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July '83 and After

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Special Issue

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July '83 and After

Nēthrā
Special Issue

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International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo

Nēthra welcomes contributions from scholars and writers. Since the journal's interests are omnivorous, there is no restriction on subject-matter. Ideally, however, *Nēthra* looks for material that is serious without being ponderous, readable and interesting without being superficial, and comprehensible even to readers who are not specialists in the intellectual field in which the subject is situated.

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Nēthra also invites creative writing - poems or stories - from both Sri Lankan and foreign writers.

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Preface

The papers and poems in this *Nethra* special issue *July '83 and After* reflect some of the important efforts that have been made to study the riot of 1983 and what it has meant to the Sri Lankan context in the years following the riot. For me it was personally a very depressing task to read through the literature, and as I read through narratives of July 1983, it absorbed much of my energy and emotions to come to terms with a moment in our history that is and has been for many a very saddening, confusing and deeply regretted moment.

Some of the earlier work that has tried to look at the nature of riots from within ICES include *Sri Lanka, the Ethnic Conflict: Myths, Realities and Perspectives* by the Committee for Rational Development (1984), *Mirrors of Violence* edited by Veena Das, published in 1990, and also the conference held in 1993 entitled *July '83: Ten Years After*. I believe that many of the arguments in this collection have been developments and engagements with the work done in those earlier efforts, and mark academic and literary efforts to reflect on not only 1983 but the nature of violence. Some of the definitions of what a riot is, why modern riots are different from pre-colonial ones, why they may be more concentrated in urban areas, and more are reflected in these earlier efforts.

Despite the enormous energies put in over the last 20 years to understand what happened in 1983, it still remains a moment of confusion and complexity. There are no coherent or straightforward narratives available for us to understand that July. We cannot simply come upon final judgements of the '83 riots or say that certain events caused certain consequences. Even if some of the papers here attempt to do so, the overall contradictions among the papers and their contesting points of view make this impossible.

The more I read regarding this event, the more complex this moment became for me. Definitions or takes on what happened that July include riot, spontaneous outbreak, pogrom where the state instigated violence to 'teach Tamils a lesson,' holocaust, an expression of economic changes brought in by the open economy, a continuum of the violence that had become part of society by then, and a moment in which some Tamils were killed but others protected because of perhaps

their class difference. The narratives relating to that moment have been greatly explored and yet have not been exhausted. Perhaps this confusion is reflected best in Yasmin Tambiah's poem "At Kandalama," (placed as the first piece in the collection) which reflects her frustrations in trying to deal with civil society initiatives, and efforts towards diversity in the midst of a moment in the past that makes little sense to her.

I do not attempt to summarize the gist of these papers. The work in the collection talk of violence, violence as a continuum that did not stop when the official riot subsided, terror, memory, anticipating violence, mourning, the role played by the state to perpetuate violence, and the massacre of Tamil prisoners in Welikade. These complex areas of work, that the scholars and poets in this collection have done with care and deep reflection, cannot be easily condensed. Furthermore, Pradeep Jeganathan in his paper *Violence as an Analytical Problem: Sri Lankanist Anthropology after July 1983* looks at what 1983 meant, and how it may have marked a moment in which violence became an emergent field of study for Anthropologists of Sri Lanka. The somewhat overview and analytical nature of this article, and Radhika Coomaraswamy's *July 1983 Retrospective* which is a summary in part of the 1993 conference, refer to some of the concerns in this collection.

I wish to thank all those who gave me their work generously and directed me to further areas of reading. I especially want to thank ICES for giving me the space to extend this work which was initially meant to be a much smaller collection. My thanks go also to Pradeep Jeganathan who not only gave me the papers that had been presented in the 1993 conference to include here, but also gave me solid advice and criticism regarding the nature of this issue. Sharika Thiranagama's continuous support, and discussion of the papers in this collection have also meant a great deal to me. I also wish to thank Thirusa Sothinathan for all the long hours of scanning papers for this issue. This collection in no way reflects the best or main work done on the 1983 riots, and much important work has been left out due to various constraints. For this I apologize.

Nimanthi Rajasingham

ICES, 2003

At Kandalama (07 Feb 2003, 1:20 pm)

Yasmin Tambiah

Listening to a discussion on civil society and ethnic accommodations, schisms, half-worked contestations between state, market and people, against a fabulous backdrop of purana tank, large swathe of water reflecting moody sky, Sigiriya stark in the middle distance, brahmin kites soaring ecstatic, I am restless, unsatisfied, lost in another moment – my landlady recounting July 1983, a Sinhalese married to a Tamil, facing down a mob that queried whether there were no Sinhala men to partner, dividing the children among her relatives, weeping at foreign embassies to take them away – "I have seven children: six doctors, one accountant. This country has been deprived of their services".

That wound unhealed oozes, mocking scar tissue – my siblings reluctant to visit, fear dogging their dreams, parents who will die anonymous old immigrants bereft of history, my generation disinherited – how withering this still insistent silence.

July 1983 Retrospective*

Radhika Coomaraswamy

The July 1983 Retrospective which took place at the Colombo ICES on the 27th and 28th of July 1993 was an attempt to evaluate the causes, and consequences of the ethnic riots of 1983. The consultation is a part of ICES' on-going interest in the field of ethnic violence in South Asia. The retrospective is a follow-up to the seminar on ethnic violence held in Kathmandu, the proceedings of which were published in the volume *Mirrors of Violence* edited by Veena Das.¹ It is also a culmination of the fact-finding missions ICES has sponsored into incidents of ethnic violence in Karaitivu and Welikanda in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka.

There were many issues which came up for discussion during the one and a half days of intensive consultation. The primary question which was raised related to the fact that July 1983 was different to previous riots in that there seemed to be a measure of state complicity which gave the aggressive rioters a sense of impunity. The riots in the prison, the action of certain elements of the security and a few politicians as chronicled in tourist witness reports led to the general breakdown of law and order. In addition, when the matter was over, payments of compensation to victims was not in keeping with the enormity of the losses faced. The judicial process also failed in that there was really no mechanism for legal redress which was effective.

It was also stated that the events of July 1983 were responsible for subsequent events of violence and the militarization of Sri Lankan society. The recruitment into the militant groups and the type of brutality which accompanies the present war of secession has a certain link to the type of violence which was perpetrated in 1983. In addition, the lawlessness which was momentarily tolerated led to the criminalization of certain groups in society. The brutality of the second JVP insurrection was also a culmination of a process which began in 1983.

It was pointed out that there was no moral outrage which was officially or politically expressed at the time of the event. This failure of moral outrage for what in law is called "shock the conscience events" made many Tamils feel that there was a legitimization of the violence. Though this response may have been a result of the fear unleashed during these events, the lack of a clear statement of outrage by the powers-that-be led to a generalized belief that the government and many Sinhalese condoned the action. Though there were numerous acts of heroism by individual Sinhalese, there is no doubt that the main Tamil narrative of the events of July 1983 was based on the belief that the government and the Sinhalese tolerated July 1983 so as to "teach the Tamils a lesson." The events of 1983 also sharply polarized Sri Lankan society into collectivities—in Sinhalese minds, all categories of Tamils were seen to be one with the Tigers and in many Tamil eyes, all Sinhalese were one with the rioting mobs. Discourses over the years reflect this perception in chauvinist writings on both sides. Once you define a group in terms of collectivities, it can lead to reprisals of the sort witnessed in 1983.

The research into the events of 1983 has not been as systematic as it could have been and most of the participants pointed to major gaps in empirical data. The events in Colombo have been described in detail by foreign correspondents, tourists, and some Sri Lankan scholars but there has been very little research collected from outside Colombo, especially in the estate sector. This lack of empirical data is one aspect which was continually pointed out by the participants and identified as a specific area for future research. Even police records have not been looked into and analyzed.

There are many academic approaches to the study of riots as well as ethnic conflicts. The first is to focus on the objective structures and institutions, the macro-processes which led to the riots: the nature of communal politics, the response of institutions and links between the economy and the conflict etc. The second approach is to look at the victims and the perpetrators of the crimes, their experiences of the riot and survival stories. The latter approach with its basis in anthropology concentrates on the 'agency' of the individuals concerned and gives an opportunity to resurrect events as part of a lived experience.

There was a great deal of discussion on the influence open-economy policies promoted by the government had on the events leading

upto July 1983. Some of the participants were of the view that the open economy eroded the base of the intermediate capitalist class of Sinhalese businessmen who had received state patronage and licenses under previous regimes and who saw the open economy as a threat especially from Tamil and Muslim businessmen. They felt that this sector had a great deal of protection from the then Minister of Industries, Cyril Mathew who had become the ideologue for extreme Sinhala chauvinists. Others strongly disagreed saying that there was little empirical proof that the open economy was the major cause of the riots.

Many of the commentators pointed out that the gendering of these riots should be taken note of. Riots seem to privilege angry young men who take the lead in these matters. Though the case of a female instigator was pointed out by one or two participants, the vast majority of the perpetrators of the crimes were young Sinhalese men and the victims for the most part, especially those who were killed, were young Tamil males. This dimension of youth has been commented on by many scholars with regard to the JVP but the gendering of the riots and violence has not been studied very systematically.

The role of rumors in heightening tension and panic was another aspect which was commented upon. These aspects had been carefully chronicled in other riots by scholars such as Michael Roberts but no such definitive study has been conducted on the July 1983 riots. Black Friday, which turned out to be the most violent day during the July riots was caused by wild rumors and people's readiness to believe in implausible stories because of heightened sensitivities.

It was also noted that there was a dialectic between national level issues and local dynamics. Many parochial disputes such as landlord/tenant, shopkeeper/patron rivalries etc., were played out using the national issue as justification. In return, there were local level developments fuelling national level panic in certain circumstances. This dynamic between national politics and local level variants is another aspect which needs further study.

Some scholars also pointed out that Westminster traditions which we inherited from the British is ethnic blind and this blindness meant that there were no institutional processes in place to help deal with riots and other events of this sort. There was now a felt need to introduce ethnic

visions through political solutions such as devolution and language amendments but there is still no legal mechanism in place to deal with ethnic riots if they were to break out in the near future. In the end, the liberal tradition rests the onus on "proper policing" and not on political process.

Another aspect of July 1983 was that it began the process of internationalizing the ethnic conflict. With the visit of Narasimha Rao and the reprisals in Tamil Nadu, Indian attention and scrutiny increased. In addition, Sri Lanka's human rights record was the subject of much discussion at the international level. This internationalization of the conflict would have serious repercussions for the Sri Lankan government in the years following the July 1983 riots. Some felt that this internationalization may be one reason why riots will not occur again.

In the final event, with regard to the more important national issues, it was constantly reiterated that the rioters of 1983 appeared to enjoy a measure of immunity because of the lack of moral outrage or clear directives from the centre. There appeared to be a legitimating of the violence, a demonstration effect in the action and words of some politicians and members of the security forces. This made the July 1983 events particularly brutal and unforgivable on the part of Tamil victims, though individual Sinhalese are on record for genuine acts of bravery in protecting Tamil neighbors and friends.

Much of the seminar was dedicated to the voices of the survivors who had witnessed the holocaust first-hand. In one presentation the voices of the perpetrators of the riot —the so-called thugs of the area were also duly recorded. The presentation showed how hierarchies of class were reversed during the brief period of the riots and how class anger was also expressed against all communities but called to order when the miscreants were told not to touch Sinhalese property. It also pointed to certain nuances through which the violence was justified (a Tamil woman had wrongly accused a Sinhala child of theft) while others were ignored (the same Tamil woman had allowed people to watch television in her home). The vandalism and the violence were vividly brought out by focusing on the anger, frustration, and brutality of the dispossessed and aggressive rioters.²

Another paper which dealt with the voices of the survivor focused on the relationships the victims shared with their neighbors and friends;

an alternative to mainstream narratives. Of Sinhalese friends and neighbors who helped in rescuing their Tamil friends, and the poignant reality of people in mixed-marriages. These nuances make it clear that the main narrative which rests on the violent polarization of the two ethnic groups does not give us the total picture.

The discussion around case-studies of survivors pointed to the fact that many of the victims returned to their former homes to pick up their lives again and to interact with their neighbors, some of who had helped and some who had not. It was also noted that riots invaded the most sacred personal spaces of the victims—their home and their bodies. The need to violently appropriate these spaces is in fact, the act of humiliating the other. The last case study of the series privileged the voices of women who had experienced the holocaust. The case-studies showed a great deal of resilience on the part of the women who survived to take care of their husbands and children. They vividly remembered the details of the events and some continue to exhibit trauma-related symptoms. The experiences of women victims in this case-study contrasted markedly from the previous case studies on male aggressors and male victims.³

For many of these victims, the bonds of humanity which bind neighbors and friends had been irrevocably broken. Even though many returned to pick up the pieces, there was a new found bitterness. Other lucky individuals would remember the heroic acts of their neighbors who saved them. Much depended on their individual experiences. If pluralism is to become an ideology in our society it requires the existence of a humanist bond between friends and neighbors at the local-level which cuts across ethnic boundaries. If there is no such bond then the chance for pluralism succeeding as an ideological reality is very limited.

Ten years after the fact, one question remains. Since 1983 there have been no ethnic riots in Colombo regardless of provocation. Why is this? Many participants still felt that despite the war, the two communities as a whole have not changed their positions regarding each other. And yet, July 1983 has not been re-enacted. Some felt that the authorities have made it clear that the earlier impunity will not be tolerated. Others felt that there was a fear of Tamil reprisals. The most optimistic assessment was that though private views have not changed, many feel

that in Colombo, at least, there is a sense of “never again” as society tries to recover from the brutal violence that has plagued it from the 1980s onwards.

* These comments are based on the conference held in Colombo in 1993 entitled “July '83: Ten Years After”

- 1 See Veena Das, *Mirrors of Violence* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990)
- 2 See Pradeep Jeganathan, “All the Lord's Men? Ethnicity and Equality in the Space of a Riot,” Ed. Michael Roberts, *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited Vol II* (Colombo: Marga, 1998)
- 3 See Valli Kanapathipillai in this collection.

3

Hitler Diaries

S. Sivasegaram

It's true that
the Hitler Diaries* are a fake.
It's also true that Hitler is dead. Yet
Hitler's diary is still written
in deed, in reality.
Today, in this land of Lanka
Hitler's words emerge
from the abstract into reality.

Shops, homes and people set ablaze
make words penned in fire.
Guns and swords
underline each sentence in red.
Every street, home and garden,
every school, university, office,
temple and prison –
wherever there is a Tamil,
in this land,
blood, flesh, lymph, bone,
skin and hair spread sheet-like.
Swords, guns and torches
in a thousand hands
driven by racism
write on
to make a deep imprint.

Manipulating behind the scenes,
the opportunist state
sheds crocodile tears –
or rubs salt into the wound.

(1983)

* The discovery of diaries supposedly written by Adolf Hitler caused a sensation in 1982, and the diaries were soon exposed to be a hoax.
This poem has been translated from Tamil by the poet himself.

'Violence' as an Analytical Problem: Sri Lankanist Anthropology after July 1983*

Pradeep Jeganathan

How, why and when does "violence" emerge as an analytical problem for anthropology?¹ What, in other words, are the conditions of possibility of an anthropology of violence? What are the analytical qualities of the category, 'violence'? Surely, this is an appropriate moment for such questions: a new anthropology of violence has been, and still is, coming into being. More scholarship is undoubtedly yet to come. It is as part of that work of supplementation, of addition, that I interrogate the intersection of "anthropology" and "violence."

The new anthropology of violence announces itself with a complaint that both distinguishes it from other fields, and is pervasive within its bounds. That cry is this: previous conceptualizations of "violence" are inadequate or 'under theorized.' Henrietta Moore's recent statement makes a nice summary example: "...in spite of a great mass of writing, research, and speculation, the concept of violence in the social sciences still seems remarkably under theorized."² There is then, the suggestion here of a lack or absence in relation to the literature on violence, an inadequacy in other words, in the categorical inheritance of 'violence.'

Why so? Surely there is an older literature on violence which in fact announces itself in a theoretical register. Among examples that come to mind are Hanna Arendt's assertion that violence is the opposite of power³, Franz Fanon's claim that violence is the ultimate cathartic⁴ or Rene Girard's argument that violence is generative of human societies.⁵ Yet, the complaints of inadequacy cited above are made despite the existence of this literature.

It strikes me then, that this general dissatisfaction with the existing conceptual/theoretical space available for violence, points, perhaps not to the lack of literature on violence, but to the lack of *canonical* literature on violence.

These are, of course, two quite different intellectual fields. Two very different absences. A canonical literature on violence, would be a set of inter-referential texts that would be unified through debates about an agreed upon category: "violence." This would be an archive that has to be moved through before serious statements on the subject can be made. An intellectual field that would have to be navigated before new projects could commence. In the anthropology of violence, then, there is no such canon. That is to say there is an absence of battle-fields in the landscape of the anthropology of violence— sites of argument, debate and cumulation so familiar for the categories of caste, kinship, or ritual. So there is not a canonical literature on violence that can be operated from within, or critiqued from without. But if indeed there is such a lack it shall not be for long. For as I have just suggested, the anthropology of violence is in fact expanding rapidly; soon there will be an identifiable literature that will be required to inform any serious addition to that very literature. In fact, it may well be argued that such a canonical field is just emerging. For example, a very recent, insightful essay by Arjun Appadurai draws together a set of ethnographic texts,— by Veena Das, Liisa Malkki and David Sutton — to think through the anthropology of 'extreme violence.'⁶ Appadurai's suggestion, if I have grasped him correctly, is that these texts, collectively, help illuminate for him the problem of violence. If so, then it could well be argued, in turn, that the unified visibility of these texts to Appadurai's anthropological eye points to the emergence of a canonical literature on violence, which, for example, could be made up by a set of texts that include or are parallel to the texts cited.

My question is simply this: what are the conditions that make this emergent canon possible? Let me answer first, with the most limited, logically apparent answer possible. A canonical literature must be simultaneous with its object: if violence does not exist as an agreed upon object, then its literature would be diffuse. If "violence" as an object is gaining cognitive visibility now, then it is indeed possible that its literature will take on canonical status. If so, the question I began with now gains depth. In summary, it is this: what are the conditions of possibility and analytical qualities of this category "violence" that emerges now as a canonizable object in anthropology?

The anthropology of Sri Lanka is, beyond any doubt, an ideal site from which to answer this question. There has emerged in recent years

a sophisticated anthropology of violence in the Sri Lankan literature, so much so that it would be fair to say that the anthropology of Sri Lanka is now dominated by the category of violence. A brief glance will delineate the breadth of this field: Two monographs by Tambiah, one by Kapferer and a collection of essays by Daniel on the one hand, and important articles by Obeyesekere, Roberts, Spencer, and Kanapathipillai on the other, are only the major landmarks in a vast and growing literature.⁷ If in fact, a canonical literature on the anthropology of violence is to emerge in general, the Sri Lankan accounts will undoubtedly make up some part of it. My specific formulation of the general question, then, becomes this: how does "violence" emerge as a problem for the anthropology of Sri Lanka?

