalties and Regionalism

The successful return of the defectors and regional strongmen and their parties in capturing a majority of the local government bodies have shown that in the Eastern Province Muslim-majority areas, the Muslim voter has the luxury of displaying parochial loyalties. This explains the electoral success of stalwarts such as Minister M.L.M. Athaullah (NC), A.M.M. Naoshaad (SLFP), Ali Zahir Moulana (SLFP), A.M. Hisbullah (ACMC) and Ameer Ali (ACMC). They belong to different factions and have their own agendas at the national as well as the grassroots level. However, their success on their home turf does not reflect the true political aspirations of Eastern Province Muslim voters. Another pertinent fact is that the leader of the SLMC, Rauf Hakeem, despite his claims to be the heir of the legacy of founder-leader M.H.M. Ashraff, remains outside of the critical mass that was referred to earlier – he is not an Eastern Province Muslim.

Regionalism certainly influences Muslim politics in Sri Lanka. It is a pivotal factor in Muslim politics. There is, however, another reason that explains this. Muslim voters do have their political allegiances and identities. This explains the abject failure of the SLMC outside the Eastern Province in the local polls. Muslims outside the Eastern province are generally a contented lot: They do not suffer from the general minority malaise of being underdogs. The SLMC’s success in the parliamentary elections of 2010 was due to its alliance with the UNP and the elephant symbol. Sans the UNP umbrella, Mr Hakeem has discovered his true constituency at the local polls, in the Central Province.

The Muslim voter outside the Eastern Province identifies her/himself as a general rule with the UNP. This is due to the historical reason of the UNP being perceived as a party that is the national vehicle available for minority communities.

As Donald Horowitz (1985) has identified this phenomenon, the Muslim minority opts for a “coalition of commitment” outside the Eastern Province and a “coalition of convenience” within the Eastern Province, where they are in a majority in a given electoral context.

According to Horowitz there are two categories of alliances visible in coalition behaviour. There is first the ‘coalition of convenience,’ stimulated by little or nothing beyond the requisite for ethnic parties to form a government. The second kind, according to Horowitz, is the coalition of mixed convenience and commitment, referred to as the ‘coalition of commitment,’ again nourished and sustained by the need to form a government, but also by some hope of having a beneficial impact on ethnic conflict with a “blend of conviction and convenience” (369-88).

A closer look at the types of coalitions commonly made by Muslim political parties helps us to understand how Muslim interests are served in political alliances they make at the centre. According to Horowitz, a ‘coalition of convenience’ is often formed with the intense desire among ethnic parties to build majorities of seats for governing across ethnic lines. However, the pressures and strains between the electoral process and the governing process that are common to political settings also affect such multiethnic coalitions. “In a divided society votes are best won on an ethnic basis but governments cannot always be formed by ethnic parties alone,” says Horowitz (Ibid.).

How the SLMC Fared in Predominantly Muslim Areas Where They Contested under Their Own Tree Symbol

In Ampara, the SLMC fielded 91 candidates in 9 local authorities. Of these 9, one was postponed (Karaitivu). Compared to the 2006 elections where the SLMC elected 29 members, it increased its numbers by one seat. This resulted in the election of 30 members with a total poll of 49,229 votes, excluding its strongholds of Kalmunai (MC) and Karaitivu (PS). It lost Sammanthurai and won the newly established pradeshiya sabha in Irakkamam. "Although SLMC did not win Sammanthurai it was not a major loss. Last time, too, we won in Sammanthurai by contesting with the UNP. This time, part of Sammanthurai had gone under Irakkamam where SLMC won. In Sammanthurai this time, we contested under the tree symbol and emerged with a difference of only 2,500 votes and got a satisfactory share, although the UPFA won this time. Had SLMC contested under the UPFA, too, it would have certainly won Sammanthurai. However, overall it has done very well in Ampara and nobody can beat us there" (Hassan Ali 2011). Retrospective wisdom is the privilege of all politicians.

"The strong message that the SLMC results convey to the government is that it is wise to have SLMC on its side to be able to win the region without a strong opponent. In the Northern Province, although UPFA won in small margins, SLMC's alliance with the government would bring in a clean sweep victory for UPFA" (Ibid.). Future hopes are also the privilege of politicians.

This is also the first time since 1989 that the SLMC faced its Waterloo in Batticaloa in all three local bodies (Eravur, Kathankudy and Koralipattu). In Batticaloa, the areas contested are clearly the domains of such erstwhile SLMCers and UNPers as Ali Zahir Moulana (Eravur), Hizbullah (Kathankudy) and Ameer Ali (Koralapattu West/Ottamavadi), which brought in effortless sweeping victories for them. Ameer Ali had lost his seat in the general elections of 2006 and has made a comeback.

In the Trincomalee District, where all Muslims parties contested under the UPFA banner, it is not possible to disaggregate the particular votes that the different Muslim parties obtained. The SLMC won the Mutur Pradeshiya Sabha, and lost Kinniya Pradeshiya Sabha to a UPFA Muslim candidate.

In the Northern Province (Mannar and Vavuniya), there are pradeshiya sabhas where Tamils (in majority) and Muslims live, such as Mannar and Manthai West in the Mannar District and Vekalcheddikulam in the Vavuniya District. There is also Musali, the predominantly Muslim majority pradeshiya sabha in the Mannar District. The SLMC went solo, contesting under its tree symbol in these areas. In the Tamil majority areas, ITAK won handsomely, followed by the UPFA in second place. The SLMC came in a poor third and won two seats. It also lost control of Musali Pradeshiya Sabha, a Muslim majority area, when the UPFA (ACMC) won (Mr Rishard Badiuddin-backed candidates). This marks the clear defeat of the SLMC in the Northern Province, as well.

In Mannar, the SLMC claims that the rival Muslim groups were more successful in deploying resources such as transport, which allegedly tilted the results by enabling voters from Puttalam to reach the polling stations in Mannar. This again is one side of the story.

Local Councils Secured by Muslim Candidates/Parties in Muslim-dominated Areas in the East

Parties/Muslim Contestants	Local Councils	Ampara District	Batticaloa District	Trincomalee District
UPFA	UCs	0	2	not analysed
	PSs	1	1	not analysed
SLMC	UCs	0	0	0
	PSs	4	0	1
NC	MCs	1	did not contest	did not contest
	PSs	1	Do	Do
Total		7	3	9

Table based on results in *Daily News*, 21 March 2011.

SLMC's Performance in 2006 and 2011 in the Eastern Province

District	No. of Candidates Elected in 2006	No. of Candidates Elected in 2011
Ampara	29	30
Batticaloa	11	4
Trincomalee	11	7

Department of Elections.

In the Eastern Province, in the 10 local bodies (7 in Ampara and 3 in Batticaloa) that the SLMC contested alone under their tree symbol, they won four and lost 6. This is a remarkably poor performance in this province.

The SLMC outside the North and East

Outside the North and East, the verdict is clear. Muslims voted for the UNP. The SLMC lost members in most of the councils where it contested under the UPFA banner.