First the simple, chronological answer: it happens after '1983.' By '1983' I mean, of course, in one sense the massive event of violence that took place in urban Sri Lanka between Sunday 24 July and Friday 29 July 1983. During this time, broadly put, urban and suburban working and lower middle class Sinhala men attacked the bodies, spaces and commodities of Tamils of all classes. Measured in conventional categories of capital, which are usually the most easily available in our readings of such events, the impact of this event was extra-ordinary: deaths in thousands, economic cost in billions.⁸ But such a description and attendant analysis, though important by way of orientation, hardly begins to address the extraordinary significance of the event, which is also signaled in the concatenated form, '1983' that I use here. In fact it is my claim that '1983' is a crucial punctuation point in the modern history of Sri Lanka, and I believe the profound significance of this moment is yet to be fully grasped.

Firstly, '1983' is a clear historical marker in the anthropology of Sri Lanka. Work on violence is produced, in very large part, after '1983'. Violence, was not a dominant category in Sri Lankan anthropology before that event. '1983' marks a break in the anthropological terrain of Lanka, after which a new anthropological object is inaugurated. Furthermore, this new category then enables and authorizes new investigations into other older categories of Sri Lankan anthropology, that are not in and of themselves thought to be intertwined with violence. The events of July 1983, I suggest, are both historical and conceptual conditions of possibility of the contemporary Sri Lankan anthropologies of violence.⁹

To make my claims about these twin conditions clearer, let me offer a set of illustrative examples. To do this I turn to two central texts in the new Sri Lankan anthropology of violence I have alluded to. S. J. Tambiah's *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*¹⁰ written soon after '1983' and *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka*¹¹ written in the years after. They are both, taken separately, enormously influential texts in their field. Taken together, in my experience, their professional readership and authority are unmatched. There can be no better place to start an examination of '1983' as both a historical and conceptual condition of possibility of an anthropology.

The first volume is written less than a year after the riots, and its central question, which is posed after a lyrical description of Sri Lanka and Sri Lankans, is this: "How could such people and such a blessed island be capable of the horrendous riots that exploded in...1983?"¹² The second stages itself in relation to a question posed in very similar form: "If Buddhism preaches nonviolence, why is there so much political violence in Sri Lanka today?"¹³ It is worth considering carefully both the similarities and differences of the two questions. Both questions operate by positioning violence as a contradiction or dilemma. The first half of the contrast, in the first question uses the familiar image of "luxuriant vegetation and striking scenery" of the island and the "warmth, hospitality and good humor" of its people.¹⁴ The first half of the contrast in the second question is the more scholarly, but yet still quite familiar idea of a non-violent Buddhism. The second half of the contrast or paradox, in both questions is the emergence of violence in Lanka. First '1983' specifically, and then second 'violence' more generally. I shall return to these problematques and other parallel ones before the end of this paper. At this point, it suffices to note that these problematques operate through a contrast, contradiction or dilemma, where violence is one half of the paradox. My point is this: this problematique — regardless of its specificities — comes into being after '1983.'

Note the difference between the two questions. The first question is concerned exclusively with '1983', and the second with violence in general. There is a movement between the two questions, from the specific to the abstract. This illustrates my point: as soon as '1983' is studied for its own sake, it becomes a condition of possibility for the investigation of

violence in general. Or in other words, the first question is a specific version of the second; the second question encompasses the first. By 1992, in Tambiah's work as in others, 'violence,' as a particular kind of problematique, had arrived.

It would be a mistake to naturalize or render transparent the emergence of this problematique after '1983.' Such an argument, for the sake of debate, would go as follows —There was enormous violence in Sri Lanka in July '83, and a civil war ensued; surely there is nothing remarkable about the study of violence in such a context. In short, we *study violence because it is there*.— This seems to me to be a rather positivist response and as such is fraught with the problems of that approach. As a contextually located way of interrupting that positivism, let me ask a simple counter-question. It is this: why did not minority directed civilian violence in 1958, in everyway comparable to '1983' draw no anthropological attention? It is not of course that there were no anthropologists in Sri Lanka at the time, the fifties were surely an extraordinary time for the anthropology of Lanka. In fact S. J. Tambiah himself recounts how he was confronted with the "ethnic riots" of 1958 during field work in the Gal Oya valley.¹⁵ Yet this event did not emerge as an object of inquiry for him or his senior colleagues. In addition a major youth insurrection in 1971 occasioned only limited anthropological scholarship.¹⁶ And in any event the question of "violence" as such did not emerge, anthropologically, in either context. Remember, that from our present vantage point it is undeniable that the massive atrocities that surrounded those events —were well known soon after they took place. Yet, they were not anthropologized through the object of 'violence.' But '1983' is different. That is to say, it is anthropologized differently. It produces a break in the ethnographic archive by reaching anthropological cognizance, and in so doing, makes available to that project violence as a general object of inquiry. That is what makes '1983' a historical condition of possibility for the anthropology of violence.

That is not the only effect of this break, for '1983' is also a conceptual condition of possibility for the anthropology of violence. The new problematique that encompasses Sri Lankan violence, framed as a paradox, is not only concerned with describing and grasping the presence of violence anthropologically in the ethnographic present or the historical archive. The point, as it turns out, is to re-conceptualize that ethnographic

present and historical archive, so that the presence of violence, now visible as never before, can be accommodated in its new visibility. '1983' becomes, therefore, a conceptual condition of possibility for a new Sri Lankan anthropology. After that event is received, knowledge about Sri Lanka can be re-examined, a new view of the past, present and even the future can be constructed. So, for example, the entire gamut of inter-ethnic relations can be now re-examined in light of this massive event of ethnic violence. Returning to my illustrative example of Tambiah's text,¹⁷ we see that this intervention even though staged specifically around the riot and devoted in large measure to describing and analyzing its peculiarities, also becomes an occasion for an intervention in a much larger field; '1983' becomes a conceptual condition of possibility for the investigation of Sri Lankan inter-ethnic relations in general. In this vein, Tambiah writes in the preface to the text, "as I labored over this essay I became increasingly confident that I was in fact correctly comprehending both theoretically and scientifically, the historical movement of Sinhalese-Tamil relations as a whole..."¹⁸ Let not the remarkably sweeping nature of this claim distract from my own rather more modest point: the emergence of '1983' as an object of investigation, has opened up questions about inter-ethnic relations and their historicity that are not, in and of themselves about '1983.' This logical movement is to be compared with a similar one in the opening pages of Tambiah's next intervention: "The main question I shall probe is the extent to which and the manner in which, Buddhism as a "religion" espoused by Sri Lankans of the late nineteenth century and the twentieth century, has contributed to the current ethnic conflict and collective violence in Sri Lanka."¹⁹ Note once again that the question of "Buddhism," which once had its own anthropological and historical narrative,²⁰ is now inserted into the problematique of the emergence of violence. This makes '1983' a conceptual condition of possibility for Sri Lankan anthropologies of violence. In summary, then, '1983' authorizes investigation of violence, and furthermore, in the name of violence, enables vast new anthropological histories and new ethnographic projects, in fields and archives once thought to have been exhausted or closed.²¹

Why so? The question is this: If it is now clear that this location of '1983' as a condition of possibility binds the new anthropology of violence in an analytical unity, it is by no means clear why this should be so.

What is it about '1983' that allows it to be the condition of possibility of these multiple intellectual interventions? An attempt at a full and convincing answer to this question will take us on a detour. Its object will be to locate '1983' in the narrativization of Sri Lanka's modernity. My suggestion is this: to understand the significance of '1983' for anthropological projects, we need to find the place and by this I mean the political place of that event in the narrative of Sri Lanka's recent past, or put more specifically, the narrativization of her modernity. This narrative of modernity, that is to say, the narrativization of the possibility of Lanka's modernity— since colonies and post-colonies are never always already modern— was not, of course, conventionally the preserve of anthropology. That narrative, rather, was constructed and maintained by administrative historians and political scientists, or those concerned with the problems and possibilities of governance.

Therefore, the location of '1983' in that narrative will require a brief and temporary move out of anthropology into those other discourses. In summary, the claim I wish to argue, in relation to this narrative is this: '1983' is where the possibility of modernity, the dream of every new nation, turned into a nightmare. That is its central significance. If the point of origin of the possibility of a Lankan political modernity is marked, historically, by the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms of 1832, then the violence of 1983 marks, in this very field, the possibility of its impossibility. Not simply its impossibility, but the possibility of the impossibility of political modernity. I now turn to a defense of this claim that will take us through a signposting of the scholarly narration of Lanka's progress to modernity through its ups and downs, twists and turns to the punctuation point of '1983.'

Sri Lanka of the 1950s, then the new nation of 'Ceylon,' was the example that warmed liberal hearts everywhere, with its happy combination of democracy, development and (re)-distribution. It was in these times that a first generation of professional scholars, properly trained and equipped in academia and concerned with the subject of Sri Lanka, came into their own. It is here, among the writings of these intellectuals, both Sri Lankan and non-Sri Lankan, that the post-colonial narrative of the nation's political modernity to be found.

G.C. Mendis' "Introduction" to "The Colebrooke-Cameron Papers"²² must be a classic in this regard. In focusing on the administrative reforms

of an early moment of British rule Mendis produces a textured, complex and sustained account of the historiographic wisdom of his generation: the possibility of Ceylon's modernity—political, economic, and social— was the work of the reforms of 1832. It is a story that had been told before, where "1832" appears as a break, a rupture or watershed in a longer story of intricate twists and turns of European empires, appearing not just as year or a date—but as a marker which bounds an era, after which, as David Scott has recently remarked "modernity, a mere glimmer until...[then]... burst in upon the colony."²³

But Mendis' work of 1956, is also different from accounts that were written before. "The Introduction" is a work of the 1950s, written not only at time of great intellectual flower in Lanka, but also, and more importantly written after the transfer of power from London to Colombo in 1948, after empire had receded and independence was at hand. This, it is worth emphasizing, is a post-colonial text. Not merely because it is written chronologically after independence but because it is conceptually located in the wake of de-colonization. So in Mendis' narrative the promise of modernity and progress that the reforms of 1832 inaugurates is in fact fulfilled, in a neat, self assured teleology by the attainment of the condition of independence. Throughout the text Mendis is explicit about this post-colonial context within which the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms become intelligible to him. "The...reforms," he writes, "are of importance also as a prelude to the study of the developments that took place in Ceylon in recent years which aroused so much interest in the colonial world and outside..." referring, of course, to the country's smooth transition to independence. But this independence is a product, not of argument, struggle or conflict, but of advancement from the years of reforms to the self-evident modernity of the present. Ceylon, Mendis wants to stress was, "conferred...a constitution...with a greater degree of autonomy than any British Dominion legally had in 1930 and more advanced than that of any colony under the British." And furthermore, Mendis points to the crowning moment of it all, the announcement of "immediate steps...to confer upon Ceylon fully responsible status within the British Commonwealth of Nations." All this, is for Mendis, related to the reforms of 1832. "These developments," he writes, referring to Commonwealth status, "are no doubt due to numerous causes. But it cannot be denied that they are partly at least the logical outcome of the trend of British rule

in Ceylon....British rule from time to time was...directed...towards modernizing the administration and the economic system and towards producing in the people a measure of political capacity which would fit them to be entrusted some day with their own government." And the central such colonial intervention was the reforms of 1832: "of these attempts which led finally to the recent advances none was more remarkable than the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms."²⁴ It is then, given these claims, that Mendis can proclaim triumphantly at the end of his introduction that "[t]he reforms...turned the course of the history of Ceylon in a modern direction and enabled Ceylon to fall in line in many ways with modern developments and ultimately to attain to the stage to which it has risen today as equal member of the commonwealth of nations."²⁵

Mendis was not alone in making this argument of the successful tutelage of Ceylon under British rule. In fact the idea that Ceylon had attained a condition of remarkable modernity, in relation to its peers, through and because of the Anglo-imperial project was both common in the dominant conservative Ceylonese intellectual circles of the time. As Kingsley de Silva demonstrates in his essay on this idea, which he calls that of "'Ceylon, the Model Colony'"²⁶ recalls powerful conservative nationalists of the time, Senanayake and Goonetilleke amplify and mobilize this very idea with great tactical skill in independence negotiations with Whitehall. But clearly the idea was not just a "clever public relations exercise;" it had greater depth and resonance than that. Silva puts it this way: "the concept of 'Ceylon, a model colony' owed much of its effectiveness to the fact that...there was enough of a corresponding reality to sustain a genuine belief in it..."²⁷

I have dwelt on this idea to mark not only its crucial place in the narrativization of Sri Lanka's modernity, but also to emphasize its extraordinary contours and texture. Note that this idea of modernity does not depend on an allied idea of the indigenous with a capital I, or of culture with a capital C. The nation is independent not because its inner-core has always been worthy of self-administration, not because of its long tradition of indigenous kingship, not because the contours of its ancient customs, manners, habits, indeed all its culture, had always been compatible with the modern. Of course, such arguments and ideas were current at the time; they had originated in the mid-nineteenth century together with archaeological discoveries of medieval ruined cities and

translations of medieval texts.²⁸ Yet, these ideas were associated with anti-establishment nationalists such as the Anagarika Dharmapala, and were not therefore the dominant, conservative ideas that ruled the day.²⁹ And even when they were thought to be legitimate they were relegated to the sphere of 'culture and the arts.'³⁰ Such ideas of past glory and compatibility with modernity were not, in any event part of a discourse of political modernity. Rather, the idea of political modernity, depended on the idea of the 'model colony;' in this view, progress made towards the modern enabled by British tutelage which operated against the grain, sought to uplift a people from all that was feudal, primitive and archaic. Hence the importance of the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms of 1832 which were designed to produce the flower of modernity in spite of a feudal earth. The modernity of Lanka was possible, then, in spite of what she had been, not because of her legacy.

This idea is as remarkable as it is tenuous. If modernity is thought to be a lesson learnt, it may indeed be a lesson forgotten. This soft underbelly of the idea of 'the model colony' is visible even in Mendis' writings, for example in the very text we read earlier. "The results of the reforms," Mendis writes, in a critical passage that precedes one of fulsome praise we read earlier, "would have been more effective had they been in a position to take into account the strength of nationality and tradition or the evolutionary view of life." Then adding a stinger, "[t]hey...underestimated the depth of caste prejudice [in Ceylon]."³¹ But these comments, on what for Mendis was the incompleteness of modernity in the island, despite the reforms, are reticent and muted ones. They only marginally qualify his laudatory assessment of the reforms of 1832, and the state of modernity in Lanka. But note that the very logic of his argument allows for the dream of modernity to be undone as a nightmare.

But it is not undone in the fifties or sixties; the idea of the 'model colony' only gives way to the idea of an exemplary new nation. So much so that a concomitant and rather conventional intellectual division of labor operates: political scientists concern themselves with the constitution, elections, political parties and such— what might be called the areas of government³² — and anthropologists concentrate on categories such as caste, kinship, and marriage, which required, in Nur Yalman's words, "to leave aside...the lively and important intellectual life of Colombo and Peradeniya, the political repercussions [of which] can be felt around the

world" for the "small, relatively isolated, traditional communities far from sophisticated centers." His subjects, both animate and inanimate were located in "the interior of Ceylon."³³ Note, however, that this neat division between political science and anthropology, between government on the one hand and social or cultural organization on the other, is not by any means inevitable. For example, political parties could have been anthropologized through kin categories or secular political rituals could have been located in relation to 'folk' rituals. But they were not. In fact, Sri Lanka has not seen a political anthropology of the conventional sort just because of this reason: the triumph of modernity in the arena of government, and the relegation of anthropology to the 'villages of the interior' in these intellectually formative years.

So the idea of the 'model colony' gave way easily to the idea of a 'new nation' that was indeed a model among its peers. This idea was challenged, quite severely, but not undone by anti-Tamil riots in 1958. The terrain upon which this recuperation of political modernity takes place will certainly illuminate our understanding of '1983' and I therefore turn to the extraordinary crisis of '1958.' This was a time when those who mattered waited, breathless, for those institutions and structures of order, so well 'modeled' on the imperial originals, to hold against an upsurge of the archaic or the primitive, in short, the darkest nightmares of the 'interior.' For days, cracks appeared and widened in the structures of government, and the forces of law and order. But then a heroic figure emerged under the sign of the Queen, Herself. Then there was calm as the possibility of modernity was enforced by the forces of civility. Structures of government were recuperated. The authoritative political scientist Howard Wriggins' remarks on the matter are brief, but firm: "After three days of terrifying disorders...the Prime Minister finally made his decision and asked the governor-general to declare a state of emergency. The toll during the days of disorder included an estimated 300-400 killed..." Then comes the huge sigh of relief. "The governor-general then became the effective center of government. The armed forces received orders to shoot if commands were not obeyed... The troops methodically set about clearing out the trouble spots in the city."³⁴ If Wriggins' descriptive account only dwells briefly on the nature of the crisis that was because an earlier account had already explored that question more fully.

Tarzie Vittachi, one of the most influential Sri Lankan journalists of his generation, wrote in 1958 what still stands as the most comprehensive account of the event attempted: *Emergency, 1958: The Story of the Ceylon Race Riots*.³⁵ The title of the volume, intended both for a Sri Lankan as well as a global audience is telling; in it is encapsulated the terrain of discussion of the event for intellectuals such as Vittachi: "1958" was about the declaration of a state of emergency. This was only the second such declaration in post-colonial Lanka, and as such represents a clear moment of crisis in the story of Lanka's modernity.

The story of '1958' becomes the story of its management. The most vivid and memorable image in Vittachi's text is that of the Sri Lankan Governor-General Goonetilleke sitting behind a desk with six telephones, two of them cradled at each ear, whispering authoritatively into each one, with his characteristic stutter: sh..sh..oot.³⁶ In the months after the crisis of 1958, Vittachi's witty account of the Governor-General's handling of the event becomes the definitive framing of that moment. Every crisis throws up its hero, and Goonetilleke could play this part with aplomb. The story of '1958' is then told through a debate about its management by the Governor-General. Was the emergency too harsh? Was press censorship too strict? And, most important of all, was the Governor-General legitimately entitled to have managed the crisis, in the face of the Prime-Minister's inaction? Was all this constitutional? All these are clearly acceptable and familiar questions in the 'science of government,' and professional political scientists enter the lists in the wake of Vittachi. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson's detailed, landmark discussion of these very questions is an example of the development of this problematique.³⁷ It is then, through this framing that '1958' becomes easily comprehensible as an acceptable bump on the road in a long journey to modernity.

Twenty five years later, '1983,' an event comparable to '1958' in every way, signifies very differently. T. D. S. A. Dissanayake's volume on the subject occupies a somewhat similar intellectual place that Vittachi's did earlier but yet the framing of the text could not have been more different.³⁸ Dissanayake's title "*The Agony of Sri Lanka*" signals this difference: the image signals a nation writhing and contorting with the pain of its wounds. '1983' could not be troped as an 'emergency' since such a state had been promulgated in the country, nearly continuously since 1971; in effect '1983' could not be troped through its calm, strategic management

as was '1958.' Even Dissanayake's conservative account, constructed as it is to demonstrate the working of the apparatus of order, can only produce a familiar yet tenuous version of the narrative of repression: scenes of lonely, heroic policemen battling rampaging 'mobs.' There is no pause, no break, no possibility of a long sigh of relief when these defuse acts of heroism finally coalesce under a heroic figure, perhaps murderous but firm, from 'the very top,' to become finally the 'forces of law and order.' On the contrary, the very top fiddled this one off. As Dissanayake concedes "one of the tragic features" of the event was that of the army who were of "passive deportment merely look[ing] on nonchalantly...while fresh violence irrupted."³⁹ Other accounts, written from positions more critical of the state and its agencies, are nearly unanimous on the virtual absence or lethargy of what was once thought to be a well oiled state apparatus. Of the complex apparatus that the state might have mobilized, nothing, not the police, nor the army, not even the most elite of all commando regiments, could be relied upon.⁴⁰ In these accounts, '1983' is one long moment of violence, that could not be repressed, managed or even contained: in short, the entire apparatus of the institutions of government had cracked open and collapsed. Something exploded in 1983, and it wasn't just another 'erupting mob.' There was rather more to this event than could have been recuperated into yet another re-writing of the "prose of counter-insurgency"⁴¹ that Vittachi managed so well. 1983 was the nightmare of the model colony and new nation. Not only did the organs of order and repression fail in the crisis, but with and through that failure was visible as never before, on the streets for all to see, what the post-colony thought it had left behind in the museums of the primitive and archaic: vicious primordiality. It was as if the cover of 'iron frames,' and the 'tall leaders,' so central to political analysis was blown, leaving visible and gaping that dark, secret, uncivilized underbelly of Lanka. These were G.C. Mendis' little reservations, just an aside in the fifties, come back to rule the roost in the eighties. Those colonial lessons inaugurated in 1832 and mimicked so well had turned out to be just so much superficial polish. '1983' represents in the narrative of Lankan modernity that moment where we wondered if "they"—those long forgotten imperial nay sayers—had been right, and "we"—post-colonial citizens—had been wrong. Where we wondered if we were, by any stretch of our imagination, civilized at all. This, I want to suggest, is a moment of great profundity.

As far as the political scientists, and the administrative historians went, a categorical crisis was at hand. Dissanayake's trope of "agony" is a last ditch effort to comprehend '1983': it is a symptom of this crisis. Nor is he alone here, other tropes of incomprehensibility abound. The similar images are frequent in the titles of immediate, parallel interventions, with "anguish", "shame" and "holocaust" being among the commonest.⁴² July 1983, taken as a totality, and positioned in a narrative of Lanka's possible modernity, is distinguished by its incomprehensibility to political and administrative discourses. It is not just another riot. The event does not have a political name and place such as -insurrection, anti-colonial uprising, repressive excess or emergency, —as other comparable events have in those discourses. '1983' marked the end of the authority of these scholarly discourses of government in relation to Lanka. They may not have gone out, but they were down; their ability to define the categories and terrain of debate receded. No longer did questions of constitutional traditions, forms of electoral representations, bureaucratic structures or legislative bodies matter, as they did before. The time when political and administrative institutions in Lanka received attention as some version of older originals in the imperial metropolis was over. Those discourses were profoundly interrupted by '1983.'

In to the breach rode anthropology. Or at least anthropologists. That's not primordiality, they cried. That's culture they said, and we have been studying it for years in the interior. Since the crisis of '1983' was a crisis in the institutions and structures of modernity, it is then conversely logical that anthropology with its privileged access to the non-modern, the specific, the local and the indigenous, that is to say 'culture', would be the discipline of that moment. At first pass this might have seemed a straightforward anthropological intervention. After all it only required a move from country to city, from the little community of the village, to the great community of the city. The fundamental work of that anthropology would be the work of all anthropology: to make intelligible in terms of Enlightenment reason the specific culture of Lanka.

The most elegant example of this discursive shift I can point to is James Manor's 1984 collection.⁴³ The first part of the book, entitled "Sri Lanka in Change — Late 1982" consists of six essays, all written by administrative historians and political scientists. The essays are fundamentally concerned with the conduct of presidential elections, and

a referendum that was held in 1982, the constitutional changes that preceded these elections and its significance for future legislative composition. The essays worry about "creeping authoritarianism" in these electoral events, or more specifically, repressive excesses on the part of the regime and state in the pursuance of electoral objectives. Yet none of the essays use "violence" in their titles; there is no need to since the excess in point is well contained within the structures of government. Not, of course, that any of this is unusual — in a text edited by Manor himself known, at the time, for his essay on the kind and quality of democratic political structures in Sri Lanka.⁴⁴ What is remarkable, to my mind, is part two of the book which is called "Sri Lanka in Crisis — Mid 1983." Here we have a second set of six essays, not conceptually linked to the first set, all on '1983.' Five of them use the word "violence" in their titles; all six are by anthropologists. I rest my case.

Foregrounded in this way, Anthropology was then challenged to fashion an analytic for the event. The troping of the totality '1983' by anthropologists in Manor's volume, for example, as the "perpetration of evil,"⁴⁵ is little different from Tambiah's an year later: "horrendous."⁴⁶ These tropes, indicate, that even though ready and willing to commence an investigation, '1983' interrupts anthropology leaving it stunned and confused. In fact in Tambiah's first monograph we find a description of the riot -which stretches for a whole paper, with all its twists and turns, and ins and outs- entitled, simply: "The Horror Story."⁴⁷ The exclamation, "the horror, the horror, of it all," is a familiar one at the edges and cracks of the modern. And as a trope of '1983' it joins others of that ilk: "agony" and "anguish." '1983' is incomprehensible to the discourses of anthropology, as it was to the discourses of government and administrative history. "Horror", I suggest, is the name of that incomprehensibility.

The Anthropological intervention, however, was not attenuated by incomprehensibility, rather it was catalyzed by it. Perhaps this move, this effervescence of knowledge-given incomprehensibility—has a historical analogy, in the logic of modernity. I have in mind Michel Foucault's suggestion that "the intervention of psychiatry in the field of law," occurs in the early nineteenth century, in the face of crimes that were, and continued to be incomprehensible in law. It is that very incomprehensibility then, that allows for the production of a range of psychiatric categories, the central of which "homicidal monomania," then

provides an analytic of comprehension for great crimes "without reason. And so, analogously, the intervention of Sri Lankanist anthropology, given the political incomprehensibility of an event, is to be seen in relation to the intervention of psychiatry, in the field of law.

Just as psychiatry produces the analytic of homicidal monomania in the face of horror, so does anthropology produce an analytic in the face of the horrors of '1983'. The master category that these analytics stand under, or the category that horror is meticulously transformed into, through anthropological intervention is 'violence.' As an aside, let me be clear that I do not argue that 'horror' must be, necessarily, a trope of incomprehensibility. While an analytic of horror could well be possible, in another configuration of knowledge, such a theoretical object does not emerge in the texts under consideration. Rather, in the rhetorical economy of these texts horror remains an untheorized trope. Nor is this trope itself, exclusive to the construction of '1983.' In Vittachi's account of '1958' also the trope emerges, and is explicitly visible in the chapter "The Horror Spreads." However, as we have already seen, Vittachi's account can move quickly to its two defining chapters "General Oliver [Goonetilleke]" and "Governor's Rule."⁴⁹ In sum then, in '1958' 'horror' is transformed into a problem of 'order', in '1983,' given the crisis in the apparatus of order, it becomes an analytic of 'violence.' That is how "violence" comes into being. It is not, of course, that Sri Lankan anthropologists did not use the category violence prior to 1983, they did but usage was rare.⁵⁰ In fact the category of violence did have a certain place in the anthropology of Lanka before '1983.'⁵¹ But it did not have the density, the authority and the weight it now does; there was not an "anthropology of violence" before '1983.' There now is.

Let me pause to consolidate my argument here. '1983,' is a moment of incomprehensibility in the narration of Lanka's modernity. Twin elements make up the equation here: the perceived collapse of the state, and the concomitant rise of cultural passions. The rise of "cultural passions" in the face of a firm and decisive state would not have been a crisis of modernity: this, put another way, is "1958." The collapse of the state, in the face of a modern or modernizing movement such as a left insurrection, led by workers or peasants, would not have been a crisis. This, put another way is "1971." The crisis of modernity that is '1983' is also an epistemological crisis for the disciplines. Horror (agony/shame) is (are)

the name(s) of that incomprehensibility, in both Political Science and Anthropology. Seeing its major object of inquiry, the practices of government, no longer apprehensible to its categories, Political Science gives way to Anthropology. Specially armed by its privileged access to culture, anthropology sets to work to transform its incomprehensibility into an analytical category. "Violence" is the analytic of that incomprehensibility. The anthropology of violence, in other words, is a development of this analytic. I have not argued, and indeed my argument does not imply, that an anthropology that arises out of a moment of incomprehensibility is in itself flawed or incorrect. Rather my efforts so far have been to answer one half of the question with which I began: what are the conditions of possibility of 'violence' as an anthropological category? My answer must now be clear: that condition of possibility is incomprehensibility. *Political* incomprehensibility.

This is a crucial point that must be consolidated from this argument before I proceed further. "Violence" in this anthropology begins as a problem in politics. The crisis in the narrative of modernity is also a political crisis. Concomitantly, the object of violence as it emerges in this anthropology, is a response to this crisis which is a loss of the political. As such, "violence" as an anthropological category has an irreducible political content which it acquires negatively through a navigation of political incomprehensibility. It is not, of course, my argument that 'violence' is reducible to its political content. It is rather a conceptual response to a political crisis and as such has particular contours of its own. An investigation of these contours take me to the second half of the question I began with: what are the analytical qualities of the category 'violence'? I shall return to Sri Lankanist anthropology to answer that question, but as I do so it will become increasingly apparent that conditions of possibility and analytical qualities have much in common and can not be completely divorced from each other. As such, I will have occasion to return to the first half of the argument consolidated here, even as I traverse the second half.

I return to Tambiah's problematization of 'violence.' Two interventions are available as I have indicated, the second more thorough than the first.⁵² 'Violence' in Tambiah's work in relation to Sri Lanka, is inserted, as I have already suggested, into other sets of anthropological categories. To grasp that field in its entirety, I will produce two interrelated intellectual

genealogies: the first of 'nationalism'/ethnicity' and the second of 'religion. By this move, I intend to re-locate Tambiah's problematiques from its usual metropolitan positioning as a clear eyed, pedagogic corrective to popular "zealotary" in Lanka,⁵³ to a rather more suitable position of a supplement to a sophisticated, on going set of Sri Lankan intellectual debates that predates it by many years.

Nationalism emerges as a problematique for an important strand of Sri Lankan scholarship in the late sixties. This move, more than a decade after Mendis, is indicative of a profound conceptual shift in intellectual terrain. It is not, of course, the question of modernity, or its possibility that is problematized; that question, as I have already argued, comes much later in relation to '1983.' Rather what is called into question in the late sixties is the 'nation.' In Mendis' formulation of the early 1950s the "nation" is fully formed, and united and therefore not itself available for problematization. A decade later another generation is not so sure; the question it put forth was this: has the "nation" of Lanka come into being, if so how?⁵⁴ The appearance of this question in the field of history, was simultaneous with a move out of the then dominant framework of administrative histories, into another field. That, very broadly put, was social history. It is in the interventions of that moment, of both the left and the right, that 'nationalism' emerges as a problem.

In its earliest phase, this work surrounds the Ceylon Studies Seminar at Peradeniya (which commences in 1968), and is published in that extraordinary journal *Modern Ceylon Studies*, beginning in 1970. Key signposts, from both the seminar and journal, would be in chronological order, Malalgoda's history of political Buddhism,⁵⁵ Obeyesekere's now canonical work on the colonial modernity of Buddhism,⁵⁶ Tissa Fernando's examination of nationalism and the temperance movement,⁵⁷ Jayawardena's landmark account of the working class roots of nationalism, Michael Roberts' re-examination of the 1818 rebellion as a nationalist moment⁵⁸ which are united by their concern with the problem of the 'nation.' It is in this vigorous debate that the questions that currently surround the study of nationalism in Sri Lanka were inaugurated, and — to move rapidly through a decade— it is the liberal and conservative strands of scholarship from this forum that are collected and edited by Roberts in 1979.⁵⁹

The late seventies, brought a new crisis of the nation: the question of Tamil separatism gained support, for the first time, in the democratic political space. And at the same time the left was decimated in national elections. Left scholars who had been theorizing the crisis of the nation as a problem in nationalism and national liberation, turned to ethnicity as a categorical name for the new crisis of the nation. In 1979, left leaning scholars coalesced at a new forum the Social Scientists' Association (SSA). A seminar held there brought together path-breaking scholarship that was published as a collection five years later.⁶⁰ Seminars organized the next year, in 1985,—again by left scholars— at Peradeniya, under the sign of the Seminar for Asian Studies, and also at SSA inaugurated yet another collective effort, which was published two years later.⁶¹ All these efforts then name and theorize the political crisis of the moment: ethnicity.⁶²

This, then is an account of the intellectual field into which Tambiah's first intervention, "*Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling...*," must be inserted.⁶³ The problematiques of the text, as we have seen it, hovers around the question of horror "How could such people and such a blessed island be capable of the horrendous riots that exploded in... 1983?" is then transformed into one of ethnic/nationalist history. So Tambiah sketches out a social history of two "ethnicities" Sinhala and Tamil with a view to mapping points of breakdown in relations, historically and contemporaneously. The argument itself adds little to the scholarship that has preceded it; what is important to note here is the form of the problematization of '1983.' The riot, in this account, stands 'explained,' by the play of inter-ethnic relations: so 'Sinhalaness' + 'Tamilness' => '1983.'⁶⁴

The second intervention in question moves into a different categorical space, that of "religion," specifically Buddhism. This space, anthropologically speaking, is a very different one from the categorical space of nationalism: 'religion' as a field of organized knowledge about Sri Lanka has a much older, colonial and evangelical history. The specific problematique here is also a well worn one: "If Buddhism preaches nonviolence, why is there so much political violence in Sri Lanka today?" It is important to note that this question is staged by Tambiah, as one posed not by himself, but by a public that has a fanciful understanding of Buddhism.⁶⁵ Tambiah's counter move is to challenge the "Pali text

puritan"⁶⁶ version of an "essentialized Buddhism...that...has viewed...developments...of a political kind, as deviations and distortions from its canonical form." He chooses to look instead "not as something reified as Buddhism, but at the universe, so far as possible, through the eyes and practices of Buddhist actors situated in history and in their local context."⁶⁷ Which is of course the conventional and powerful move of Anthropology in the face of Indology. Yet, it could be argued that Tambiah still sits quite squarely in a colonial problematique. For him, "religion" is prior to the political: the problem for him is how Buddhists become politicized. That he does not see this as deviant, or corrupting is another matter: the historical, and logical priority of the "religious" over the "political" is a central assumption of the argument. But it could well be argued, however, that this relationship must be rethought: reversed in fact.

Such an argument will take seriously epistemological spaces produced by colonial power in relation to places like Sri Lanka; or in other words take seriously Bernard Cohn's remark: "The conquest of India was a conquest of knowledge."⁶⁸ David Scott's recent work on "religion" as a category of knowledge in the context of conversions, and as a political space in colonial civil society are important in this regard.⁶⁹ "Buddhism" in this argument, is always already a political category, fashioned simultaneously in two projects, that of missionary conversion and colonial rule. As such Tambiah's conclusion, "Sri Lankan conditions has revealed features that have made it so far a pressure chamber leading to periodic explosions..." because Buddhist nationalism and Buddhist nationalists have not "stretch[ed to]... incorporate a greater amount of pluralistic tolerance" for the minorities, may have to be reversed.⁷⁰ For this argument implies that Buddhism has trouble with pluralistic politics; and assumes that Buddhism is prior to modern politics. On the contrary, Buddhism itself, it could be argued, is a political category of colonial civil society. The 'trouble' then is with political spaces of (post)-colonial civil society rather than with Buddhism as such. Almost needless to say then, the entire question of the 'politicization of Buddhism' loses salience.

In any event, arguing this point at length does not concern me here. By signaling the limitations of Tambiah's argument, I wish only to draw attention to its form, which parallels the previous argument I examined. The form of the problematization of violence is this: History x

(Buddhism+Politics) => Violence. This, then, is one of the dominant forms of the problematization of violence that emerges in the anthropology of Sri Lanka after '1983.' Gananath Obeyesekere's work, on this point, even though offering a far more sophisticated account of 'Sinhala Buddhism' than Tambiah's, also seeks to explain the emergence of violence with recourse to ethno-history.⁷¹ Yet another strand of this anthropology, exemplified by the work of Bruce Kapferer and Jonathan Spencer,⁷² takes a different stand point. Rather than insert 'violence' into *histories* of 'ethnicity,' or 'religion' they attempt to provide 'cultural' explanations of 'violence.' In this view, violence emerges in the Lankan ethnographic field, not because of the unfolding of Sinhala Buddhist history, but because of certain elements of Sinhala Buddhist culture.

For the purpose of this argument, what is important is not the internal intricacies of each of these approaches, but their overarching form. My question, in this section, after all is this: what are the analytical qualities of the category 'violence' that emerge in Sri Lankanist anthropology after '1983?' Let me summarize my answer. Recall that "horror" was a name of incomprehensibility, and "violence" was an analytic response to it. Another way of asking that question is this: what has been the analytical movement in this anthropology from "horror" to "violence"? In this anthropology "violence" emerges as "explained." "Violence," once a sign of incomprehensibility is now relocated and enveloped in another set of categories: ethnicity or religion, Sinhalaness or Buddhism. The hard, causal explanation tells us "violence" is, because x+y. As such the epistemological burden is on the received anthropological categories; those categories must do the work of explaining violence. While being the enabling category of the work, violence remains a condition of possibility in these texts, not an object of inquiry in its own right. Violence itself is not investigated. So by positioning violence as a cause, explanations shunt violence out of analytical sight, not addressing the incomprehensibility that gave rise to it in the first place, but rather, displacing that incomprehensibility on to received anthropological categories.