The striking demonstration of this assertion is to be found in Kandy. In Kandy, the SLMC fielded 207 candidates contesting 9 councils (3 postponed) and won only 4 seats, compared to 9 seats won in 2006 when it contested under the UNP. In Matale and Nuwara Eliya it retained one member, as in 2006. In Kurunegala, too, the SLMC contested 3 councils under its own banner and one under the UPFA banner. It lost all seats, compared to the 3 won earlier when contesting in alliance with the UNP and with the elephant symbol. In Puttalam the SLMC fielded 44 candidates, where 3 councils were contested under its own symbol and 2 with the UPFA. The SLMC won two under the UPFA and two under its own symbol.

Another case where the SLMC lost due to its abandoning the UNP alliance was in the Central Province. Anuradhapura, too, was a major flop, where it failed to win a single seat. In the previous poll it had won three seats. In Badulla, too, it had two members when contesting with the UNP, but won only one member when contesting under the UPFA.

The SLMC's Overall Performance

In the 68 local bodies it contested, the SLMC won 50 seats under its own symbol and 10 under the UPFA banner, and there are more results to be added in 15 councils where elections were postponed.

In a sense this could be read as a growing disenchantment with the government. The SLMC won 6 MPs from the Eastern Province (out of 11 in the island) while in the opposition in the April 2010 general elections, as there was a rising sense of grievance among the returning Muslim paddy farmers who had lost their land in the aftermath of the war. The last time around the people believed that being in the opposition under the executive presidency would give them the opportunity to raise such issues in parliament. Now, the thinking seems to be that with the SLMC being in government, it can still speak on their behalf. Whether within or out of government, the SLMC's role in Ampara remains intact, and unchallenged.

The SLMC's decision to join the government en masse unconditionally in August 2010, owing to five of its eight members threatening to join the government, has had a

negative impact on the party, as clearly shown in the local government polls. The dilemma the party leadership faced was to either reduce the party to a miniscule minority of three members of parliament, or go along with the five parliamentarians who had already decided to join the government. The party succeeded in preserving the semblance of a political group that will have some bargaining power with the government in power (Thaheer 2010a: 9).

Such a decision has resonated a discordant note among Muslims, as it was mainly carried out with the intention of not losing its party members, and not in the best interest of voters.

The author had noted in an earlier edition of *Polity*, after the parliamentary elections, that "contrary to the general expectation that voters would widely prefer to vote for a winning party that will bring material advancement as has been the trend in the past, Muslim votes at a glance have largely belied this trend ... those representing 'rights/ideology-based' votes led in numbers at a national level ... The Muslim vote for the SLMC component of the UNP in the North and the East, ... could be treated as a symbol of the 'resistance' of the 'rights-based' voter" (Thaheer 2010b: 23-24). However, the voting patterns in the recently held local government polls show the complete opposite, where development-oriented issues have outweighed the rights-based voting pattern.

Conclusion

The consistency of the voting patterns displayed by the average Muslim voter in successive elections since 2006 and up to the local government elections of 2011, and the politics of expedience of the founding members of the SLMC, illustrate a basic reality. The *raison d'être* of the SLMC at the time of its formation was the accidental combination of the ambitions of a charismatic Muslim leader, Ashraff, and the rudderless drift of the Muslim community at the height of the communal conflict, especially in the Eastern Province. The SLMC has lost its relevance to the Muslim constituency to a great extent. If the SLMC wishes to continue as a Muslim-centric political party which represents majority Muslim aspirations, it will have to operate within the two main majority-dominated parties or opt for regionalism (Eastern Province) and the coalition of convenience.

Strong personalities emerged as leaders in the Muslim community due to the Islamic culture of recognizing gifted

leaders. The present upheaval in West Asia is yet an unfolding of traditional Muslim societies rediscovering individual freedom. Even in Sri Lanka, the Muslim constituency tended to be more tribal than individual. Now, individuality is beginning to emerge.

The people's verdict at the local polls also indicates that the average Muslim voter does not live in isolation. They are concerned with contemporary issues such as development, education and employment opportunities.

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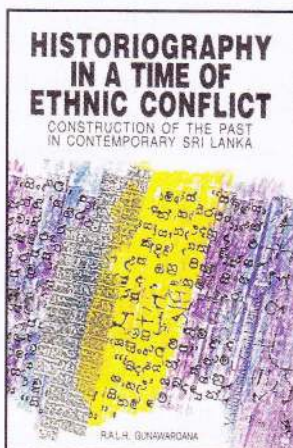
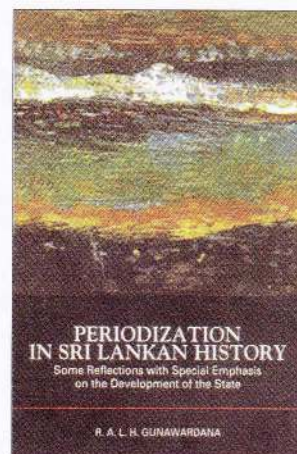
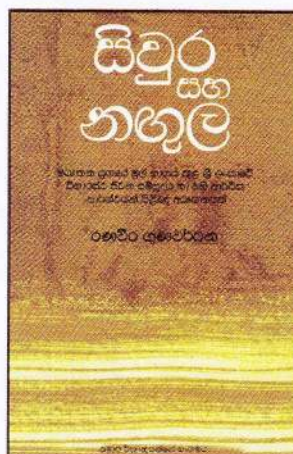
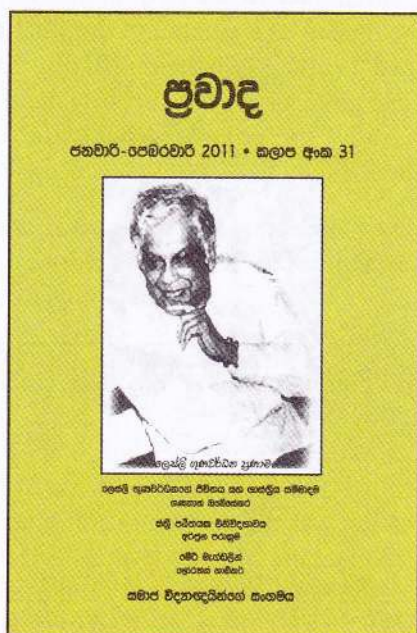
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HOME ECONOMICS

Food riots have sent shock waves around the Arab world in a ripple effect. In Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan and Algeria people have taken to the streets protesting against their governments and the cost of living. When ordinary people are unable to make ends meet and feed their families, food security becomes an emotive issue that has the potential to unite people across religious and ethnic divides. Ultimately even the class divide gets chipped away as more and more middle-class people become anxious about the high cost of living. The backlash is almost always against those in power.

The rising cost of living has been a recurring cause of concern for women. Often it is women who have to manage the family budget and take responsibility for providing food for their families. The current market price for essential items such as coconuts is around Rs. 60-70. As we go to press, there is a shortage of Bombay onions. Vegetables such as green beans, beetroot etc. are being sold for Rs. 100 per 500g. Already such vegetables have been placed beyond the reach of ordinary citizens.