It is, I think, as an antidote to this move that some may advocate the autonomy of "violence." Such a move attempts to preserve or conserve the density and weight of the object of violence, as a thing in itself. Allen Feldman, who's work must surely be part of any emerging canonical

literature on violence, puts it this way "Violence...[is] ...an institution possessing its own symbolic and performative autonomy."⁷³ In light of this move, let me consider, at some length, a recent intervention in the anthropology of Sri Lanka that seems to take this approach to the problem of violence: Valentine Daniel's *Charred Lullabies*.⁷⁴ My questions concerning the analytical quality of 'violence' will remain unchanged.

While '1983', is for this text, like its recent predecessors in Sri Lanka's anthropology of violence, a historical and conceptual condition of possibility, "violence" is positioned differently in its pages. On the one hand, Daniel is clear that 'violence' in his anthropology will not be 'explained', or 'solved': "...anyone who reads this book to find causes and their corollary, solutions, to what has come to be called the ethnic conflict, reads in vain."⁷⁵ So therefore, the text must be about violence as such. And it is subtitled "chapters in an anthropography of violence." Note here the lack of other categories, such as nationalism, ethnicity, religion, or even identity from this heading — Daniel's predecessors have all included "violence" with some other category in their titles, or subtitles. This signals a text, where 'violence,' unmoored and unencumbered by other anthropologies of religion, ethnicity or nationalism, comes into its own. It is an anthropology of violence.

How then is this category 'violence' positioned and located in the text? At the outset, Daniel writes that this positioning is not coherent. Explicitly, in the introduction—as if anticipating an unnamed interlocutor— Daniel writes that the chapters of this book "do not march towards a single point; they barely sustain a consistent thesis."⁷⁶ These inconsistencies — named "discordances" by Daniel "echo," for him, "the discordance of the phenomenon being studied—violence and its effect."⁷⁷ This discordance is not one that can be captured at a meta level, according to Daniel which might have given the work a certain "coherence."⁷⁸ Rather the "discordance" is produced by "a set of disparate and desperate forays into the roughest waters in order to recover meaning." Well, at first pass Daniel is right: "violence" is positioned differently across different essays. But I'm not as certain as Daniel is that an account of this "discordance" can not be written; in fact it is my claim that an examination of the conditions of possibility of the category "violence" will produce a coherent account of its emergence. That account, I submit, will not only unify Daniel's text, but also locate it in relation to previous Sri Lankanist anthropologies of violence.

To do this, I examine closely the discordant place of 'violence' in this text. Take the last chapter first. In this chapter "Crushed Glass" Daniel is concerned to trace the relationship of "violence" to "C/culture." Having thought this issue both broadly and narrowly, Daniel moves to illustrate a point by presenting a verbatim, eye witness account of an event of '1983.' In this account, Piyadasa, a Sinhala man in his twenties, tells of the killing of a young Tamil boy during the riots. The boy is pulled out of a Hindu temple where he is hiding on to the street. The crowd circles the boy, to shouts of "kill the Tamils, kill the Tamils." Then after awhile the boy is cut with a sword; blood begins to pour. After beating him with sticks and cutting him up more, a tire and petrol is brought. Then the boy is thrown on to the tire. Piyadasa concludes: "So they piled him up on the tire and set it aflame. And can you imagine, this fellow stood up with cut arms and all and stood like that, for a little while, then fell back into the fire."⁷⁹ For Daniel, and me, this is an extraordinary story. The anthropologist writes that he was, and continues to be "struck "speechless"" by this "event."⁸⁰ He calls it, before he moves on to analyse it as an event of violence, a "horror-story."⁸¹ I note, here, as I have done before in this argument, the emergence of the trope of "horror" as a name for the incomprehensibility of violence, in relation to '1983.' This example then is another such example that joins others I have pointed out earlier in my argument. Therefore, this marks a congruence between the positioning of 'violence' in Daniel's text and its positioning in other texts, such as Tambiah's read earlier.

Yet this is not the only positioning of violence in this text. There is yet another location of the category in this text; in that location violence is not horror. An examination of that contrastive location will be instructive not only of the "discordance" of "violence" that Daniel has warned us about, but also of the meta-coherence of that discordance I have promised.

My example is taken from Daniel's third chapter, the first in the book to address violence categorically. Here, within a rich, original reading of the semiotics of agronomy and agriculture a "communicative event" is located in its ethnographic context: the "story of the Perumal cut." In this tale, told by Tamils who work on a tea-plantation where Daniel did field work, an oppressive and ignorant white superintendent confronts a young male worker pruning tea bushes: Perumal. The Superintendent brash in his ignorance and bullying in his exercise of authority, demands the pruning

knife from Perumal, proposing to show him how exactly the cut — to be made fifteen inches above the earth — is to be executed. Perumal hands the superintendent the knife and watches his inept, insulting demonstration. Perumal felt his "blood boil and rise to his head, [i]n his stomach was hunger." He asked for the knife, and then "[i]ike a flash of lightening...[he]...swung at the Englishman with the word "ippati!" (like this!). *The next thing you saw was the Englishman's arm, severed from below his elbow, writhing in the drain, spouting blood.* It was exactly fifteen inches long."⁸²

What I want to contrast is the troping of this "event" as opposed to the previous one I examined. The first, as we have seen, is a "horror-story." The second, which we have just read, is not. That is to say it is not troped as such in Daniel's reading of it. It is in fact, located quite differently in a very different tropic field. That field is defined by a (anti-colonial) political narrative that is not easily available in the first instance. Daniel locates the story of the 'Perumal cut' as an instance of 'effective history' that is a "useful appropriation by the collective memory of a subordinated people against future oppression."⁸³ It is just this political narrative of (colonial) oppression/ (anti-colonial) rebellion which makes this "event" intelligible to both the anthropologist and his reader; note, therefore, that this event is barely called "violent." The category "violence" is not part of the naming of the event in its immediate retelling nor is it explicitly part of the final analysis that comes at the end of the chapter. That analysis is summarized thus: "Ungoverned by the courtesies of rule governed behavior, energetic interpretents explode. Their meanings are precipitated, not before, not after but *in the act*: "The Perumal Cut."⁸⁴ Theorized as an 'energetic interpretent,' here the Perumal cut is troped as an 'explosion.' It is after that move that 'violence' appears as an analytical category in relation to *this* incident. Daniel reads Foucault to suggest that the story of the "Perumal Cut" is a "violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules."⁸⁵ Note, here, that for Daniel to call the "Perumal Cut," "violence," is in itself an analytical move.

Contrast this with the "horror-story" we read earlier. That "event" had no easily available political framing such as anti-colonial rebellion/ colonial oppression. It is then a "horror-story." And during analysis of that "horror-story," in lines immediately below its appearance, in fact, the category 'violence' emerges. This, is a moment I have noted earlier. In

shorthand, horror is the name, and violence is the analytic, of incomprehensibility. The movement here from horror to violence is distinct but rapid. They may in this particular analytic stand in for each other: 'violence as horror' or 'horror as violence.' This much we have seen before: for this is the very same movement I foregrounded earlier in the work of Tambiah. Note that for both anthropologists the emergence of 'violence' as 'horror' must be inserted into an analytic. This is different from the Perumal cut: there calling the event "violent" was a final analytic move. Here in the face of 'horror' more analysis is produced.

Tambiah's move, as I have argued before, is to 'explain' violence, in the form 'violence is, because x+y.' x and y can be 'Sinhala-Buddhists' and 'Tamil-Hindus' or they can be a similar anthropological category. Daniel disavows such moves, responding differently to the problem of violence. The analytical quality of the category changes shape in his hands: the emergence of 'violence' enables an analytic of violence itself. Therefore Daniel's statements on violence are in the form 'violence is x,' where x is an abstract quality. In this case (chapter seven) the sentence is: "violence is an (event in which there is a certain) excess."⁸⁶ This, then, is the break that Daniel makes in his text, that distinguishes it from the (Sri Lankan) anthropology of violence that has been written before him, taking him to a new terrain in that anthropology.

Let us return, with this reading in mind, to Daniel's original claim of "discordance." "Violence" we have found upon analysis is in fact differently positioned in the two chapters read, as it is in others. But in the preceding paragraphs I have been able to produce an account of that 'discordance.' My account has, as has this entire chapter, examined the historical and conceptual conditions of possibility of the emergence of violence in an anthropology. These conditions, as we have seen, are politically constituted. 'Violence,' as a category, has different analytical qualities given its differential positioning in political narratives. There is then a certain coherence to the emergence of violence in Daniel's text, and therefore a certain coherence to 'violence' as it appears across chapters. It is worth noting, however, that the predominant positioning of violence, is that of 'horror,' that is to say a location where political narratives have, for Daniel, been rendered meaningless.⁸⁷

I would like to reflect on this dominant moment in this text, for I think it an important one. In short it is the moment which allows 'violence'

to come in to its own. Already, we have seen in Daniel's anthropology an unmooring of violence from other categories such as ethnicity, religion or nationalism which have informed previous anthropological accounts of violence in Sri Lanka. That move glides into another, which allows the category violence to leave Lanka, as it were, rise above it, and be available to other fields and other anthropologies as 'violence as such.' Let me return to Daniel's text to illustrate this point. My example comes from chapter five: "Embodied Terror." At the end of an ethnographic description of terror, and its aesthetization Daniel reflects on Adorno's response to a poem on the Holocaust. Having done so he writes: "Granted the horrors of Nazi Germany — and more recently of Uganda, Rwanda and Bosnia — may appear to dwarf those of Sri Lanka."⁸⁸ Note first here the reappearance of 'horror' as the framing trope of the entire sentence. "Horror" both as trope and now as a comparative category allows in this point of the text, as it does at other points, for an entire economy of sites to appear as a unity. Nazi Germany, Uganda, Rwanda and Bosnia. And Sri Lanka. My point is not of course, that this list is too long or too short or that it needs to be rewritten in some way. Rather I remark on the very possibility of such a list. The sites on this list have a certain economy, I stress: surely Indo-China of the 1960s and '70s would not make this list, this economy of horror, at first pass? That site does not make this list because it is not clearly a moment of breakdown in political narratives, not a place where the sheer "magnitude of meaningless"⁸⁹ of events have horrified anthropology. What then does this economy of horror enable? In Daniel's text it allows for a comparison between two moments of horror. Nazi Germany and contemporary Sri Lanka. Auschwitz and '1983.' Daniel's concern is about the representation of these two events; his worry is about his own implication in such a representation.⁹⁰ But such a comparison can not proceed without 'horror' being available as a general, abstract category. Through it — horror as violence, violence as horror — violence itself emerges as a general, abstract category. Here then emerging before us is that elusive thing many have been looking for, that complained about lack or absence in relation to the problem of violence: 'violence' as a canonizable category.

"Violence" in this view is an analytical name for events of political incomprehensibility, events of horror, events that challenge ideas of humanness and humanity, without a counter-vailing and intelligible

political meaningfulness. And the current effervescence of the category of "violence", I would suggest, is simultaneous with the delegitimization of received political narratives that produced that political comprehension in another time. So with the destruction of the liberal narratives of the new nation and left narratives of national liberation and socialism, old ways of making meaning in the face of conflict are also destroyed. Taken together with the perceived collapse of the state, a profound loss of political space results. Hence, the rise of cultural arguments about "violence." Or in other words, an anthropology of violence. Note that my argument here does not in anyway depend upon knowing if there is more violence in the world today, than at another historical conjuncture. Take the simple example of the war in Indo-China that extinguished more than two million lives in the 1960s and 1970s. Is there "more" "violence" now in Rwanda, Bosnia and Sri Lanka, than there was in Indo-China? My answer is categorical, not empirical: the war in Indo-China had a political name — American imperialism, communist aggression, nationalist uprising or popular revolution — whatever hue one's cloth was. What is called "violence" today is different, for it cannot be easily placed under a suitable political sign. This then is the condition of possibility of its emergence as a category. That is indeed why it is now common place to refer to Rwanda, Bosnia and Sri Lanka in the same sentence: they all represent sites of the emergence of "violence" in the face of the loss of political meaning.

I claim then, that this is one possible and plausible answer to the set of general questions I began with, or in other words, these are conditions of possibility of an anthropology of violence, for as we have seen, under these conditions violence can and does emerge as a canonizable category. Not only have I been able to point to the conditions under which such a category might emerge, but have also, given its emergence, delineated its analytical qualities ($x+y \Rightarrow$ violence or violence $\Rightarrow x$). This does not mean, of course, that this is an exclusive answer to the question; undoubtedly other answers are possible. Yet my journey does demonstrate that this is one possible answer to the general question.

My efforts here, have not been intended to be read only for their own sake: they are part of a larger work, of which this is a part. By asking categorical questions of the anthropology of violence, I have, I hope made the way clearer for myself. Let me formulate one partial and preliminary conclusion from this investigation, reserving a more substantial statement for a later moment.

This conclusion is simple: 'Violence' is not categorically self-evident to anthropology. An investigation like mine then, which seeks to make 'violence' visible to an anthropological eye must be mindful of its own conditions of possibility. On the one hand, the condition of possibility of my anthropology is '1983,' with all its entailments; in other words my work shares in the very conditions of possibility I have delineated. But on the other hand, there is another condition of possibility of my anthropology: the very texts of my distinguished predecessors which I have passed through in this account.

My strategy is to avoid causal explanations for violence: to do that would be to shunt violence out of analytical sight and ignore the incomprehensibility that gave rise to the category in the first place. On the other hand, I shall not treat violence as a thing in itself, unmoored from the social. Such an approach runs the risk of treating 'violence' as self-evident, not thinking through its categorical emergence. My effort, rather, is to comprehend the *emergent location* of 'violence' in a given field. This allows the analysis to stay with the destiny of the category of violence, not replacing incomprehensibility with causal 'explanations' however sophisticated, and not removing violence from its sociality.

¹ Earlier versions of this chapter were presented at the South Asia Workshop, Foster Commons, University of Chicago in May 1996, and at the South-South Workshop: Re-Thinking the Third World, University of the West-Indies, Mona in December 1996. I am grateful to all those who commented.

² Henrietta Moore, "The problem of explaining violence in the social sciences," in eds. Penelope Harvey and Peter Gow, *Sex and Violence: Issues in Representation and Experience* (London: Routledge, 1994): 138. Note that for Moore, an erudite anthropologist, this supposed theoretical lack is self evident. It is not demonstrated in the article, and no literature that conceptualizes "violence" as such is discussed. See for other such 'complaints' about the category of violence in anthropology, that are contextualized, Michael Taussig's remarks in *The Nervous System* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 116, on "how decidedly flat, how instrumental" Weber's notion of violence is; Allen Feldman's note in *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991): 21, of its reduction to a "derivative system" in a previous literature on Northern Ireland; and Fernando Coronil and Julie Skurski's, "Dismembering and Remembering the Nation: the Semantics of Political Violence in Venezuela" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33, no. 2 (1991): 289, point that it has been hitherto positioned as "cause, function or instrument."

- ³ Hannah Arendt *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1969)
- ⁴ Frantz Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963)
- ⁵ Rene Girard *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
- ⁶ See Arjun Appadurai "Life After Primordialism," in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 155 & ft.4, 203. The texts in question are, Veena Das ed., *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford, 1990), and *Critical Events: Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Delhi: Oxford, 1995); Liisa Malkki's *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and David Sutton's "Consuming Counter-Revolution: The Ritual and Culture of Cannibalism in Wuxan, Guanxi, China." *CSSH* 37, no. 1 (May to June 1968):136-72. Earlier attempts at the constitution of such a canon would include Veena Das's "Violence, Victimhood, and the Language of Silence," (with Ashis Nandy) in *The Word and the World: Fantasy, Symbol and Record* in ed. Veena Das (Delhi: Sage, 1986) which provides a three-fold anthropological genealogy of violence through "sacrifice," "vivisection" and the "feud."
- ⁷ Both S. J. Tambiah's *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) and Bruce Kapferer's *Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance, and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988) are extremely influential. Gananath Obeyesekere's articles "The Origins and Institutionalization of Political Violence," in *Sri Lanka in Crisis and Change*, ed. James Manor (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), *A Meditation on Conscience*, Occasional Papers (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1988) and the more recent "Buddhism, Nationhood, and Cultural Identity: A Question of Fundamentals," in *Fundamentalism Comprehended*, in ed. Martin Marty & Scott Appleby (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995) make a distinguished contribution to the literature. Michael Roberts offers one powerful essay on '1983': in "The Agony and the Ecstasy of a Pogrom: Southern Lanka, July 1983" but the entire collection which contains this article, *Exploring Confrontation — Sri Lanka: Politics, Culture and History*, (Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996) is concerned with violence. Jonathan Spencer's views on the subject are in "Collective Violence and Everyday Practice in Sri Lanka," in *Modern Asian Studies* 24 no. 3 (1990): 603-623, and also in his monograph *A Sinhala Village in a Time of Trouble: Politics and Change in Rural Sri Lanka*, (Delhi: Oxford). Valli Kanapathipillai's work is represented in "July 1983: The Survivor's Experience" in *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, ed. Veena Das (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), and "The Survivor Ten Years after the Riots," paper presented at the conference, *July '83: Ten Years After*, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, (Colombo, July 1993), [both her works are published in this collection,] while Sasanka Perera's Collection, *Living with Torturers and Other Essays of Intervention: Sri Lankan Society, Culture and Politics in Perspective* (Colombo:

- ICES, 1994) is a prelude to ongoing work. This, as it turns out is but a small sampling. To be added to this list is the work of Malathi de Alwis, Jani de Silva, Purnaka de Silva, Patricia Lawrence, Jagath Seneratne, Yuvi Thangaraja, Terese Ondadenwindaad. A representative cross section of such work was presented at the The Expert Meeting on Aspects of Violence in Sri Lanka, held at the Centre for Asian Studies, Amsterdam, The Netherlands in June 1995.
- The political economy of the event, it has been argued in the most complex work available, is to be seen in relation to the under capitalization of a Sinhala entrepreneurial class, in contrast to their Tamil counterparts, in the post-1977, monetarist regime. Such uneven capitalization, it is argued, provided structural conditions of possibility for the event. While I find such accounts important, and useful, I shall not evaluate them in the course of my argument here. See Newton Gunasinha, "The Open Economy and its Impact on Ethnic Relations in Sri Lanka," in *Sri Lanka: The Ethnic Conflict — Myths, Realities and Perspectives*, Committee for Rational Development (Delhi: Navarang) and Sunil Bastian, "Political Economy of Ethnic Violence in Sri Lanka: The July 1983 Riots," in Das ed., (1990).
- ⁹ I understand these conditions as related and intertwined, yet distinct. I am grateful to Dipesh Chakrabarty for pointing out this distinction to me in a close reading of an earlier version of this paper.
- ¹⁰ Tambiah, (1986).
- ¹¹ Tambiah (1992).
- ¹² Tambiah (1986):1.
- ¹³ Tambiah (1992):1.
- ¹⁴ Tambiah (1986):1.
- ¹⁵ Tambiah (1986):137.
- ¹⁶ The disciplinary literature, as opposed to explicitly leftist accounts, is concerned, in the main, with the question of social inequality raised by the insurrection. The caste composition of the insurgents becomes the central site for this problematique. See Gananath Obeyesekere, "Some Comments on the Social Background of the April 1971 Insurgency in Sri Lanka (Ceylon)," in *Journal of Asian Studies* 33,(1974):367-84, and Janice Jiggins, *Caste and Family in the Politics of the Sinhalese, 1947-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
- ¹⁷ Tambiah (1986)
- ¹⁸ Tambiah (1986): ix.
- ¹⁹ Tambiah (1992): 2.
- ²⁰ The foundational texts in this field, are in turn, Obeyesekere's "The Great Tradition and the Little in the Perspective of Sinhalese Buddhism," in *Journal of Asian Studies*, 22, no. 2 (1963): 139-153 and Kithsiri Malagoda's *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).
- ²¹ In this vein, note that previous events, such as '1958' and '1971' are now available for anthropologies of violence. In fact, one such event, the 'anti-moor' riots of 1915, distinguished from others because it has a dense written archive associated with it, has now emerged as an object in the anthropology of violence, in Tambiah's latest work. [Cite S. J. Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethno Nationalist Conflicts and Leveling Collective Violence in South Asia*

- (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) here]. This event, previously was the provenance of historians who debated questions of class, caste and community — but not 'violence' — within its contours. Michael Roberts too, has offered such reworking of previous events of 'violence.' The 1915 riots are addressed in "Noise as Cultural Struggle: Tom-Tom Beating, the British and Communal Disturbances in Sri Lanka, 1880s-1930s" in ed. Das (1990) which is reworked and extended in "The Imperialism of Silence Under the British Raj: Arresting the Drum" in Roberts, (1996): 149-181. Additionally "The Asokan Persona and its Reproduction in Modern Times," in Roberts, (1996): 95 and passim, offers a comparative commentary on eight rebellions and riots.
- 22 G.C. Mendis "Introduction" *The Colebrooke-Cameron Papers: Documents on British Colonial Policy in Ceylon, 1796-1833*, 2 vols. selected and edited by G.C. Mendis (London: Oxford, 1956).
- 23 David Scott, "Colonial Governmentalities" *Social Text* 43 (1995): 206. My understanding of the reforms is indebted to Scott's important essay. See also Vijaya Samaraweera, "The Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms," in *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon* 3 (Colombo, University of Ceylon Press, 1973) For a location of Mendis' work, see Kingsley M. de Silva "History and Historians in Twentieth Century Sri Lanka — The G.C. Mendis Memorial Lecture," *Sri Lanka Journal of the Social Sciences* 1 (1978): 1-12.
- 24 All preceding quotations are from Mendis (1956): x-xi.
- 25 Mendis (1956): lxiv.
- 26 See Kingsley M. de Silva, "'The Model Colony': Reflections on the Transfer of Power in Sri Lanka," in *The State of South Asia: Problems of Integration*, eds. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson and Dennis Dalton (London: Hirst, 1982): 79.
- 27 de Silva (1982): 79. I do not, myself, make claims about 'reality' here. Rather my argument is that the idea was the dominant idea in conservative intellectual circles of the time. Indeed, the idea has a much longer colonial history: it is manifest through the writings of British colonial officials separated by a hundred years. I have in mind Sir James Emerson Tennent's *Ceylon: An Account of the Island, Physical, Historical and Topographical*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1859) and Sir Charles Jeffries' *Ceylon: The Path to Independence* (London: Pall Mall, 1962)
- 28 See, on the important example of Anuradhapura, Elizabeth Nissan "History in the Making: Anuradhapura and the Sinhala Buddhist Nation" in *Social Analysis* 25 (1989): 64-77. My own account is in "Authorizing History, Ordering Land: The Conquest of Anuradhapura," in *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, eds. Pradeep Jeganathan & Qadri Ismail (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association 1995)
- 29 Of the extensive literature on Dharmapala, what is most relevant here is Kumari Jayawardena's early account in *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972).
- 30 For a comprehensive account of such a debate, in relation to the 'ancientness' of Sigiriya, see Malathi de Alwis' "Sexuality in the Field of Vision: the Discursive Clothing of the Sigiriya Frescoes," in *Embodied Violence: Communalizing Women's Sexuality in South Asia*, eds. Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwis (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996)

- 31 Mendis (1956): lxiv.
- 32 Foundational texts would be W. Howard Wriggins, *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960); Robert Kearney, *Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1967)
- 33 Nur Yalman, *Under the Bo Tree: Studies in Caste, Kinship, and Marriage in the Interior of Ceylon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967/1971): 3.
- 34 Wriggins (1960): 268-9.
- 35 Tarzie Vittachi, *Emergency, 1958: The Story of the Ceylon Race Riots* (London, Andre Duetch, 1958)
- 36 Vittachi (1958): 70-1. On the fascinating figure of Goonetilleke compare Sir Charles Jeffries' laudatory biography 'O.E.G.: A Biography of Sir Oliver Ernest Goonetilleke' (London: Pall Mall, 1969) with D.B. Dhanapala's sharp, even caustic sketch "Oliver Goonetilleke" in *Among Those Present* (Colombo: M.D. Gunesena 1962).
- 37 See A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, "The Governor-General and the State of Emergency, May 1958-March 1959," in the *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies* 2, no. 2 (1959): 160-181.
- 38 T.D.S.A. Dissanayake, *The Agony of Sri Lanka: An Indepth Account of the Racial Riots of 1983* (Colombo: Swastika, 1983) Note the echo of Vittachi, 1958, in the title.
- 39 Dissanayake (1983): 81.
- 40 This 'eye witness account' is exemplary: "...the police and armed forces were most conspicuous by their absence. They either looked the other way or joined in the looting. Several onlookers reported that army men traveling in lorries waved merrily to the looters, who waved back. No action was taken what so ever to disperse the mobs. Not even tear gas was used." See "Sri Lanka's Week of Shame: an Eyewitness Account," in *Race & Class* xxvi, no. i (1984): 41.
- 41 The phrase is, of course, from Ranajit Guha's classic essay, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency" in *Subaltern Studies* 2, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford, 1983): 1-44, but this section of my account, is especially indebted to Gyanendra Pandey's work that builds on Guha's essay. See "The Prose of Otherness" in *Subaltern Studies* 8 (*Essays in Honour of Ranajit Guha*) eds. David Arnold & David Hardiman (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- 42 Take for example: Canaganayagam Suriyakumaran, *The Anguish of '83': Sri Lanka's Ethnic Crisis and the Way Out, 1983-1990* (Colombo: K.V.G. de Silva, 1990); "Sri Lanka's Week of Shame: an Eyewitness Account," in *Race & Class* xxvi no. i (1984): 41 and L. Piyadasa, *Sri Lanka: the Holocaust and After* (London: Marram Books, 1984).
- 43 James Manor, ed., *Sri Lanka in Crisis and Change* (St. Martin's Press: New York, 1984)
- 44 This essay is the key disciplinary contribution in the pre-1983, post-1971 period. See James Manor, "The Failure of Political Integration in Sri Lanka (Ceylon), in *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 1, no. viii (1979): 21-46. His authoritative biography, *The Expedient Utopian: Bandaranaike and Ceylon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1990) was yet to be published.

- ⁴⁵ "I found myself desperately trying to make sense of that familiar paradox — the perpetration of evil by apparently nice, decent people," Jonathan Spencer, "Popular Perceptions of the Violence: A Provincial View," in ed. James Manor (1984): 187.
- ⁴⁶ Tambiah (1986): 1.
- ⁴⁷ Tambiah (1986): 19-33.
- ⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, "The Dangerous Individual" in *Michel Foucault — Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Routledge, 1988): 128, 132, 135.
- ⁴⁹ See Vittachi (1958): 44-50, 68-71 and 75-77.
- ⁵⁰ For example the category does not make the index of Obeyesekere's landmark study, *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984)
- ⁵¹ Joke Schrijvers' *Mother's for Life: Motherhood and Marginalization in the North Central Province of Sri Lanka* (Delft: Eburon, 1985) is an interesting example that marks that 'other' place of violence precisely because it is located in a completely different political narrative from the texts I am reading here. Her work is product of an important feminist intervention that names 'domestic conflict' as violence. I note, from the point of view of my argument, that the categorical emergence of violence is predicated, once again, on a political narrative. This is what enables Schrijvers reevaluation of Obeyesekere's pioneering "Pregnancy Craving (Dola-Duka) in Relation to Social Structure and Personality in a Sinhalese Village," *American Anthropologist* 65, no. 2 (April 1963) as a foundational (professional) ethnographic account of domestic violence. This is indeed apt, but Obeyesekere's original account, is not, however, staged around the category of 'violence'— and was not read as such by politically aware intellectuals at the time of its publication. It now is. I am grateful to Malathi de Alwis, Kumari Jayawardena, Gananath Obeyesekere and Joke Schrijvers for discussing this point with me in different contexts.
- ⁵² Tambiah (1986): 1992.
- ⁵³ For such an account of Tambiah's work see Jonathan Spencer, "The Past in the Present in Sri Lanka. A Review Article" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 2 (1995): 358-367. My response "Sri Lanka as Curative Project: Ordering and Authorizing a Post Colonial Scholarship" is forthcoming.
- ⁵⁴ My understanding of the intellectual field in question is indebted to conversations with Kumari Jayawardena, Michael Roberts and Ananda Wickremeratne all scholarly participants of the moment under discussion. The views expressed are my own interpretation of these conversations.
- ⁵⁵ Kithsiri Malalgoda, "Millennialism in Relation to Buddhism" *Ceylon Studies Seminar Paper* (Peradeniya: University of Ceylon, 1969)
- ⁵⁶ Gananath Obeyesekere, "Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon," *Modern Ceylon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1970): 43-63.
- ⁵⁷ Tissa Fernando, "Arrack, Toddy and Ceylonese Nationalism: Some Observations on the Temperance Movement, 1912-1921" in *Modern Ceylon Studies* 2, no. 2 (1971): 123-150.
- ⁵⁸ Michael Roberts, "Variations on the Theme of Resistance Movements: The Kandian Rebellion of 1817-18 and Latter Day Nationalisms in Ceylon," *Ceylon Studies Seminar Paper* (Peradeniya: University of Ceylon, 1972).

- ⁵⁹ Michael Roberts, *Collective Identities, Nationalisms and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Marga Institute, 1979).
- ⁶⁰ Social Scientists' Association, ed., *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1984)
- ⁶¹ Charles Abeysekera and Newton Gunasinghe, eds., *Facets of Ethnicity in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1987) Also important as a parallel intervention is the collection edited by scholars at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, *Sri Lanka: The Ethnic Conflict — Myths, Realities and Perspectives*, ed. Committee for Rational Development (Delhi: Navarang, 1984)
- ⁶² This tradition of scholarship continues in different institutional locations, under different political signs in present day Sri Lanka. See, for a very recent intervention Gunawardana's *Historiography in a Time of Ethnic Conflict: Construction of the Past in Contemporary Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1995).
- ⁶³ Tambiah (1986) Emphasis added.
- ⁶⁴ The text is also explicitly pedagogic, with an entire chapter entitled, "What Is to Be Done? A Prescription for the Future." See Tambiah (1986): 122-128.
- ⁶⁵ Tambiah (1992): 3.
- ⁶⁶ No sources are mentioned, but I believe Tambiah has Richard Gombrich in mind.
- ⁶⁷ Tambiah (1992): 3.
- ⁶⁸ Bernard Cohn, "The Command of Language and Language of Command" in ed. Ranajit Guha *Subaltern Studies* 4 (Delhi: Oxford, 1985): 276. It would be impossible to review the enormous literature on this subject here; landmarks in relation to South Asia would be, Cohn's *An Anthropologist Among the Historians* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990) and *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Ronald Inden's, *Imagining India* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, ed. Das (1990); and Carol Breckenridge and Peter Van der Veer ed. *Orientalism and the Post-Colonial Predicament* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).
- ⁶⁹ David Scott "Conversion and Demonism: Colonial Christian Discourse and Religion in Sri Lanka" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 2 (1992): 331-365, and "Religion in Colonial Civil Society: Buddhism and Modernity in Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka," in *The Thatched Patio* 7, no. 4 (1994): 1-16. These two texts, which are in my view, the most important extensions to Obeyesekere, 1963, and Malalgoda, 1976, ever attempted are unaccountably missed in Charles Hallisey's curious review essay, "Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravada Buddhism," in Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed., *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1995)
- ⁷⁰ Tambiah (1992): 125.
- ⁷¹ See for his most recent and complex account see "Buddhism, Nationhood, and Cultural Identity: A Question of Fundamentals," in *Fundamentalism Comprehended*, eds. Martin Marty & Scott Appleby (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1995).
- ⁷² Kapferer (1988) and Spencer, "Collective Violence..."(1990).

- ⁷³ Feldman (1990): 21. See for citations of Feldman's work, Das (1995): xx, Daniel (1996): 132 and Malkii (1995): 107. Michael Taussig (1992): 16, is both eloquent and forceful on the same point.
- ⁷⁴ Valentine Daniel, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996)
- ⁷⁵ Daniel (1996): 9.
- ⁷⁶ Daniel (1996): 6. My understanding of the positioning of violence here was greatly aided by the discussion at an ICES seminar on "Charred Lullabies" held in Colombo in June, 1994. I am grateful to Valentine Daniel for participating in that occasion.
- ⁷⁷ Daniel (1996): 6.
- ⁷⁸ The only coherence that Daniel can find in his chapters is the "movement of time itself" (1996): 7.
- ⁷⁹ All preceding quotations are from Daniel (1996): 209.
- ⁸⁰ Daniel (1996): 209.
- ⁸¹ Daniel (1996): 209, "This was in the early days of my horror-story collecting,..."
- ⁸² All preceding quotations are from Daniel (1996): 86-7, my emphasis.
- ⁸³ Daniel (1996): 87.
- ⁸⁴ Daniel (1996): 103.
- ⁸⁵ Daniel (1996): 103.
- ⁸⁶ Daniel (1996): 208.
- ⁸⁷ It is perhaps a reflection of this overall orientation that allows for this statement: "The flow of events in Sri Lanka, its unpredictable turns, and the *magnitude of its meaninglessness*, have made some of these concerns lose their earlier force and urgency." Daniel (1996): 6, my emphasis.
- ⁸⁸ Daniel (1996): 153.
- ⁸⁹ Daniel (1996): 6.
- ⁹⁰ This movement, through 'horror' to Auschwitz, occurs again in Daniel's text. See Daniel (1996): 211.

Animal Crackers*

Richard de Zoysa

(for Dimitri, when he is old enough to understand)

"Draw me a lion"
 So I set my pen
 to work. Produce a lazy, Kindly beast...
 Colour it yellow.

"Does it bite?"
 "Sometimes,
 but only when it's angry-
 if you pull its tail
 or say that it is just another cat...
 But for the most part indolent, biddable,
 basking in the sun of ancient pride.

(Outside the sunlight seems a trifle dulled
 and there's a distant roaring, like a pride
 of lions, cross at being awakened
 from long, deep sleep)

Then.
 "Draw me a tiger."
 Vision of a beast
 compounded of Jim Corbett yarns
 and Blake
 stalks through my mind, blazing Nature's warning,
 black bars on gold.
 "Draw!"
 You turn and draw the gun

on me, as if to show
that three-year-olds understands *force majeure*
and as you pull the silly plastic trigger
all hell breaks loose: quite suddenly the sky
is full of smoke and orange stripes of flame.

BUT HERE THERE ARE NO TIGERS
HERE THERE ARE ONLY LIONS.

And their jackals
run panting, rabid in the roaring's wake,
infecting all with madness as they pass
while My Lord
the Elephant sways in his shaded arbour,
wrinkles his ancient brows, and wonders-
If, did he venture out to quell this jungle-tide
of rising flame, he'd burn his tender feet.

"Put down the gun. If you do, and you're good,
I'll draw a picture of an elephant.
A curious beast that you must understand..."

DON'T LOOK OUT OF THE WINDOW-

"Just a party down the lane
A bonfire, and some fireworks, and they're burning-
No, not a tiger-just some silly cat."

Colombo, 25 July 1983

6

Ethnicity and Sinhala Consciousness*

Kumari Jayawardena

Introduction

In March 1883, Buddhists and Catholics were fighting each other on the streets of Colombo; in July 1983, there occurred the worst ethnic conflagration in the recent history of Sri Lanka, directed, this time, against the Tamils. These events and the experiences of similar outbursts against other minorities, prompted me to enquire into the persistence of such incidents in the colonial and post-colonial period, and the reasons for both the growth of ethnic consciousness among all classes and the decline of class consciousness among the working people of all ethnic groups.

In Sri Lanka, differences exist between groups of people of a religious, linguistic and ethnic nature. The majority is Buddhist by religion and Sinhala by ethnicity, but the non-Sinhala minorities form 26% and the non-Buddhists 33% of the population. In the last hundred years, violence has been directed against what have been called the 'un-Sinhala' (*asinhala*) and 'un-Buddhist' (*abaudha*) elements in Sri Lankan society. This study is concerned with examining briefly the continuing manifestations of Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism in relation to all other minority groups, the form this chauvinism has taken at different periods in the past, and the hegemonic nature of this ideology today among all social classes in Sri Lanka.

Recent Themes

The literature and propaganda directed against the Tamils from the 1970s onwards form an important source of information in analyzing the recent phase of Sinhala-Buddhist consciousness. I have taken some of the

frequent themes of this literature and will show that similar ideas have existed in earlier periods when Sinhala Buddhists were in conflict with other non-Tamil minority groups. The themes can be broadly classified as follows:

1. The doctrine of the primacy and superiority of the Sinhala as the original, true inhabitants of the island, linked to the myth that they were 'Aryan' migrants from Bengal. A publication of the 1980s states:

The Sinhala race has a clearly documented unbroken history of over 2500 years. There is no history older than the history of the Sinhala in Sri Lanka. That Sri Lanka belongs to the Sinhala race is not based on mythology or fables... Ancient rock inscriptions, inscriptions in gold, huge vihares and dagobas, statues of Lord Buddha sculptured out of rocks, tanks and irrigation systems all bear unshakable witness to the heritage of the the Sinhala nation. (Translated from *Kauda Kotiya? Who is the Tiger?* -undated, Colombo 1980).

2. An associated idea is that of a beleaguered island and the feeling that the Sinhalese are really a minority in the region, with no other country except Sri Lanka, unlike those minority groups which have ethnic and religious links with other countries.