To add to this situation, Sri Lanka faces a shortage of eggs. Importing millions of eggs from India and selling each at Rs. 19 hardly addresses the problem of affordable nutrition for families, particularly the young and the elderly. The nutritional and health cost of these serious price hikes – as well as the increasing stress and worry on women who have to make ends meet in this unfavourable economic climate, is certainly not lost on women.

Food Security

We know that there is a global food crisis (or crises). Floods and droughts caused by climate change and their impact on food crops pose serious problems that require long term strategic responses, not only from the developing world, but also the developed countries. However, ensuring food production and supply within a country such as Sri Lanka which is rich in diversity whether in terms of climate, peoples,

soils and agricultural products should surely have been possible with clear long-term economic policies. This has not been the case. Acres of coconut lands were allowed to be sold off to housing development companies. Subsidies to farmers were removed, re-introduced and removed again by consecutive governments or even by the same government in power. Precious forest cover is allowed to be cut down by those who have one or another politician's backing.

Given this track record it does not come as a surprise that Sri Lanka is on the threshold of a serious food crisis. Those who hold the reigns of power may do well to re-educate themselves on basic economics. The importance of food security as an integral part of economic planning. This should have been recognized earlier by planners.

Conspicuous Consumption

These problems have been compounded by the conspicuous consumption of those who have both political and economic power. Come elections, massive banquets were held on a daily basis for thousands of people strategically targeting the media, the corporate sector, professionals, academics etc. We were told that the cost of the food and drink (including alcohol) were borne through donations. This may have taken care of who paid the immediate bills. But we wonder whether the shortage of food items such as chicken and eggs had something to do with this undue surge in demand.

Over the last couple of years, such practices have become legitimized and today feeding potential voters has become an integral part of election campaigns. Not only is this an utter wastage given the sheer numbers involved and the fact that most invitees are those who can well afford a meal. These practices have also driven the cost of successive elections higher, and had a direct impact on women running for political office. Many women who are interested in entering politics

have complained that they cannot muster the necessary financial resources to run an election campaign.

Econogimmicks

Inflation has steadily increased from 4.3% in July 2010 to 5.8% by September, and 6.6% by October 2010. In November 2010 the Dept. of Census and Statistics stated that inflation was 7%. This figure surely went up during the Christmas season. Economists maintain that there have been a number of factors that have kept inflation down from its dizzy peak of 28.2% in July 2008. These include the relatively stable prices of oil in the world market (the price of oil has just gone up again), the Middle East dollars brought in by women migrant workers, and the IMF loan that has shored up foreign exchange reserves contributing to the stabilization of the rupee.

Yet 7% inflation is nothing to crow about if women now have to buy their vegetables and other products in smaller quantities. Nor is an increase in per capita income meaningful when people are unable to save anything from their earnings because of the cost of living. What does it mean when marketers have to re-package their products in order to sell them? Nestomalt now comes in smaller packets as does Shampoo and a bevy of other consumer items. This also leaves room for unscrupulous marketing gimmicks. A 100 gram packet of well-known brand of biscuits stayed at the same price but almost imperceptibly became 90grams overnight.

While the price remained steady the packaging was downsized in the hope that the customer would not notice. These are well known marketing gimmicks. Others such as getting the military to sell vegetables attract a lot of publicity but hardly make a dent in food delivery at reasonable prices to households. Long queues for vegetables have re-emerged in the public space. A military lorry with a meagre load of vegetables looks like the bare shelved co-operative shops of the bad old days. When people have to spend a lot of time in queues and are unable to get what they want, frustration increases.

Warning Bells and Women Voters

There has been a tendency in Sri Lanka, during a crisis to divert attention to trivial, populist issues. There is no point distracting people from the real economic issues – on to mini skirts and taking pot shots at foreign bogeys NGOs and westernized folk etc. The real issues need to be discussed and addressed. The country is under a huge debt burden. The fundamentals are not sound and policy makers need to get things right.

At a time when women bear the burden of high prices and low wages, one can again urge that in the forthcoming local government elections, women's representation in politics should be drastically increased. For there is no doubt that their presence in local government would be a huge incentive towards tackling some of the serious socio-economic problems the country faces today. ■

CITIZENSHIP, PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

What constitutes citizenship in a country? What are the benefits of citizenship? What can we expect from it? What are our rights and entitlements as citizens? For those of us fortunate enough to be privileged and mainstream, we hardly think - or need to think - about citizenship in this way. We can take it for granted. For those of us who are heterosexual and conform to the sexual behaviour expected of us, we enjoy the perks of citizenship without much thought. But the recent events held to commemorate Pride month, and discussions held around issues that haunt the lesbian, gay, transgender and bisexual (lgtb) communities in Sri Lanka, brought up the fact that, for these communities, citizenship remains a vexed legal, socio-political subject.

Equal Rights

The Sri Lanka constitution guarantees equal rights to all its citizens. Yet it is commonplace that discrimination and inequalities occur. For instance, Sri Lankan women, on the whole, are highly discriminated when it comes to political representation and certain other rights such as ownership/ access to property, particularly of state land. Our society hardly takes into account the fundamental needs and priorities of those who are differently-abled or disabled – they are usually consigned to their homes or a limited number of state institutions. Amongst those disadvantaged because they do not belong to a dominant majority, and because they do not conform to the norm, are women who love other women.

Art ahead of its Time

Film, literature and theatre have often been at the vanguard of exploring social taboos, spelling them out, boldly portraying the discrimination and violence faced by characters who break them. In Sri Lanka we had a ground-breaking film by Asoka Handagama entitled 'Flying with One Wing' (2002) which depicted the story of a transgendered person. In 2003 Visakesa Chandrasekaran wrote the Sinhala language play 'Katuyahana' about gay men which entered the final round of the State Drama Festival. Much earlier, in 1971, Punyakante Wijenaike had written into her novel *Giraya*, an undercurrent of homosexuality as a reason which destroyed the married life of Kamini and Lal. (Unfortunately, this important aspect of the novel was expunged in Lester James Peiris' film based on the novel). Today, the Bolo Theatre which works in both English and Sinhala languages, and also uses movement in its theatre pieces, has staged several productions under the theme 'Voicing Silence' which portrays same-sex relationships and issues. Amongst its exemplary performance pieces have been 'Saman's Story', 'Abhirami's Story' and 'Nachchi'. These artistic works include path-breaking documentary films in which these communities have courageously narrated their experiences and outlined their victimization as well as hopes for change.

Even as this cultural work has been timely, and has contributed a great deal to the fact that we can speak and write about these issues today to a far greater extent than we could 25 years ago, culture also remains the ground on which the most conservative of ideas flourish. Cultural tradition is often used rhetorically to shame and punish those who do not conform to its dominant standards. Women who love other women – lesbians – are shamed and cornered because they refuse to conform to what is culturally expected of 'good women', embodying femininity in dress and behaviour, marrying men, having children and reproducing the nuclear family. Just as with gay men, lesbians are thrown out of their homes by their parents and siblings, shamed in public, and made the target of violence. While these incidents which occur with disheartening regularity in our society has got some coverage in the mainstream press, less discussed are the citizenship rights that are denied to gay men and lesbians because civil union partnerships remain unrecognized in our country. One possible reason for this is that same-sex relationships are usually coded in sexual terms by mainstream society, not as couples abiding by the norms of domestic relationships.