The Sinhalese have no motherland other than Sri Lanka. The Indian trade union leaders, the Borah traders, other Indian traders, the Sindhi traders and most Tamil workers use Sri Lanka as a mine from which they obtain money and invest it in large houses and lands which they buy in the names of their children and close relatives in India. All of them live with one foot in India and the other in Sri Lanka. Their only loyalty to Sri Lanka is as a goldmine. They do not have any sympathy for Sinhala culture, language, Buddhism or Sinhala traditions. (Translated from *Sinhalayage Adisi Hatura* -The Unseen Enemy of the Sinhalese, Colombo 1970).

3. The concept that the Sinhala race has been placed in a special relationship to Buddhism as its protector. Appeals to save Buddhism

from 'infidels' or non-Buddhists are resorted to, and in recent years, calls for a *dharma yudhaya* (holy war) to protect Buddhist monuments and to preserve the Buddhist religion have been made.

The link between the Sinhala race and Buddhism is so close and inseparable that it has led to the maxim:

'There is no Buddhism without the Sinhalese and no Sinhalese without Buddhism.' This is an undeniable fact. The literature of the Sinhalese is Buddhist literature. The history of the Sinhalese is enriched by the doctrine of the Buddha. The 'Era' of the Sinhalese is the 'Buddha Era.' The culture of the Sinhalese is Buddhist culture. The flag of the Sinhalese is the Sinhala Buddhist flag.

With the establishment of Buddhism, Sinhala culture and civilization took on a new orientation. The life of the Sinhalese began to be guided by Buddhism. Recently there has been an organized movement of anti-Buddhist barbarians to destroy our invaluable archaeological ruins and Buddhist shrines.

It is undoubtable that future generations, as well as our forefathers who sacrificed their lives for the freedom of their race and for the glory of their religion, shall curse us for our silence. At least now, in the name of our forefathers and in the name of the unborn generations, let us all direct our attention to this situation. (Translated from *Sinhaluni Budu Sasuna Bera Ganew!* - Sinhala People, Save the Buddhist Religion, Colombo 1981)

Based on these concepts Sinhala-Buddhist ideology assumes that Sri Lanka is the land of Sinhala Buddhists who are the true *bhumiputra* (sons of the soil), and that all other groups are 'aliens' who are out to exploit the country and its people for their own gain, in the process sullyng the 'purity' and 'integrity' of the Sinhala-Buddhist people. That this charge is now laid against Tamils is evident from a recent quotation:

Not only is this non-Sinhala minority group trying to destroy the rights of the Sinhala people to their motherland in the most unjust

manner, but this group also perpetrates *numerous other injustices* on the unsuspecting, innocent Sinhala masses. (Translated from *Kauda Kotiya?* op. cit., emphasis added)

Other 'Injustices'

Two of these other 'injustices' have figured largely in fashioning Sinhala-Buddhist consciousness as it exists today:

- A. The perception that foreign or minority-owned business ventures have retarded the development of Sinhala business; calls are therefore made for privileges for Sinhala merchants and for measures against 'alien traders':

If this is a genuine national government it should appoint a Commission to look into the unfortunate situation of the Sinhala traders as a result of the influence of the Indians, and take remedial measures. Also, in order to save the Sinhala from the dangers created by foreigners and Indians controlling trade and large plantations in this country, they should be driven out forthwith.

In the central market in Colombo, the local Sinhala traders today do not control even 5% of the trade. Power is almost entirely in the hands of Indians, Borahs and Sindhis.

The export-import trade is completely in the hands of foreigners. A person who travels from Colombo Fort to Wellawatte could see how many Sindhi shops there are on either side of the Galle Road. Every single one of these trading establishments was started after an independent government was set up in Sri Lanka in 1948. (Translated from *Sinhalayage Adisi Hatura*, op. cit., 1970)

- B. There is also the very prevalent view that non-Sinhalese have an unfair share of government jobs and university places. Suggestions

are therefore made that recruitment and university admission should be on a system of ethnic quotas. To cite a popular document suggesting that Tamil students have entered the university illicitly:

From the time the Peradeniya University was set up, the ordinary people of this country have lost the opportunity of studying medicine, engineering and the other sciences. Who then were the students of Peradeniya University? They were Tamils.

The cry that educational facilities are the natural rights of the Sinhala was raised by such eminent persons as L.H. Methananda, Dr. F.R. Jayasuriya, and K.M.P. Rajaratna, who raised the issue in public. Because of this they were labeled racists. When monks such as Baddegama Wimalawansa and Devamottawe Amarawansa pointed out the injustice which was being perpetrated on the majority community, they were ridiculed and harassed. Today the majority community has realized how they have been deceived. (Translated from *Visvavidyalayata Hora Para - Illicit Entry into the University, Colombo 1970*)

... the important and serious question whether all the Tamil medium students who entered the Medical, Engineering, Science and other Faculties did so by improperly receiving excess marks comes forcefully into our minds. This is a burning question that painfully sears and violently explodes within the hearts of our Sinhala students, parents and teachers. (*A Diabolical Conspiracy, Colombo 1980*)

To understand these recent expressions of Sinhala-Buddhist sentiment and the way in which anti-minority feeling has been expressed over the years, some historical probing is necessary. Such an overview will show that although the ideology has remained more or less constant, the minority groups targeted for attack have been different over the years.

From Marxism to Chauvinism

One of the most crucial developments of the 1960s was the spread of chauvinist ideology among the working people, encouraged by the two main Marxist parties of Sri Lanka. One of the most important contributions to the political life of Sri Lanka by the Left parties had been their insistence on equal rights in the country's multi-ethnic society. Risking unpopularity, the Left, up to the mid-sixties, took an uncompromising stand in support of minority rights.

The Left parties also attempted to develop a rational secular consciousness, overriding such traditional and parochial identities as religion, caste and ethnicity. They emphasized the 'backwardness' of such identities, and, while taking no overt stand against religion, attempted to minimize its influence. They demonstrated their beliefs by stressing, in their political and trade union organizations, the importance of class unity; working within a class divided into several ethnic and religious and caste groups, they sought to emphasize class unity over all other considerations.

This strong insistence on class as opposed to ethnic consciousness was certainly a factor in keeping the larger part of the organized working-class away from pogroms against the minorities. But after the Left had legitimized appeals to ethnic consciousness, there was no important force to check the spread of Sinhala chauvinism among the working people. Thus the reversal of policies of the main Left parties, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Communist Party (CP) in the early sixties, meant that for the first time, the working class had no major political party to provide an alternative, non-chauvinist leadership.

In the 1920s, the trade union movement, led by A. E. Goonesinha, took a non-racist stand, even to the extent of supporting franchise rights for Indian plantation workers. When Goonesinha switched to chauvinism in the 1930s, his own earlier slogan - that the working class knew no barriers of caste, color, race, or creed - was taken up by the Left, and the LSSP firmly supported the rights of minorities. Up to the early 1960s, both the LSSP and CP took up non-chauvinist positions on all issues and made this an important concern of their politics. But by the mid-sixties, the tide had turned and racism not only gripped important sections of the masses, but also found its way into the main Left parties.

Ethnicity and Sinhala Consciousness

This reversal of Left policies on the ethnic issue was to have serious consequences. Whereas joining coalition governments could be defended as part of short-term strategies which could, on later analysis, even be identified as 'mistakes,' the resort to chauvinism by the Left was a betrayal of basic socialist principles.

The spread of chauvinism among the masses made the ethnic issue a useful weapon to prevent the class issue flaring up. The lines that are drawn are based on ethnicity and not class, and the polarization on ethnic lines between Sinhala and Tamil is a determining factor in keeping down and diverting the class tensions simmering in the South. The Sinhala workers of Sri Lanka, rather than being aroused to unite irrespective of ethnicity, with workers of minority groups, to bring about social change, were being urged to unite with other Sinhalese irrespective of class, to establish Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony in the country.

The temporary abandonment of the struggle for a secular class consciousness by the Left parties, opened the way for the infusion of chauvinist ideology into mass movements, and to a situation where ethnic consciousness seems to be the dominant constituent of popular ideology.

The Hartal of 1953

The political and economic upheavals of the 1950s were very crucial factors in the change from a principled non-racist position to an opportunist support of racist policies. The Sinhala-Buddhist sentiments that emerged in the 1950s were both chauvinist (directed against Tamils and Christians) and egalitarian (directed to the political elite and privileged groups). The assertion of such feelings was not unconnected to the prevailing critical economic situation of the 1950s. The issue of class consciousness as against ethnic consciousness was clearly posed in two contrasting 'mass' events of the 1950s - the hartal of 1953 and the ethnic riots of 1958 - both events being manifestations of a crisis ridden decade.

After the collapse of the economic boom of the early 1950s, for three decades Sri Lanka experienced serious economic problems linked with worsening terms of trade and rising unemployment. The effects of the crisis were being already felt by 1952 when there was a collapse of rubber prices and a serious fall in foreign exchange earnings. This

coincided with a shortage of rice and a dramatic rise in its price in 1953. During the late 1950s, the price and volume of imported goods rose, whereas the price of exports declined; domestic production was also severely affected by droughts and floods especially in 1956-57; and the situation was further aggravated by mounting unemployment.

The hartal or general stoppage of work which occurred in 1953 was one of the most important mass actions of the working people in Sri Lanka. In the post-World War years, there had been a great increase in militant action by the working class, including the massive general strikes of 1945, 1946 and 1947, led by the Left parties. Workers of all ethnic groups joined in these struggles, and the death of a Tamil clerk, Kandasamy, when police fired against the strikers, in 1947, was annually commemorated by the trade unions in later years.

Although the 1947 strike was smashed by the government, the militancy of the workers was only temporarily subdued, and erupted again in 1953, when the government drastically cut the rice subsidy which led to a very sharp increase in its price. On 26th July 1953, a mass protest rally was held on Galle Face green which the police tear-gassed. The 24 hour hartal on August 12th met with an immediate and unexpected response. The urban working people of all ethnic groups joined the protest by leaving their workplaces; in many parts of the country there was an impressive and militant response from the rural masses (especially in the South). People stopped all transport, barricaded roads, paralyzed the railways, and resisted the forces of law and order, resulting in 11 deaths and widespread arrests. As the LSSP *Young Socialist* wrote:

Although the hartal was limited to a 24-hour period its effects were far reaching on the consciousness of the people and the political temper in the country... it led to the eventual resignation... of the Prime Minister... In the political life of the people it produced a qualitative change and built up in them the confidence that their united strength could determine... the fate of governments... [T]he repercussions of the Hartal were evident three years later at the polls when the UNP was unceremoniously dethroned. (*Young Socialist*, No.2 1961)

This was the view from the Left - namely that the MEP victory of 1956 was linked to the upsurge of mass action. The same analysis of the lessons of the hartal was that:

Capitalism cannot assure the wellbeing of the masses; only a bold socialist policy will secure the economic cooperation of the masses and lift the country out of its economic stagnation. History can yet repeat itself and the fund of mass patience is not inexhaustible. (ibid)

The optimistic analysis failed to foresee the impending change of line of the Left and the emergence of ethnic rather than class consciousness in the 1960s. In 1958, the country was plunged into ethnic violence, in which sections of the masses also participated, and history was indeed to repeat itself, not in class actions but in ethnic carnage, in 1977, 1981 and 1983.

Much has been spoken about the 'betrayal' of the Left parties in joining coalitions with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in 1964-65 and again in 1970-75. But the real betrayal was not so much in their short period of participation in coalition governments, but in their succumbing to chauvinism and dividing the working people along ethnic as opposed to class lines. In doing this the Left went against the basic non-racist principles it had consistently and forcefully advocated for twenty-five years. One of the most eloquent of the LSSP leaders, Colvin R. de Silva, had denounced racism in 1958, as "Neanderthalian recidivism."

I am confident in my knowledge... that large numbers of people, who in 1956 were not ready even to contemplate giving Tamil any place at all, today say in this desperate way: 'Well, if the only way we can go forward is by making Tamil also an official language let us do it.' My hon. Friends say, 'If you do it, you will have a Sinhalese communalist uprising... But I say that if we place faith in... those large masses of the country who are sick and tired to death of these communal conflicts, if we would rely on them and have the courage of our convictions to act along the lines of relying on them, this can be achieved. (Wanasinghe, 1966).

Instead of giving this leadership to the masses, however, the Left was caught up in strategies designed to obtain electoral success and ensure some sharing of power. From the working-class point of view, there had been two historic events in 1963, the formulation of the 21 demands of the working-class by the Joint Committee of Trade Union Organizations, representing a wide section of urban and plantation trade unions, and the coming together, for the first time, of the Left parties (LSSP, CP and VLSSP) in a United Left Front in August 1963, which aroused the enthusiasm of the radical forces in the country. But in June 1964, both platforms crumbled when the LSSP accepted 3 portfolios in the Bandaranaike government. At the election of 1965, this coalition was defeated and the UNP formed a government with support from the Federal Party (FP), which had returned 14 MPs from the Northern and Eastern provinces. The joining of forces between the UNP and Tamil politicians of the FP, and the support for the government from the two appointed members of the Ceylon Workers Congress, unleashed a wave of communalism in the country; this backlash was encouraged, as an issue of political opposition to the UNP, not only by parties like the SLFP, but also by the LSSP and the CP. The view from the Left was as follows:

On one side was the united front of the LSSP and CP. Only the Sinhala Buddhists supported them. Who supported the UNP? Local and foreign capitalists, Indians led by Thondaman, Tamils led by Ponnambalam, the Catholic Church, Muslims who were against the trade policy of the coalition government, thuppahi elements who do not support our national culture, capitalist newspapers, all of them backed the UNP. The UNP was able to get a majority of seats because in addition they received the support of Sinhala Buddhists who do not have a clear understanding of Buddhist Philosophy. Thus the Coalition received the unsullied votes of the people of this country. The UNP received the votes of the minorities and a small section of the majority community. (Editorial, *Janasathiya*, 28 March 1965, quoted in Wanasinghe 1966).

Thus did the Sinhala chauvinism of the Left hit out against all minorities - in short against all un-Buddhist, un-Sinhala elements of the population.

Significantly, by this date the Left had also begun to use the word *thuppahi* (a derogatory term meaning half-caste, without cultural roots), not dissimilar to Anagarika Dharmapala's "infidels of degraded race." In an article, "Nation grieves at Sinhala New Year," a Left paper the *Janamathaya* (9 April 1965) wrote:

How can we celebrate Sinhalese New Year at a time when the nation has been betrayed by an alliance of the UNP, the Catholic Church, Singleton Salmon, Thondaman, and the Federalists?

The Sinhalese nation will weep during this Sinhalese New Year. The people who love the nation, the motherland and language will lament. (Wanasinghe, 1966: 122)

Ethnic hostility in the 1960s thus spread to many sections of the Sinhala population including the working class; it was directed mainly against Sri Lankan Tamils, Christians, and Indian Tamils. In all these instances, chauvinists in the Left were responsible for promoting ethnic antagonism among the working peoples, even though important sections of the workers were Tamils and the Sinhala working-class included Christians.

Against Christians

In the 1960s, the Christians once again became the targets of attack. There had been a Buddhist revival directed against the privileges of the Christian elite in the 1950s. In the spirit of Anagarika Dharmapala, the profession of Christianity was associated with immorality, drunkenness and alien 'vices' and the banned scurrilous pamphlet of the early 20th-century, *Kanni Mariyage Hati* (The Truth about the Virgin Mary) was republished in the 1950s. In the election campaign of 1956, the MEP had skillfully drawn on these prejudices; the sensational political poster of the period showed the Buddha being challenged by the evil hordes of Mara John Kotelawela with belly-dancers, drunks, cow slaughterers, ballroom dancers, urban socialites, and, significantly, Americans doling out dollars, with a church featured in the background. (See visual).



'The fight against the forces of evil 2,500 years ago and now. In this year of buddha Jayanthi, rescue your country, your race and your religion from the forces of evil' — a skillful combination of traditional lore and contemporary politics. (Wriggins 1960: 357)

The Left was also involved in this campaign against Christians, whose image as 'enemies' was further reinforced by the resistance of sections of Christians to the takeover of their schools by government in 1960. Instead of limiting their criticism to the conservative elements of the Christian clerical hierarchy, who opposed radical changes, Christians as a whole were denounced and vilified as 'anti-national' by the Left.

In the mid-sixties, Left newspapers frequently indulged in anti-Christian attacks. The LSSP paper *Janasathiya* in 1965 had headings such as "Catholics help illicit immigrants to escape Army net" (18 July) and "Buddhist G.A. transferred and a Catholic appointed" (20 Oct). Stories that Christians were unfairly taking high office were also publicized in *Janasathiya*: "Catholic influence has begun to spread... In addition to appointing two Catholics and one Protestant to three of the highest posts in Parliament, they have appointed Catholics for the post of Mayor and deputy-Mayor in Colombo" (11 April). The CP was no less virulent; its paper, the *Aththa* of 9 April 1965, under the editorial caption "No place for Buddhists," also commented on the fact that the Speaker and Chairmen of some committees in parliament were Christian (Wanasinghe, 1965: 120-123)

Against Plantation Workers

Left parties also supported the Sirima-Shastri pact of 1964 between the Sri Lanka and Indian governments, under which Sri Lankan citizenship was to be given to 300,000 persons of Indian origin, with 650,000 to be repatriated, ostensibly on a voluntary basis. This was clearly a shift of position from the Left's earlier uncompromising policies towards plantation labour. When the UNP government of 1965 received the support of the Ceylon Workers Congress, and its leaders Thondaman and Annamalai were made appointed members of parliament, the Left attacks on plantation workers and their leaders took a chauvinist turn.

The *Aththa*, reflecting CP opinion, was at the forefront of this campaign, making allegations that the government was giving concessions to the minorities and that the repatriation of plantation workers under the Sirima-Shastri Pact was threatened. Some of the *Aththa* headings left no doubt about their line. Referring to Sirima Bandaranaike's electoral defeat and Indian workers' repatriation, the paper attributed the phrase

"Before Meenachchi could be sent Sirimavo was chased out" to Thondaman the CWC leader (30 Mar. 1965) and "Thondaman leaves for India like a Chola King who has conquered Lanka" was another story in the same issue.

The LSSP *Janadina* also tried to rouse hostility towards plantation workers, even raising the question of voluntary repatriation, thereby implying that the Sirima-Shastri agreement had an element of forced repatriation of these workers to India. It wrote, under the heading "Another secret pact - concessions to Thondaman":

Political observers believe that Mr. Dudley Senanayake has entered into an agreement with Mr. Thondaman as well. One of the main conditions of that agreement is that only those who volunteer will be repatriated. (29 Nov. 1966, quoted in Wanasinghe 1966:219)

Against Sri Lankan Tamils

The main thrust of the Left propaganda of the period was, however, directed against the demands of the Federal Party and its leaders. The campaign was conducted on a basis of virulent Sinhala chauvinism and all the prejudices of the majority community were revived.