Missed Opportunities

My girlfriend and I have been living together for four years. We have been staying in rented houses. Recently, we decided to look into the prospect of buying our own home. Many advertisements attracted us by the prospect of 'our dream home'. We approached many banks, with proof of our income... To our surprise, every bank refused our application for a home loan. My partner and I were not married.'

It is indeed alarming that many international banking chains which claim equal opportunities and provide housing loan facilities to same sex partners in other countries are prevented from doing so in Sri Lanka, because the law does not provide the support for non-discrimination against these marginalized groups. An inquiry with one of the banks revealed that even supplementary credit cards can only be given to a member of one's family, thus preventing same sex couples from enjoying a common credit card bill for household expenses. The gay and lesbian community is criminalized under section 365 A of the Sri Lankan penal code. They are detained, in some instances deported, and subjected to violence by the police. When they experience either domestic partner violence, or custodial abuse in the police stations, they are unable to protect themselves through the law because of their criminalized status.

Discrimination

Same sex couples are also denied the chance to define a 'family' in non-heteronormative terms and denied the joy of parenting. While a few single women have managed to adopt children in Sri Lanka, it has taken a lengthy process of about four years. Lesbian couples who have been in a steady relationship for several years have stated they would like to share the responsibility of adopting and raising a child but because they are not seen as a legally married, heterosexual couple, this is not a possibility.

Let's look at another example. In an instance when one partner of a same sex couple is hospitalized, the other partner is often not allowed the same access that is allowed to a member of the patient's family. Family in this sense includes only one's parents, husband, wife, or siblings. Once again, since the state refuses to accept the union of a same sex couple as a 'family unit', gay and lesbian people are denied legitimacy as the primary care givers to their partners.

Thus it is not a surprise that same sex couples are discriminated even in death. When a person dies intestate (without leaving a will), it stands to reason that his / her property is divided amongst his/her dependent's and heirs. As the person's same sex partner is not recognized on paper as his or her wife or husband, the chances of any of the property being allocated to the partner will depend only on the discretion of the deceased's legally recognized heirs. The surviving partner cannot claim the property as a right, even though he/she has been in a domestic partnership with the deceased for many years.

Changing Trends

While Sri Lanka lags behind, elsewhere governments in both eastern and western countries have stepped in to erase the anomalies that affect gay and lesbian people. In India, the Delhi High Court in July 2009 declared that section 377 of the Indian Penal Code which criminalized the consensual sexual acts of same sex adults in private was a violation of their rights to privacy, liberty, health and equality enshrined in the Indian constitution. In December 2007 the supreme court of Nepal ruled that the new democratic government must create laws to protect LGTB rights. In Kenya, the Human Rights Commission took up the issue in

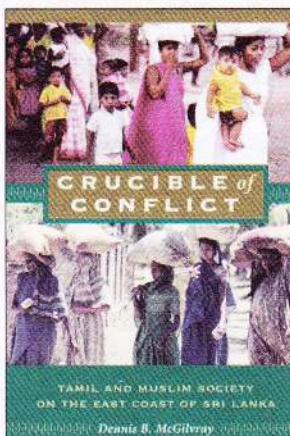
November 2009 prior to drafting a new constitution and stated that in a democracy inclusive of diversity and based on respect for human rights all citizens – irrespective of gender identity and sexual orientation – should be granted full citizenship rights and protection from non-discrimination. Even a Catholic country such as Portugal legalized gay marriages in May 2010 and recently, the first same-sex marriage of a lesbian couple took place. In the U.S.A. several states have legalized gay marriage.

In Sri Lanka, same-sex relationships between women became illegal almost by accident when Prof. G.L. Peiris amended the penal code in 1995. Many of the amended provisions were for the better, except in the case of homosexuality. The wording in the penal code was specifically about men. In the 1995 amendment the word 'women' was suddenly added, and an amended penal code which was expected to promise equality for women ended up criminalizing them! Justice Edwin Cameron of South Africa's Constitutional Court once stated that 'admittance of gays and lesbians is the ultimate measure of a society's capacity to view humanity in its fullness and of its commitment to equality, justice, secularism and humane co-existence.' Judging by this standard, Sri Lanka has a long way to go! ■

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MORALITY AND THE POLICE

A series of developments over the past few weeks has brought into focus the role of the state and the Police in safeguarding certain notions of “public morality” in Sri Lanka. Recent news reports show that a number of couples who were holding hands, kissing and cuddling in public areas including parks and beaches have been arrested in the cities of Kurunegala, Matara and Colombo. The arrests in Colombo have been attributed to a concerted crack down on “vice” within the capital by the Police. Similarly the removal of “indecent” hoardings in and around Colombo city was carried out by the Bureau for the Prevention of Abuse of Children and Women of the Sri Lanka Police. Apparently the Bureau made this move because it was “prompted by the sense that the younger generation of Sri Lankans do not show sufficient respect to women and that modern culture treats them as commodities.” This also comes on the heels of moves by the Women and Children’s Desk of the Police to ban all pornographic content on mobile phones through the Children’s Courts.

The Police appear to be guided by a strong conviction of the need to protect and respect women as well as to fight against the “commodification” of women in Sri Lanka. This is indeed laudable, and Cat’s Eye is pleased to note the concern shown by the Police on these issues. However when the Police decide to act on an issue such as this it is extremely important to question as to whether these measures really do protect women or whether the outcomes and fall outs of this kind of action outweigh its benefits. This is obviously not something that can be quantified or measured but nevertheless any executive action seeking to safeguard public morality needs to be carefully thought out.

Public Morality

In this article Cat’s Eye will explore the implications of policing “public morality” for society in general and more specifically for women in Sri Lanka. A glance at the cases

referred to above suggests different understandings of acts that “corrupt” public morality. This leads to the question as to whether “indecent” hoardings on public roads in Colombo are as likely to “corrupt” public morality as the sight of couples holding hands in public? Furthermore reports on the arrests of couples in Colombo also note that the Police raided guest houses, hotels and motels in the early hours of the morning. This is also problematic since none of these places are essentially “public” in the same sense that a billboard is public. Clearly the definitions of acts that are “indecent”, acts that can “corrupt” public morality and areas that are considered

The role of family, education, culture, religion etc in defining public morality, in learning to respect other members of society – should be highlighted here. The “religiousness” of Sri Lankan society as indicated in statistics – does not seem to translate into our daily practices in the “public sphere.” The sexual harassment of women and girls on roads and in public transport is an indication of this. Another indication is that any woman who chooses to walk about in the city in the night, unaccompanied, does so at a risk to her safety – both physical and emotional. Is it possible at all to change such negative perceptions of women, by removing “indecent” hoardings? Moreover, is the Police the most appropriate public authority to take up this matter?

Cat’s Eye raises these questions because it is well aware that beneath the veneer of protecting public morality lies a stricter policing of a woman’s morality, a control over her body and her sexuality. Within such a context Cat’s Eye wonders at which point a private consensual act impinges on considerations of public morality. Who should ultimately decide on the demarcation between the boundaries of public and private morality? With this in mind the earnestness shown by the Police to protect public morality require a careful reexamination in terms of what it means for women in Sri Lanka. ■

We reproduce several recent Cat’s Eye articles which cover relevant topics . Courtesy, *Sunday Island*

PALA POTHUPITIYA'S ART EXHIBITION 'KATUGAHA AND MYTHICAL LANDSCAPES'

Tamara Nissanka

Introduction

The art exhibition titled 'Katugaha and Mythical Landscapes' by Pala Pothupitiya (born 1972) was held at the Saskia Fernando Gallery in Colombo from 16 to 30 of January 2011. The exhibition featured 21 paintings and two metal sculptures of mythical animals. This essay reviews the exhibition with a special focus on the paintings featured.

Pala Pothupitiya and the 90s Art Movement

In order to engage in a comprehensive reading of Pothupitiya's collection, it is important to understand him in the context of developments in the Sri Lankan art scene. This could be done by outlining the characteristics of the 90s art movement (of which Pothupitiya is a member) and identifying the similarity Pothupitiya bears to the trends and themes of the 90s movements.

The art movement of the 90s marked the breaking away from the previously dominant artistic trend of the 43 Group. According to Jagath Weerasinghe, the artist of the 90s movement appears as a "political individual" (81). As would be examined in detail later on, in the 'Katugaha and Mythical Landscapes' series Pothupitiya does not attempt to occupy an 'innocent' apolitical role, and clearly makes politically charged statements through his paintings.

Most of the artists belonging to the 90's movement have spent their younger years in rural parts of Sri Lanka. Having witnessed the social and political turmoil in their villages and hometowns, they continue to live with painful memories of conflict, violence and social turmoil. Similarly, Pothupitiya comes from Deniyaya, a rural area in the south of Sri Lanka, and since his childhood he witnessed the hostility between Tamils and Sinhalese in his village.

Another important feature of the 90s art movement is its tendency to represent the present, or the situation "now" and 'right here', to borrow Weerasinghe's terms (85). Instead of reproducing the much exhausted symbols of a far-off past

which they have not even lived to see, these artists express their engagement with the "current cultural moment" through their work (85), hence the visual representation of the landscape of postwar Jaffna in Pothupitiya's Katugaha and Mythical Landscapes series.

Having identified Pothupitiya's place in the Sri Lankan art scene, the review now progresses to examine the concept behind Pothupitiya's latest series of paintings.

Concept Note: Katugaha and Mythical Landscapes

The 'Katugaha' or thorn tree defies any common definition of a tree. Fierce tiger and lion paws and teeth and numerous thorns curl upwards to form the roots, trunk and branches of the 'Katugaha' (see Annex 1, 2 and 8). It bears no fruit, only a mass of thorns capable of inflicting pain. At times it hardly looks like a tree because of the strange shape it takes. The Kathgaha grows in hell, a mythical landscape, where only the damned are made to suffer. The eerie landscape ridden with thorn trees in the paintings resembles the war-torn Jaffna peninsula. Pothupitiya says, "This is how I picture Jaffna." The palm trees in the background of some paintings suggest that they depict the landscape of Jaffna (Annex 7). Pothupitiya started working on the 'Katugaha and Mythical Landscapes' series after returning to Colombo from a visit to Jaffna in 2010. The curator's note written by Saskia Fernando (2011) says that the 'Katugaha' is 'obviously representative of the barren landscape between Vavuniya and Jaffna...' Relating the event that sparked this series of paintings Pothupitiya says, "Most people went to Jaffna after the war for enjoyment. I too went to Jaffna to enjoy, but I couldn't enjoy it". The artist found for himself that the image of a recovering, prospering, developing northern peninsula created in the media was only a myth. Instead, the destruction caused by years of armed conflict had turned the place into something of a hell. The landscape of Jaffna in the post-war context is portrayed as an embodiment of anguish, hatred and ongoing suffering in this series of paintings. All of them are in the form of mixed media on canvas.

Challenging Elite Notions of 'Excellence' in Art

As with all artists of the 90s movement, Pothupitiya makes a serious attack on formerly established ideals of 'superior art'. He says, "According to the European elite notion, an 'artist' is expected to create something unique each time, whereas in their notion a 'craftsman' is someone who produces the same thing over again. The Europeans used this stance to argue that their fine arts are far superior to the works of art produced in Asia." According to Pothupitiya, this Euro-centric hegemonic notion of 'what counts as art' is seriously flawed (Liyanage 2003). He resists this elite notion by blurring the lines between art and crafts in his *Katugaha* and *Mythical Landscapes* series. Pothupitiya's attempt to merge art and crafts is visible in his use of the line motif inspired by Sri Lankan traditional dancing costumes to which he had a direct lineage since childhood. The 'Vaka deka' (Annex 6) and 'tiringa tale' (Annex 1) motifs of traditional Sinhala art are present in his current series. Descending from a family of traditional Sri Lankan dancing, the artist has expressed his own identity through the paintings by incorporating aspects of local craftmaking into the paintings. In his former exhibition titled *Ancestral Dress + My ID* (2007-2008) Pothupitiya clearly placed his identity in the midst of his ancestry of traditional dancing (Perera 2008). He learned jewelry design and embroidery in Pakistan in 2006, and has been influenced by Anoli Perera's art work contains knitting and sewing. This aspect of Pothupitiya's background may have also motivated him to incorporate weaving patterns into his current series of paintings. Perhaps the line motif in the paintings emerges from Pothupitiya's attempt to show the laborious tasks involved in making local crafts (see annex 3). While the hundreds of subtle lines that intricately weave the images closely resemble the patient weaving, stitching, and etching work that goes into making local crafts, they also bear evidence for Pothupitiya's desire to validate local craft-making as a form of art that deserves recognition by society.

Themes of the *Katugaha* and *Mythical Landscapes* Series

Geopolitics

Exploring the area of geopolitics has been a recurrent feature in Pothupitiya's recent works. The '*Katugaha* and *Mythical Landscapes*' series has grown from the artist's enduring engagement with the theme of geopolitics. According to the artist the civil war which lasted in Sri Lanka could be identified as a conflict over rights to land. Pothupitiya says, "

People killed each other over the rights to control land". Although the expression of themes related to geopolitics emerges as a recent phenomenon in Pothupitiya's work, the preoccupation with social turmoil arising from the civil war is certainly not a new phenomenon in his consciousness. Since his childhood he witnessed the contempt with which his Sinhalese neighbors used to treat the Tamil labourers working in the plantations of Deniyaya. "When we were young, we were asked to keep away from the Tamils because they were considered to be lower than us... when we go to school, the Tamil children would go for work in nearby plantations" Pothupitiya recalls with a deep sense of injustice. Having lived to see the initial phase, the climax as well as the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka, it comes as an inevitable fact that Pothupitiya's work contains images of pain and suffering associated with the struggle for power over land. To signify the geopolitical references in his current series, the artist has drawn parts of a map into the mythical landscape (Annex 9).