The LSSP *Janadina* led the racist onslaught. Some of its headings in 1965 included: "A secret attempt to make Ratmalana a Tamil Town" (6 July); "Federalists win: English Rules; Sinhala finished" (23 July); "Sinhala in the North in danger" (25 August) (Wanasinghe 1966:21317). On the question of the attempts to frame regulations on the use of Tamil in the North and East to ease the ethnic problem (the Dudley-Chelvanayakam Pact), the *Janadina* wrote, under the heading "Tear the Pact":

Patriotic organizations are making rapid preparations to hold a series of meetings throughout the country to mobilize public protest against the Dudley-Chelvanayakam pact which betrays the birthright of the Sinhalese. (23 Nov. 1965, quoted in Wanasinghe 1966: 218)

It would have been difficult during this period to distinguish the LSSP and CP Sinhala journals from the typical racist writing of the Sinhala-Buddhist press. To give only one example, on 5 December 1965 the *Janadina* wrote:

The Tri Sinhala Awakens - Three Processions to Save the Country. The Pancha Maha Bala Vegaya is now making preparations to have processions to the holy places in the Tri Sinhala starting from the statue of Vihara Mahadevi at Victoria Park. This step is to show public protest to the Dudley-Chelvanayakam pact which betrays the birthright of the Sinhalese to the Tamils.

Racist slogans to weaken and discredit the government were even introduced by the Left into the processions and speeches on May Day 1965 - the main cry being '*Dudleyge badai masalavadi*' (Dudley has swallowed *masalavadi*) - a racist reference to the support given by the Federal party to the government. Apart from this sullyng of the historic workers day by Sinhala chauvinist slogans, the Left was also involved in the National Day of Mourning on 8 January 1966, which had been planned to include a general strike and a display of black flags, as well as an oath to defend the rights of the Sinhalese to be taken by MPs before Vihara Maha Devi's statue. There was not a great response to the call for a strike and black flags, but a crowd, which marched to parliament crying "*Para Demalu apata epa*" (Down with the outcaste Tamils) after the oath-taking ceremony, was stopped at Kollupitiya, where police firing killed a Buddhist monk. Emergency was declared by the government, which used the occasion to victimize the workers (Wanasinghe 1966:223-24).

Thus the Left, whose main contribution to the political life of the country had been to promote a democratic and socialist ideology that was essentially non-chauvinist and based on class unity and class action, was to lead the working-class, not only into coalition governments with chauvinists, but also more dangerously, into racist politics. The long years of struggle in building up class-consciousness among a multi-ethnic working class were forgotten and, instead, the poisoning influence of racism was injected into the system, resulting in sections of the working class participating in subsequent pogroms that occurred in the country.

The JVP and the Ethnic Question

By 1965, the main Left parties had succumbed to racist politics, and by the 1970s and early 1980s, the hegemony of Sinhala chauvinism was

such that it included virtually all classes in society. Once the policies of working-class parties had become chauvinist and such sentiments were being propagated and diffused through the Left newspapers read by the masses, it was difficult to counteract chauvinism which permeated Sinhala working people-both urban and rural. Even the largest of the alternative groups, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which was formed in 1965-66 and led the 1971 uprising of youth in an attempt to capture political power, also basically appealed to Sinhala sentiments.

The JVP consisted of several splinter groups mainly from the 'Peking wing' Communist Party, which came together to form a revolutionary party, opposed to the 'revisionism' and 'betrayal' of the Old Left, which in 1964 had joined the SLFP government of Sirima Bandaranaike. The new party was essentially a Sinhala party, being confined to the Sinhala-speaking areas, with only a handful of supporters among Tamils. It was composed mainly of youth of the rural petty bourgeoisie and poor peasantry. Most of the JVP activists were products of the Sinhala-language education stream, with secondary education qualifications, but little prospect of suitable employment. In G.B. Keerawella's definition, the JVP uprising of 1971, was the "Leftist challenge of the younger radical elements of the crisis-ridden petty bourgeoisie." (Keerawella 1980:48)

Economic Crisis and Political Unrest

Sri Lanka continued to face an economic crisis in the late 1960s. Terms of trade kept on deteriorating and the decline of foreign exchange earnings led to import controls, resulting in increased prices and shortages of essential goods. Investment slowed down and unemployment (and under-employment) reached record heights. As foreign aid was insufficient to bridge the trade deficit during these years, the government resorted to heavy borrowing from abroad. The crisis led to a reduction in subsidies and welfare services, and in November 1968, under IMF pressure, the rice subsidy was reduced and the rupee devalued.

The resulting sharp rise in prices affected the living standards of the working classes and the petty bourgeoisie. The late 1960s was also a period of increasing labor unrest; strikes occurred in the plantation and urban sectors and in both private and state-owned firms. In addition,

these were years of continuous, militant student agitation in the universities and unrest among the youth of the country.

In the massive election landslide of July 1970, when the UNP was badly defeated, sections of the JVP supported the victorious United Front of the SLFP and Left parties. But the JVP, being disillusioned with the programmes of the new government, prepared for an armed insurrection. State repression of the JVP also became severe, and insurrection broke out in April 1971. After some initial successes by the JVP, the state forces were able to reassert themselves and the insurrection was suppressed with a great deal of ferocity.

JVP Ideology

It is not surprising that, in spite of the revolutionary slogans of the NP and their internationalism, as seen in their admiration for the Cuban revolution and the example of Che Guevara, the JVP in its early years had a fairly strong element of Sinhala chauvinism. In 1971, of the 14 Politbureau members of the JVP, all were Sinhala and mainly Buddhist, most of them from the strongly nationalist and radical regions of the South of Sri Lanka. They were mostly products of Buddhist schools in southern provincial towns. With one exception, they were in their twenties, and had grown up during the years of the 'Sinhala Only' agitation of the mid-1950s, the ethnic riots of 1958, and the mounting chauvinism against the minorities even of the Left parties in the early 1960s. The ideology of the JVP has been defined as not strictly MarxistLeninist, "but an eclectic mixture consisting of various elements of Stalinism, Maoism, Castroism, Guevarism etc." (Keerawella 1980:46). This definition, however, omits one of the key elements of its ideology, namely Sinhala nationalism, which evoked a response in the petty bourgeoisie-which was the social base of the JVP.

Indian Expansionism

One of the important lessons of the JVP's programs of indoctrination-the famous 'Five Lessons'-was on 'Indian Expansionism,' an idea taken from the Maoists. According to the 'lesson, 'the thrust for Indian expansion in

the region derived from the needs of Indian big capital which operated in Sri Lanka through several interrelated factors, namely trade, the smuggling of goods, the Federal Party, the "We Tamil" movement, Indian cultural expansionism, illicit immigration, and Indian plantation labor. The background to this lecture was a historical narration of South Indian incursions into Sri Lanka from the 4th century B.C. Thus the modern threat to Sri Lanka from Indian expansionism was set in the context of Sinhala nationalism and was seen as a continuation of ancient threats to the Sinhala people from South India. The approach was totally ahistorical and sought to tap the prejudices of the JVP's petty-bourgeois base.

The arguments were as follows:

- (i) Indian capital dominates and even monopolizes some sectors of the export-import trade. These capitalists have their bases in India and their exploitative activities in Sri Lanka are designed to contribute to the development of the Indian capitalist class.
- (ii) These capitalists also engage in contraband. Goods are smuggled between the two countries, to the detriment of Sri Lanka's finances.
- (iii) The Federal Party, seen as an extension of the "We Tamil" movement of South India, which aims at uniting all Tamils everywhere, was thus virtually a fifth column, and agents of a foreign power.
- (iv) Cultural penetration, through films, magazines and music, is one of the facets of Indian expansionism. All Tamils in Sri Lanka look on the South Indian film star, M.G.Ramachandran, as a heroic figure.

Plantation Labor

The crucial part of this lecture on 'Indian Expansionism,' however, dealt with JVP attitudes towards plantation labor. It was alleged that plantation workers, who had been brought to Sri Lanka by the British to serve imperialist interests, lived in the best parts of Sri Lanka and enjoyed benefits like housing, education and health facilities; their conditions and living standards were superior to those of Sinhala peasants engaged

in slash and burn (*chena*) cultivation; and their political loyalty as well as cultural and social links were still with their homelands in India.

With regard to plantations, the JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera is reported to have said: "The tea bush has killed and replaced the paddy plant, the rubber tree has killed and replaced the kurakkan plant" (*Janatha Sangamaya*, 1980:96). Therefore the plantation sector had to be destroyed in order to build up a self-sufficient economy in Sri Lanka. In response to questions about the possibility of drawing in plantation labor into the revolutionary movement, Wijeweera argued that no revolutionary movement could succeed if it was heavily based on the support of national minorities. He cited the example of the Iraqi Communist Party, which had based itself on Kurdish support and had been wiped out by the Ba'ath Party.

It was also alleged that plantation Tamils still referred to Tamil Nadu as *Thainadu* (mother country) and revered Indians like Gandhi and Nehru. The general argument was that their interests were not linked to Sri Lanka and that they could not be mobilized for the Sri Lankan revolution. It was also stressed that the problem of plantation labour could not be looked at in isolation; it was necessary to place it in the context of 'Indian expansionism.'

In discussing their role after the revolution, the JVP argued that, if these workers became Sri Lankan citizens, and did not oppose the closing down of the plantations, the party would welcome them. If not, they would have to be treated as counter-revolutionaries and fought, even though they were workers. It was argued by analogy that Stalin fought the German army, even though that army was composed, in the main, of members of the German proletariat. On the question of the JVP line towards the plantation workers, a commentator in the *Lankan Guardian* wrote:

This posture of the JVP was so absurd that the most exploited segment of the Sri Lankan proletariat was portrayed as an agent of the Indian monopoly bourgeoisie, while simultaneously counterposing it to the other exploited sections of our society such as the *chena* cultivators. So much for the worker-peasant alliance. (*Lanka Guardian*, 15 Jan. 1979)

Chauvinist Attitudes

In the "Five Lessons," the approach of the JVP to the minorities was based on the Sinhala-chauvinist view which regards Sindhi and Borah merchants, Tamil capitalists, Tamil workers and peasants, and Indian Tamil estate labor as one homogeneous group with extra-territorial loyalty. No attempt was made to distinguish between Tamils on a class basis. This was synonymous with the ideology of Sinhala chauvinism which regards all non-Sinhala people, of whatever class, as aliens out to exploit the 'sons of the soil' and debase their culture. The fact that this attitude was central to JVP ideology is also demonstrated by their further acceptance of some Sinhala myths; for example, Sinhala-Tamil differences were referred to as having a historic genesis in 'Arya-Anarya' conflicts. The harijans of the North were described as descendants of Sinhalese subsequently enslaved by the Tamils. In their recounting of the colonial period and of resistance to colonial powers, reference was made only to resistance from Sinhala people.

Further, the proposed solution for the ethnic problem revealed the JVP's strong commitment to Sinhala nationalism. The party advocated the reallocation of the country's population so that Sinhalese and Tamils would be dispersed all over the island. It was claimed that this would eliminate the ethnic problem, which largely derived from the occupation of geographical areas by different ethnic groups. It is obvious that this 'final solution' was based on a theory of assimilation whereby the Tamil minority would be gradually absorbed into the Sinhala majority.

Thus, in the mid-1970s, JVP ideology with regard to the ethnic question was consistent with mass Sinhala consciousness as we have defined it. One inevitable result of this ideology was that the JVP, although claiming to be a Left party, did not either pose problems in class terms or seek the support of the minorities; it remained essentially a Sinhala party. This was reflected in the fact that the 1971 insurrection was confined to the Sinhala areas of the country.

Change of Policy

Following the defeat of the 1971 insurrection and the selfcriticism in the party during the subsequent period, the JVP changed its line on the

ethnic question. The lecture on 'Indian expansionism' was dropped from the program of instruction. The earlier adherence to a nationalist line was blamed on Stalinist and Maoist influences on JVP thinking. This self-criticism was extended to the point of describing patriotism as a non-Marxist, chauvinist concept. A long self-critical essay published by the party referred to: "The dark chapter in our history when revolutionary Marxist teachings were ignored, when class collaboration replaced class struggle, when narrow chauvinism and patriotism replaced internationalism" ("Let us look at April 1971 self-critically" *Niyamuwa* publication, in Sinhala, 4).

The JVP at this stage accepted that the Tamil people formed a nation; that they were subject to oppression by the majority; and that they were entitled to the right of self-determination even to the point of secession. However, the party did not advocate secession, it believed that the problems of the Tamil nation could only be solved within the framework of a socialist Sri Lanka. It had, in the interim, no plan of action as regards this question. There were thus serious theoretical and practical shortcomings to the position adopted by the JVP during this period. It resulted, however, in some activity among both Sri Lankan and plantation Tamils and the involvement of some Tamils in JVP activities: Tamils also appeared in the lists of candidates put forward by the JVP for district council and municipal elections; for example, their candidate for deputy mayor in Colombo, in the Municipal elections of 1981, was a Tamil.

This line did not last, however, and in recent years, the party has again given in to the rising tide of Sinhala chauvinism. This is apparent from many statements on this question made by the party since 1982. In its Presidential campaign in October 1982, the JVP maintained what was called a 'strategic silence' on the ethnic issue. This silence has since then been transformed into the adoption of attitudes in no way different from those of other Sinhala chauvinists. One needs only to refer to the statements issued in 1984, for the 13th anniversary of the April uprising, denouncing the Round Table Conference and rejecting all suggestions of solving the ethnic issue through devolution.

These attitudes are confirmed in another document issued in 1984 by Rohana Wijeweera entitled "A Message to the People of Sri Lanka." It is interesting that this document also takes over some of the emotional rhetoric of Sinhala extremism, expressing opposition to any devolution of power to the Tamil people:

We are also totally opposed to the secret attempts being made by the government, on the basis of the Round Table Conference and behind the backs of the people, to foist on the country a federal solution. Federalism, as has been shown in the case of India, will only help to further separatist tendencies. We are for a unitary state where all will enjoy equal rights.

The political struggles of the TULF as well as the activities of Tamil militant groups are seen as an imperialist plot by the JVP. As the message melodramatically puts it: "The JVP and I [Rohana Wijeweera] are totally opposed to any imperialist attempt to divide the country. As long as the JVP exists, as long as I live, we shall not allow any imperialist force to divide the country." The message concludes: "I have not fled from Sri Lanka. I shall not abandon the country and the nation (*rata saha jathiya*) when the nation is in peril... we are prepared to make any sacrifice to preserve the country and the nation from the great danger it is now facing." (Since the Sinhala word '*Jathiya*' also means race, the question arises as to whether Wijeweera by *jathiya* meant the Sinhala race.)

The inability of the older Left parties to maintain a firm position on the question of minorities, in the face of a rising Sinhala ethnic consciousness, is detailed in the last chapter. The JVP, which began as a corrective to Left opportunism, treads the same path. It has now adopted both the values and the rhetoric of Sinhala chauvinism. It even opposes any meaningful devolution of power, ironically, at a time when the 'Old Left' parties (LSSP & CP) were moving towards a more rational position. The important question, however, is the persisting strength of ethnic consciousness and the power it has to override all other differences including class. This is precisely the theoretical problem before the Left today.

The Hegemony of Sinhala-Buddhist Ideology in the 1970s

Earlier chapters have discussed the formation of Sinhala-Buddhist ideology over a century—from the lone voice of Anagarika Dharmapala and others during the height of colonial rule, to the late 1970s when this ideology became dominant among the Sinhala people. Its hegemonic nature was such that it covered all classes among the Sinhala Buddhists and all

major political parties of the South. What is more, Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony became legitimized through its incorporation into the two Constitutions of 1972 and 1978. Sri Lanka then became in constitutional terms the *Sinhaladvipa* and the *Dharmadvipa*—the land of a 'chosen' people, the Sinhala, who had pledged to preserve and protect the 'chosen' faith, Buddhism.

All-Class Hegemony

In the 1970s and early 1980s, there was a determined chauvinist propaganda campaign designed to appeal to all sections of Sinhala Buddhists. While many issues were raised to arouse the Buddhists in general, certain specific 'grievances' were promoted in order to mobilize specific classes—the Sinhala bourgeoisie, the working-class, and the peasantry. The propaganda was carried on in Sinhala; and documents of various Sinhala organizations were circulated in the post or by hand, never actually openly sold in the bookshops or news-stands, but nevertheless reaching influential sections of the Sinhala people. However, other chauvinist material was continually published in the daily Sinhala newspapers and several leading Buddhist monks were also active in publishing agitational papers and journals; thus by the early 1980s, hardly any section of the Sinhala population remained unaffected by the agitation of the Sinhala-Buddhist crusaders.

The Buddhist Crusade

In the campaign to whip up Buddhist feelings, the most highlighted issue was that of archaeological remains of Buddhist shrines in the northern and eastern areas. Based on the view that only Sinhalese were Buddhists (thereby totally ignoring the earlier existence of Tamil Buddhists and the fact that many early Buddhist scholars and commentators were Tamils), the Sinhala Buddhists were even urged to wage a *dharma yudhaya* (holy war) for the preservation of these Buddhist sites.

It is no secret that the archaeological ruins of the Northern province, which was a part of the *Raja Rata* in the days of the Sinhala Kings, and of the Eastern Province, which was a part of the ancient state of *Rohana*, have faced the threat

of destruction for quite some time. If we permit this destruction to go on any longer, shutting our eyes to it or engage selfishly in our own personal affairs, we will be supporting this anti-Sinhala, anti-Buddhist campaign which is directed towards completely erasing and destroying all traces of Sinhala Buddhist culture from the areas. (*Sinhalauni Budu Sasuna Bera ganiw*, op cit 1981: 13)

This was an effort not only to rebut the claims of Sri Lankan Tamils to a 'traditional homeland' but also to warn the Buddhists about the dire consequence of separatism.

If Sri Lanka is divided into two, into Sinhala and Tamil areas, many famous old Buddhist places of worship such as Seruwila, Deegavapi, Kiri Vehara and Naga Dipa as well as those shrines which are not covered by the jungle, would fall into the hands of the Tamils. (*Sinhalayage Adisi Hatura*, op. cit 1970: 48)

Arousing the Peasantry

In the specific attempts made to arouse various classes and groups of Sinhalese, by raising issues that were likely to agitate them, the Sinhala peasantry of the Kandyan district was set up against plantation workers.

Politically these workers had for many years been deprived of their rights, but after 1964, a section had received citizenship while others had been repatriated; but the old bogey that the plantation workers would politically, economically, and culturally 'swamp' the Sinhalese was resurrected as a theme of racist literature.

... By conferring citizenship rights on a large and rapidly growing community such as the Tamil-speaking Indian plantation workers, we see that Sinhala culture, Buddhism and the up-country villager will all vanish in the not so distant future. (ibid: 5-7)

Arousing the Traders

Similarly, much of the propaganda directed against traders and shopkeepers of minority groups found a ready response among their

Sinhala competitors both from the petty bourgeoisie, and from the higher levels of Sinhala entrepreneurs.