The geopolitical inferences in the paintings are not limited to the boundaries of Sri Lanka. By bringing in Chinese (i.e., dragon in Annex 4) and Indian (i.e. Hanuma's mace in Annex 6) symbols, the artist subtly portrays the growing influence of regionally dominant Chinese and Indian politics on Sri Lanka.

Power

A theme closely related to geopolitics is power. This overarching theme of power occupies an important place in the politics of the '*Katugaha* and *Mythical Landscape*' series. Pothupitiya has broken of power relationships in its various forms. He says, "The crisis is a result of conflict between the powerful class of the North and the powerful class of the South of Sri Lanka". The tiger and lion paws engaged in a wrestle with one another is reminiscent of the armed struggle between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government forces which lasted for almost three decades. Just as the two parties fought for power to rule men and land in the North of Sri Lanka, the tiger and lion paws on Pothupitiya's canvas are wrapped in an incessant battle to defeat one another. This fierce wrestle only makes the vicious *Katugaha* grow taller and scarier, adding to the fearful atmosphere of the surrounding landscape.

In *Katugaha + Mythical Landscapes III* (Annex 6) Pothupitiya has painted the thorns of the *katugaha* with the colours of the Buddhist flag. By doing so, he heavily criticizes the exertion of cultural and ideological hegemony of the

majority over the minorities of Sri Lanka. The artist has incorporated Sinhala art motifs like the 'vaka deka' into the mass of thorns to create a sense of the ideological hegemony of the majority. The overall silhouette of this particular painting resembles the 'yagadawa,' which is believed to be the weapon of the mythical character, Hanuma.

The theme of power emerges through this series of paintings in other forms as well. *Katugaha + Mythical Landscapes 1* (Annex 5) contains the image of a Shiva Linga. It could also be seen as the police baton. God Shiva is considered to be the god of power in Hinduism. The Shiva Linga is an object of worship for the Tamils, and a possible symbol for male dominance in society. The police baton speaks for the state's authority over the lives of all people. In bringing these two symbols to stand for one another in a single painting, the artist has identified points of power concentration, and commented on the command they exert over their, women and anyone who disagrees with the agenda of the state.

Suffering in the Postwar Context

The war waged by humans against humans has dehumanized the atmosphere. There are no images of people to be seen in any of the paintings, except in *Katugaha + Mythical Landscapes XIX* (Annex 10), where a faint silhouette of a man clad in the Sinhalese national costume is seen calmly meditating under a thorn tree. Explaining this picture, Pothupitiya says, "Those who are responsible for the crisis are now meditating." The Sinhalese national costume clearly reflects the artist's opinion about some of the perpetrators of the social and political crisis. The human figure in a meditating posture is carefully camouflaged into the background of the painting, and is not immediately visible to the audience. Pothupitiya has placed the culprits of chaos in a discrete position, while devoting a more prominent place on the canvas to depict the suffering in the postwar atmosphere. This seems like an allusion to the reality of how culprits of massive social disorder soon go invisible, leaving behind the victims' suffering to be visible. Especially in a postwar context the culprits of chaos occupy a rather insignificant place in the minds of a people struggling to recover from the agony of the past.

Several paintings in this series portray images of plantain trees caught up in the wrestle between the tigers and lions (Annex 11). According to the artist, this is a representation of the destruction of the cultural symbols belonging to both the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The plantain tree is an important

aspect in Hindu as well as Buddhist rituals. It is used in religious and non-religious rituals of the Sinhalese and Tamil people. This symbolism is used by the artist to illustrate how the war has been mutually destructive for both the Sinhalese as well as Tamil communities.

The appearance of the mythical landscape on Pothupitiya's paintings closely resembles the ruined and empty buildings, burnt trees, vast stretches of scarcely populated land, and the lack of plant and animal life in the actual postwar Jaffna. The threat on life has been further conveyed through the symbolism of condoms and bullets seen in two paintings (Annex 4 and 5). Although the war has officially come to an end, the damage it has caused to society continues to lurk in people's collective memory. The frustration ensuing from years of conflict and the shock experienced by people in the post-war context has been clearly detailed in the paintings. The artist's choice of colours has been helpful in this endeavour. According to the artist, colours like black and gray have been used widely in the paintings because they signify the remains of something that has been burnt down. Belonging to a generation of artists who visually represent their existence in their contemporary cultural moment, Pothupitiya has depicted the slings of suffering and pain in postwar Jaffna. The fact that artist sees himself as being enmeshed in the contemporary social chaos deserves attention. He says, "I live within the chaos/confusion and not outside it." This is an important feature that is often shared by artists of the 90s movement. In their "issues-driven art" (Weerasinghe), artists of the 90s movement see themselves as being part of the issue they portray.

Pothupitiya has been successful in communicating the concept on which the 'Katugaha and Mythical Landscapes' series is based. Yet, the artist's interpretation was essential to recognize some of the themes in the paintings. Themes such as geopolitics could not have been identified without the artist's explanation. However, this is not a reason to devalue Pothupitiya's paintings in this series, but a point to understand the importance of the artist's own interpretation of his imagination and lines of thought pictured on the canvas.

Conclusion

The terror-struck surreal landscapes in Pothupitiya's paintings ring a note of nostalgia and express a yearning for harmony in society. Like most para-modern artists of his generation Pothupitiya has enthusiastically engaged in representing the existing moment of the social reality available to him.

However, it is important to note that this series of paintings cannot be understood in depth without the artist's interpretation of the related themes and concepts. When there is a gap between the end production which communicates an idea and the audience who is expected to receive that idea, one would expect the curation to play a greater role in communicating the artist's intentions to the public. However, it seemed as though the curation has somewhat failed in this respect. Although the curator's note in the exhibition provided some information about the artist and his current series, it had several printing mistakes, and one of the reproductions of paintings had been printed up-side-down on the catalogue. Furthermore, the placement of the exhibits in their respective positions had not been done in consultation with the artist. Thus, the overall presentation of the exhibition was rather unsatisfactory.

Although the artist has attempted to create an attractive visual impression through his paintings, the audience can hardly escape the melancholic, eerie atmosphere portrayed in them.

This seriously limits the artist's chances of selling his paintings to collectors. Pothupitiya is aware of this, and nonetheless, compromises on the success of his paintings in the art market in order to express the concepts and themes which he strongly feels should be expressed. Thus, the 'Katugaha and Mythical Landscapes' series comes to the audience as a collection of art charged with the emotions and political attitudes of an artist who lives and deals with the continuous legacy of war and the hope for a more peaceful future.

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Annexes



Annex 1
Katugaha+Mythical Landscapes XIII
Mixed media on canvas, 30cm 55cm



Annex 2
Katugaha + Mythical Landscapes XII Mixed media on canvas. 30cm 55cm



Annex 5
Katugaha + Mythical Landscapes I
Mixed media on canvas, 81cm 56cm



Annex 4
Katugaha + Mythical landscape II
Mixed media on canvas, 81cm 56cm



Annex 7
**Katugaha +
 Mythical
 landscapes XI**
 Mixed media on
 canvas, 29cm 22cm



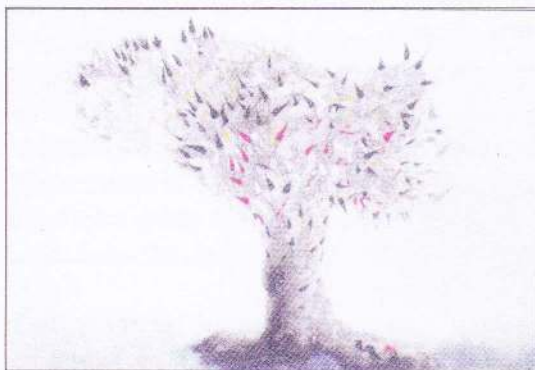
Annex 6
**Katugaha +
 Mythical
 landscapes III**
 Mixed media on
 canvas, 81 cm
 56cm



Annex 9
Katugaha + Mythical landscape XIV
 Mixed media on canvas, 46cm 92cm



Annex 10



Annex 8
Katugaha + Mythical landscapes IV
 Mixed media on canvas, 56cm 81cm



Annex 3
Katugaha + Mythical Landscapes V
 Mixed media on canvas, 22cm 29cm



Annex 11

LESLIE GUNAWARDANA – A LEFT SCHOLAR AND ACTIVIST

It is hard to imagine that Dr Leslie Gunawardana is no more, and harder to write a full appreciation of his multi-faceted life and work, and his commitment to research and social change. Some of us first met Leslie as an activist young lecturer at Peradeniya University who came to Colombo regularly to mobilize academics and others on a series of political issues. While he was involved in the path-breaking task of separating mythology from history (and was involved in many controversies) as an activist on the left he had plenty of “street cred” – appearing at May Day rallies and also at demonstrations of progressive scholars led by Prof. E.R. Sarachchandra in 1970. Leslie was also a founder member of the Civil Rights Movement in 1971.

The Social Scientists’ Association formed in 1977, drew in Leslie and many progressive academics into its discussions. At a seminal conference in 1978 on ethnic issues organized by the SSA, Leslie electrified the audience with his paper entitled “*The People of the Lion: Sinhala Consciousness in History and Historiography*” which was published in 1984 in the SSA book *Ethnicity and Social Change*. The SSA also published several of Leslie’s works – including a Sinhala translation of his major work *Robe and Plough* (*Sivura Saha Nagula*).

Other publications by the SSA of Leslie’s writings included *Historiography in a time of Ethnic Conflict – Construction of the Past in Contemporary Sri Lanka* (1995) and *Periodization in Sri Lankan History: Some Reflections with Special Emphasis on the Development of the State* (2008) which won an award. Important articles by Leslie reprinted by the SSA as pamphlets, were “The

Kinsmen of the Buddha: Myth as political charter in Ancient and Early Medieval Kingdoms of Sri Lanka”. “The Analysis of Preconial social formation in the writings of Karl Marx”.

The hallmark of Leslie’s scholarship as a historian was his commitment to theoretically guided historical research and interpretation of historical evidence in the light of trajectories of socio-economic transformation. In this regard, Leslie drew much inspiration from the Marxist method of historical analysis. He was also the first Sri Lankan historian to treat historiography an integral component of the vocation of history writing.

Several generations of students and academics in Sri Lanka have been influenced by Leslie’s scholarship, by his Marxist analysis and his political commitment. Internationally, Leslie’s work was also appreciated by many outstanding scholars, among them Eric Hobsbawm and Romila Thapar, who like Leslie are also “public intellectuals” combining their research as historians with strong political interventions.

To us at the SSA the value of Leslie’s contributions were not only that he kept alive a critical analysis of Sri Lankan history, but also that during the 30 years of ethnic conflict, his voice was loud and clear against ultra-nationalism and chauvinism. This was a time when reactionary forces were espousing such causes and courage was needed to go against this trend. Leslie’s contributions will continue to inspire those who have a commitment to social change. “The struggle continues” as Leslie would have reminded us. ■

Editors, *Polity*

RANAWEERA LESLIE GUNAWARDANA

1938-2010

Amaradasa Liyanagamage

Ranaweera Leslie Gunawardana (Leslie to his friends), one of the bright lights of the University of Peradeniya, is no more. It would take quite some time for us, - indeed he was my friend and colleague for over 50 years - to reconcile ourselves to the fact that this great scholar, probably one of the brightest of contemporary Sri Lanka, has departed for good. Being the most outstanding student at the University Entrance Examination (1956), he was awarded a scholarship apart from a government scholarship, to finance his undergraduate studies. At the B.A. Final Examination, Leslie gained first class honours in history and carried away as many as four awards in a row, consisting of the much coveted scholarships and prizes. What is indeed the more remarkable and noteworthy, is the fact that he never allowed the brilliant start to loosen its momentum and fizzle out into a lack-luster pale trudge. The contributions made by the emeritus professor to unravel Sri Lanka's past, including, on occasion, that of the adjacent Asian lands, stand out in bold relief. He was at once a highly respected historian both in Sri Lanka and abroad.

Leslie began his academic career in 1960 as an assistant lecturer in the Department of History, University of Ceylon (Peradeniya), and in due course in 1982, on the basis of a merit promotion, he was appointed to a personal chair in history. Subsequently he was elevated to the position of Dean of the Faculty of Arts (1991), before he reached the pinnacle as Vice Chancellor (1997-2000) of the University from which he had graduated. Right through he had an interest in left-leaning politics. He was appointed the minister of Science and Technology in the administration of President Chandrika Kumaratunge. I should, however, note that at no time did he allow political discourse to dilute the rigour of academic discipline.

The life and work of Leslie present a range of achievements, which cannot possibly be compressed into a brief statement such as this. His publications, in the form of books and research papers, add up to a total of well over 100. Similarly, the seminars and conferences which he had addressed over the years are amazingly extensive. Very many of were at indeed

prestigious international centres of learning such as London, Cambridge and Oxford, Chicago, New Delhi and Tokyo. His research deals with a variety of complex issues, such as the structure of the state, ancient and medieval science and technology of Sri Lanka, ethnic issues, historiography, Buddhist monastic organization of Sri Lanka with special reference to economic interest, and so on. His work is of lasting value, in the sense that, despite the intricate problems arising from precolonial sources of information, he finds his way into the deepest nooks and corners of the past, with the aid of his powerful searchlight. His work is meticulously thorough and reliable.

Heading the list of publications as a major item is his book, *Robe and Plough: Monasticism and Economic Interest in Early Medieval Sri Lanka* which is his doctoral thesis accepted by the University of London (1965). In this book, the author examines with amazing skill, the intricacies of the management of extensive monastic estates which belonged to the Sangha, the proceeds of which were utilized for the maintenance of vast communities of the Buddhist order and its monastic properties. Anyone who would like to know more about it may read the detailed review in my book, *Society State and Religion in Premodern Sri Lanka*, which I consider a fitting tribute to this great scholar. As remarkable as his scientific approach to the study of history, is the significance of the choice of research themes. Most impressive, indeed, is the work he had begun on a promising scale on the development of science and technology in ancient and early medieval Sri Lanka. He has to his credit five excellent research papers in this field: 1. Hydraulic Engineering in Ancient Sri Lanka: the Cistern Sluice 2. Inter-Societal Transfer of Hydraulic Technology in Pre-colonial South Asia: Some Reflections based on a Preliminary Investigation, 3. Craftsman as Artist and Innovator in Early Medieval Sri Lanka: Two Lamps with Hydrostatically Controlled Oil Reservoirs from Dedigama 3. Immersion as Therapy: Archaeological and Literacy Evidence on an Aspect of Medical Practice in Pre-colonial Sri Lanka and 5. Obstetrics and Theories of Reproduction in Ancient and Early Medieval

Sri Lanka. These studies, notably those on hydraulic technology, medicine and medical practice, are distinct original contributions to the study of science and technology in precolonial Sri Lanka.

Equally important are Leslie's contributions to the study of Sri Lanka's pre-colonial social organization and Buddhist institutions. *Robe and Plough*, cited above, is an outstanding work, a model for research in the history of Buddhist Monasticism, with special reference to economic interest. Again, he draws our attention to the oldest extant Sinhala manuscript, (12th century, *Karma-Vibhagaya*, discovered by Rahula Sankritya- yana) in a Tibetan monastery. It rises to great importance, when one admits how little is known of the chronology of the hundreds of ola-leaf manuscripts, written in Sinhala and Pali, found deposited in our monastic and non-monastic libraries.

Quite early in my own career, as a student at the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya (1954-58), I had planned a book on the Anuradhapura period of Sri Lankan history (*Anuradhapura Yugaya*), to meet the need for reading material in Sinhala, with the transition of the media of instruction from English into Sinhala and Tamil in the mid-fifties of the past century. I am pleased to record, in retrospect, how Leslie who arrived in Peradeniya two years later in 1956, happily joined me as a collaborator in this project. It was published by the Vidyalankara University of Kelaniya in 1961, where I was a member of its academic staff from 1959. He contributed two chapters on political developments and South Indian Invasions respectively, to its enlarged and revised edition of 1965 (reprinted 1987), filling a gap in the original text. This was the beginning of a lifelong link as friend and colleague.

It needs to be stated that Leslie has to his credit publications, both in English and Sinhala, while, understandably, most research papers are in English. Apart from the joint venture referred to above, and *Sivura saha Nangula*, among Sinhalese works, perhaps less-noted but immensely valuable is his work on the evolution of the historical discipline,

(*Itihasaye Atitaya*), placed in its widest spectrum. It is a substantial volume dealing with a theme, on which no noteworthy publication had appeared previously. One other item which calls for inclusion is *Reflections on a Heritage: Historical Scholarship on Premodern Sri Lanka*, Vol. I, Part I (2000), a symposium of selected writings of past and present scholars, brought out by a dedicated committee of senior scholars, of which he was a member. A Sinhalese translation of this work is available, too. Before proceeding further, let me hasten to add that, I have picked up only a few of the more noteworthy and representative items of writing out of a long list, with a view to highlighting the caliber of his scholarship, taking into account the limited space available to me.

When I conclude this note of appreciation, it occurs to me that, while little or nothing is said of the men and women who had served their community with such distinction and devotion when they are alive, the loss is highlighted and songs of praise are sung when they are dead and gone! Personally, I am relieved that my tributes to this great scholar were paid when he was alive and well, and they are available in print, both in English and Sinhala. Still on a personal note, even more assuaging is the fact that I had visited Leslie and spoken to him at his bedside, weeks before his condition deteriorated irretrievably. One more comment: personal idiosyncrasies, if he had any, are his own. Of this there can be no dispute; he was every inch a great scholar.

Our condolences go out to his beloved wife, Viru Gunawardana, herself a senior professor in the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science in the same university, who obviously shared his joys and sorrows all the way, caring for him during his illness in the final weeks, as well as to his beloved son, Asela, and his wife. I stated at the beginning of this note of appreciation that it would be very difficult for us to reconcile ourselves to the fact of the death of this great scholar. Perhaps the only way out is to reflect upon the eternal reality that 'Life is uncertain, death is certain' *jivitam aniyatam, maranam niyatam!* ■

Amaradasa Liyanagamage, Emeritus Professor of History, is the author of *Society, State and Religion: In Premodern Sri Lanka*

CONVERSATIONS WITH LESLIE GUNAWARDANA

Romila Thapar

I was fortunate to have had many long conversations with Leslie Gunawardana on my visits to Sri Lanka, as well as in distant places such as Kyoto and Seattle where we happened to be at the same time. He was one of those rare historians for whom history was what E.H Carr described as a dialogue between the past and the present. His mind scanned the world around him and sought connections and contexts, as is characteristic of the best of historians.

But his curiosity did not stop at explaining the past. He was sensitive to the present and more so to its inequities and concerned about where our kinds of societies were heading. And as part of this he was interested in his friends and their lives and thoughts. I remember an evening of talking about the cantonment culture of the British Raj (which is what I grew up in) and his questions and comments which led to my thinking about nuances that had earlier passed me by. For him it was getting to know a friend.

Conversations with Leslie, and a few others, during the term I spent at Peradeniya in 1978, made me realize that historians writing on early Buddhism in the sub-continent, would find the work done on the same in Sri Lanka, quite illuminating. The structure of the Sangha, the monasteries and the political relationship with royal power, provided insights into the same relationship elsewhere in South and South-East Asia.

Leslie's magisterial work was on what Max Weber has called 'monastic landlordism'. In *Robe and Plough*, Leslie extended the meaning of the term by relating it to the socio-economic context that was its crucible. This he did by creatively using

Marxist methods of analysis, without in any way reducing the argument to a mechanical causation. It became an intensive study of the political relationship of the Sangha and royal authority as well as the economic base of the authority of monastic establishments. These were aspects that had received less attention from historians but the work of scholars such as Leslie has now resulted in more studies along these lines.

The dichotomy between the householder and the renouncer, so central to early Buddhism and Jainism, became blurred in situations where monasteries began to function as social institutions – holding property and employing labour.

Many Marxists historians discarded the Asiatic Mode of Production and Oriental Despotism on theoretical grounds. But Leslie delved deeper and carried out a technical survey of the hydraulic network crucial to agriculture. The evidence he unearthed did not support the theory. He was able to disprove it on both theoretical and technical grounds. This was no mean achievement.

He wrote extensively on the Sinhala-Tamil inter-face. By analyzing the texts from early to later times he was able to show that cultural articulation was plural; and that there was no consistent hostility of the one towards the other. Situations of accommodation or of conflict varied and were determined by multiple factors. It was important for historical writing to reflect this multiplicity. This became a particularly significant study not only in itself but also as a contribution to the dialogue between the past and the present. ■

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