A fact that should be especially mentioned here is that the wholesale and retail trade [which was about 68 years ago in the hands of the Sinhalese in Colombo as well as in the Uva, Sabaragamuwa and Central regions] is now completely in the hands of Indian nationals. This has not happened spontaneously. It is a result of an organized move by Indian trade unions and other organizations to supply Indians with cash and other necessities to purchase Sinhalese-owned business enterprises and buildings. Because of this farseeing and organized plan of the Indians, the number of Sinhalese traders has been reduced by about 90% and they have been replaced by a similar number of Tamil traders. (ibid)

Arousing the Youth

Another important section of opinion-makers who were prone to racism, and at whom much of the racist propaganda was directed, were students, youth, and parents of prospective graduates. These sections of the population were made to understand that there was a 'diabolical conspiracy' of Tamils to deprive Sinhala youth of both higher education and prestigious employment. In a situation of intense competition, where very large numbers of students competed for a few thousand university places each year, and where the results of university examinations determined future careers, the allegations of conspiracy by Tamil teachers to give Tamil students higher marks, became indeed a "burning question... exploding within the hearts of our Sinhala students, parents and teachers" (*Diabolical Conspiracy*, 1980: 23 emphasis added).

With the expansion of education concurrently with the aggravation of the economic situation and the contraction of the number of jobs available in proportion to the number of graduates, it is not surprising that the ethnic battleground shifted to the arena of education and that both the petty bourgeoisie and sections of the Sinhala bourgeoisie became involved in the issue. The chauvinist sentiments of Sinhala professionals became linked to the keen competition for education and employment.

Thus, apart from a minute number of radicals and members of the intelligentsia, elements among Sinhala workers, peasants, students and youth, and the bourgeoisie (of large merchants, entrepreneurs and professionals) were influenced by Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism.

The conflicts between Sinhala and minority groups, which have now become the basis of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism, could be summarized as follows:

- (a) Competition between Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim merchant capital, industrialists and other large-scale interests which have increased with the 'open' economy since 1977.
- (b) Competition between professionals of the Sinhala and Tamil communities.
- (c) Competition between small businessmen, shopkeepers and petty traders of all communities.
- (d) Competition for limited job opportunities between Sinhalese and Tamils in white-collar jobs.
- (e) An intense scramble for place in schools and universities and the increase in bitter communal recriminations between Sinhalese and Tamils on the issue of education.
- (f) The prevalence among the working class of antagonism to minority workers in a period of inflation, unemployment and continuous racist propaganda in the Sinhala press.
- (g) Antagonism between rural Sinhalese and plantation workers, as well as trade and employment rivalry and increased racist propaganda.

Constitutional Enshrinement of Sinhala Buddhism

While the propaganda war against the Tamil minority was being intensified in the 1970s, Sinhala-Buddhist ideology became constitutionally legitimized in the two new constitutions of the decade, the 1972 Constitution of the Bandaranaike government and the 1978 Constitution of the Jayewardene government.

The massive electoral victory in 1970 of the United Left Front (composed of the SLFP, LSSP, and CP), led by Sirima Bandaranaike,

had raised hopes of a solution to the ethnic problem which had by then become critical. But instead, the minorities were further disillusioned during the Bandaranaike government (1970-77), and were especially disappointed by the new Republican Constitution of 1972. Its author, Dr Colvin R. de Silva, leader of the LSSP, who was Minister of Constitutional Affairs, had laid great emphasis on the radical content of the constitution. But for the minorities, the 'socialist democracy' envisaged in the constitution was seen to be confined to Sinhala Buddhists and could not, by definition, be either socialist or very democratic. In 1977, after the landslide victory of the UNP, which was followed by communal rioting against Tamils including plantation workers, a new constitution was adopted in 1978, which ostensibly gave more rights to the minorities and was said to be based on 'democratic socialism.' But there is no question that the 1978 Constitution, too, continued to give primacy to the Sinhala Buddhists, and saw the beginnings of the decline of democracy.

Sinhala Only

The constitution in force from independence in 1948 to 1972 had neither enumerated fundamental rights nor made any declaration on language or religion; but under the important Section 29(b & c) of this constitution, parliament could not enact laws which made "persons of any community or religion liable to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of other communities or religions are not made liable"-nor could parliament "confer on persons of any community or religion a privilege or advantage which is not conferred on persons of other communities or religion."

The Constitution of 1972 abrogated these safeguards to minorities. The principle of 'Sinhala Only,' which had been in existence for 16 years, was enshrined in the Constitution by a provision that: "The Official Language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala as provided by the Official Language Act of 1956" (Section 7). Regarding the Tamil language, it was stated that: "The use of the Tamil language should be in accordance with the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958," adding that any regulations under this Act "shall not in any manner be interpreted as being a provision of the Constitution." Thus, while Sinhala was to be given a special constitutional status as the 'Official Language,' the status of Tamil was to be treated as governed by ordinary legislation.

In addition, the 1972 Constitution stated that "all laws shall be enacted or made in Sinhala," with a Tamil translation, and that "the language of the courts... shall be Sinhala". There was provision for parliament to make alternate provisions in the North and East only in the case of courts exercising original jurisdiction with provisions for persons in these areas to submit petitions and participate in the proceedings in Tamil.

The 1978 Constitution, however, made some significant changes in this respect; while Sinhala continued constitutionally to be the official language, Sinhala and Tamil were both accepted as 'national languages.' While Sinhala was to be the language of administration and the language of the courts throughout Sri Lanka, there was provision for Tamil to be used for administrative purposes and in the transaction of business by public institutions; provision was made for laws to be published in both languages, and for the exercise of original jurisdiction in Tamil in the Northern and Eastern provinces.

In spite of these provisions, the Constitution clearly provided for a privileged and primary status for Sinhala and relegated the minority language to a secondary role.

Buddhism Only

Special privileges were accorded to Buddhism by the Constitution of 1972 which declared under Section (6) that: "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster Buddhism while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Section 18(1) (d) 'that all citizens had the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.'" The provision on Buddhism had not existed in earlier constitutions, which were secular. However, although Buddhism was not made the state religion, the earlier secular nature of the state was changed. It is ironic that it was the veteran leftist, Dr Colvin R. de Silva, who defended the inclusion of this provision, stating that "the religion Buddhism, holds in the history and tradition of Ceylon a special place and the specialness thereof should be recognized" (Wilson, 1980:104).

In the 1978 Constitution, the "foremost place" of Buddhism was again constitutionally reaffirmed and, in addition, Buddhist religious institutions were also given a special mention, Article 9 stating: "The

Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana, while assuring to all religions the rights guaranteed by certain freedoms including freedom of thought, conscience and religion, speech, expression."

Fundamental Rights

One of the flagrant acts of discrimination of the 1972 Constitution was the distinction made between 'persons' and 'citizens' on the question of fundamental rights. While all persons were declared to be equal before the law, and no person could be "deprived of life, liberty or security of persons except in accordance with the law" [Section 18(a)(b)]. Only a citizen had the basic fundamental rights of freedom of thought, conscience, religion, speech, publication, movement, choice of residence, and the right to promote his or her own culture; in addition citizens could not be discriminated against on grounds of race, religion, caste, or sex, and a citizen could not be arrested, held in custody, imprisoned or detained except in accordance with the law [Section 18(1)(c)].

This denial of fundamental rights to non-citizens mainly affected the stateless plantation workers of Indian origin who had not received Sri Lanka citizenship. Not surprisingly this was one of the provisions of the constitution that was sharply criticized both by minority political organizations and trade unions and by those concerned with civil rights. The constitutional denial of basic rights to the group in society that needed them the most was rectified in the 1978 Constitution. The distinction between citizen and person was eliminated in certain respects; persons most granted freedom of thought, conscience and religion, were equal before the law, had access to shops, hotels, places of worship, etc., could not be subject to torture or cruel punishments, or arrested or punished except according to due process of the law, and were presumed innocent until proved guilty. However, citizens and persons with 10 years continuous residence were to be free of discrimination on grounds of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion, and place of birth, and were to be entitled to the freedom of speech, publication, peaceful assembly, association, movement, promotion of own culture, and the freedom to engage in lawful occupation (Articles 10-14).

But both the Constitutions of 1972 and 1978, in granting a special status and hegemonic role to the Sinhala language and to Buddhism, were in effect subordinating the rights of minorities to that of the majority thereby giving legitimacy to the demands of the Sinhala Buddhists that had gathered strength.

The Persistence of Ethnic Consciousness

During the July 1983 pogrom against the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the small yet still articulate liberal elements among the Sinhalese were struck by feelings of horror, shame and guilt. The sense of horror and shame was expressed by a few political parties, trade unions, women's groups, religious bodies, and civil rights organizations. Bishop Lakshman Wickremasinghe spoke of the collective guilt of the Sinhalese in a moving pastoral letter which received widespread publicity in Sri Lanka. Following on these initial reactions, there has been ongoing debate, at varying levels of sophistication, on the reasons for violence. There has also been much discussion on the decline of class consciousness and the hegemony of ethnic consciousness among all classes.

This survey of ethnic conflict from 1883-1983 is an attempt to put into historical perspective the question of violence between Sinhala Buddhists and various other religious and ethnic groups. As evident from the earlier discussion, the ideology of the Sinhala Buddhists during this period was distorted by a false consciousness whose main constituents can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. The self-perceived role of a 'chosen people' with a historic mission to defend both the race and the faith, backed by an appeal to past glories.
2. The belief that the Sinhalese are a hemmed-in minority in the region, a beleaguered group with only one geographical territory, which itself is under threat.
3. The self-perception of the Sinhalese, nurtured by the Sinhala intelligentsia, that they are simple peasant producers in a rural economy, the original 'sons of the soil,' believers in the true religion, virtuous, peace-loving, unsuspecting prey to all manner of wicked oppressors and exploiters from outside and from other ethnic groups.

4. The vision of the 'enemy' as non-Sinhala and non-Buddhist-the 'Other,' who is an alien in ethnicity and religion, who is seen as crafty, rapacious and thrifty, unfairly competing in all spheres, taking away the jobs, trading and educational opportunities of the 'innocent' Sinhalese.

This consciousness gave rise to various incorrect explanations and justifications for violence against minorities. Many Sinhalese have seen ethnic riots as the unfortunate but understandable response of the majority community against persistent and continuous affronts and threats from 'aggressive' minorities. The 1915 riots between Sinhalese and Muslims, as well as subsequent riots, including the July 1983 anti-Tamil pogrom, have been seen in such a light by some sections of the Sinhala intelligentsia. Commenting on the 1915 riots, Anagarika Dharmapala said: "The peaceful Sinhalese have at last shown that they can no longer bear the insults of the alien. The whole nation in one day has risen against the Moor people." In addition, sections of the Sinhalese have seen ethnic confrontation as a continuation of ancient animosities. The Sinhalese and Tamils are said to be 'historic enemies'; the political struggle between Dutugemunu and Elara is depicted as a Sinhala- Tamil battle, and deeds of Sinhala kings and heroes in repelling Chola invasions are glorified and kept alive in the current propaganda. It is this viewpoint that was evident after July 1983 in the statements of leaders of Sinhala parties and of many members of the Buddhist clergy. This explanation, in short, tries to justify the violence in terms of self-defence.

Another belief is that riots are caused by criminals, hooligans and the 'lumpen proletariat' of the underworld and the city slums who in no way represent the mass of the Sinhala people. The riots that have occurred in Sri Lanka over the decades have evoked such explanations. In 1915, the rioting in the city was attributed by officials to "the criminal classes of Colombo and elsewhere [who] joined in a movement which had become simply predatory and anarchic". The 1958 riots were described by the police as perpetrated by *goondas* (hoodlums): and the July 1983 attacks have been frequently blamed on thugs and criminals. In this interpretation, the Sinhala people, as an ethnic group, bear no responsibility, the actual violence being attributed to lawless, anti-social elements.

Another argument seeks to blame the Left for ethnic riots. It was alleged in 1958, and again in 1983, that the criminal elements involved in rioting (insurgents and terrorists) were from extremist sections of the Left who were bent on a violent overthrow of the government. It was also alleged in 1958 that such Left elements were merely pawns of international Communist intrigue; and this canard was used again in 1983, when the government proscribed the Communist Party, the Nava Sama Samaja Party and the JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) and arrested some of their leaders. The perception of ethnic riots as a threat to the stability of the ruling class explains the persistence of various conspiracy theories during periods of violent ethnic conflict. In 1915, for example, the British suspected that the Germans were behind the riots in an effort to undermine Britain during the First World War; while many theories of foreign powers trying to destabilize Sri Lanka were current in July 1983.

While all facile explanations can be discounted, it is necessary to assess both the ideological content of chauvinism and the strong socioeconomic factors that form the background to such beliefs in order to understand the ethnic conflicts in the past 100 years. In doing so, however, one has to analyze not only ways in which ideology is linked to socioeconomic realities, but also the way ideology can assume an autonomous existence.

Socio-economic Factors

A consideration of the economic and social background may not offer a full explanation of ethnic violence, but nevertheless it provides some vital clues to unraveling the question. It is crucial in an analysis of ethnic conflict to have a picture of peripheral capitalism in a colonial and neo-colonial context, with its uneven development, backwardness, and inability to radically transform the lives of the masses. It is also important to understand the class structure as well as the economic and political power and main distribution of wealth. In colonial and postcolonial Sri Lanka, the one overriding problem remained that of underdevelopment and economic uncertainty. Poverty, limited resources, slow growth rates, unemployment and inflation, were the realities that threatened the fabric of society in many ways, as even the basic wants of large sections of the people could not be provided. Since the aspirations of the people for

economic security and social status were not satisfied. Deprived sections blamed their situation not on the system as a whole, but on the alleged privileges of minority groups. The lack of opportunities for Buddhists was blamed on the Christians; the difficulties of Sinhala shopkeepers, merchants and petty traders were attributed to Muslims and Indian competitors; difficulties in obtaining bank credit made the Chettiar and Pathan moneylenders a source of popular hatred; the lack of employment (especially during periods of depression) caused resentment against plantation and urban workers of Indian origin; and the scramble for education and prestigious jobs was the basis for the conflict with Sri Lankan Tamils. In all cases, the minorities became the scapegoats for the economic and social deprivation felt by certain classes of the Sinhala people, making it easier for the British and for the postcolonial rulers to follow policies of 'divide and rule.'

Several attempts have been made to explain ethnic riots in such contextual background, seeing them as an expression of the economic and social discontent and frustrations of deprived sections of population, fanned by propaganda arousing religious or ethnic animosity. The 1915 riots can be analyzed, not so much as a religious quarrel in itself, but as a reflection of economic dislocation, price rises, and the political ferment of the period. Similarly, the anti-Malayali agitation of the 1930s was linked to unemployment caused by depression. The July 1983 riots are also viewed by some in this way. Private-sector real wages roughly doubled between the mid-1970s and the beginning of 1980, but steady inflation reduced them by as much as a fourth between the 1980 peak and 1983. In this period Sinhala resentment was often directed against Tamils, who were perceived to be beneficiaries of the open economy. It is also claimed that Tamils, denied entry into the state sector and also, to some extent, the organized private sector, had gone in for self-employment, where earnings are not adversely affected by inflation in contrast to the situation of fixed-wage earners. This relative deprivation of the Sinhalese is seen as one of the factors that triggered off the ethnic violence of 1983.

The ethnic riots and tensions of the post-1977 period have been also attributed by Newton Gunasinghe to the consequences of the open economy, under which different strata and groups advanced on uneven lines; ultimately, differential rates of growth led to disparities and deprivations which exploded along ethnic lines. In this analysis, emphasis

is placed on the structural changes that occurred in the transfer from a state-regulated economy to an open economy, rather than on the fluctuations of the business cycle and changes in real wages.

What is important [are]... the structural alterations that have occurred in an economy... and the manner in which different social strata emanating from different ethno-religious communities compete with each other in a social context of differential factor endowment; how this competition occurs within a fabric of ideology, political patronage and state intervention, and how suddenly the rules of competition break down, giving rise to open violence. (Gunasinghe 1984)

In this context it is therefore not the urban poor and 'lumpen' sections of the city population who cause the riots; they are merely the temporary 'beneficiaries' of unrest. They use the rare opportunity to come out on to the streets, to break all the norms of bourgeois society in respect of 'law and order,' to rule the roost for a day or two, vent their anger against the 'haves' and help themselves to the property of others. This phenomenon occurs with increasing frequency in South Asia, where there are glaring contrasts between rich and poor. The deprived sections, given a license to plunder by the racist propagandists, make full use of such occasions to attack whichever minority group has been targeted as the enemy - whether it be Muslims or Sikhs, as in India or Tamils or Muslims, as in Sri Lanka.

Ideology

While it is generally recognized that socio-economic factors play a crucial role in ethnic conflict, it is equally important, in considering the persistence of ethnic violence, to take into account the role of ideology. Ideology can be defined as a set of systematically fashioned beliefs and symbols that make social reality meaningful to a given group of people. An analysis of the beliefs and symbols of Sinhala Buddhists, and the formation and evolution of Sinhala-Buddhist consciousness and culture in early history, as well as the colonial and post-colonial periods, is thus of prime importance in understanding recent ethnic violence in Sri Lanka.

Careful historiographical analysis is needed to unravel the constituent elements of this consciousness and to expose the myths, falsehoods and misinterpretations that have become embedded in it.

Mythology and history have been so intertwined, however, that recent attempts by scholars to separate the two, and give a scientific analysis of Sri Lankan history, have led to their being denounced as traitors by those traditionalists and reactionaries who have a vested interest in misusing history to justify racist politics. [See *Ethnicity and Social Change* (1984) and the strong attacks on this book in the *Sunday Divaina* from October to December 1984, which have been analyzed by Serena Tennekoon (1987)].

There have been similar experiences in neighboring countries. In India, when historians Romila Thapar, Harbans Mukhia and Bipan Chandra challenged the communal interpretation of Indian history and rewrote school texts, they were vilified and called pro-Muslim and pro-Communist by Hindu bigots and obscurantists who campaigned for the withdrawal of the textbooks. Similarly in Tamil Nadu, attempts by progressive scholars to demystify history, to challenge glorification and romanticism of Chola and Pandyan rule (separating myth from historical fact), and to analyze the socio-economic base of the Dravidian movement, were met with extreme hostility. In Sri Lanka too, Tamil scholars like K. Kailasapathy, who challenged the prevalent view of the 'golden age' of the Cankam period, and K. Sivathamby, who critically reassessed the class bias and pro-British attitudes of Arumuga Navalar, hitherto revered as a spiritual leader above criticism, were also subject to condemnation by Tamil pundits. Thus, chauvinism permeates traditional scholarship whether Sinhala or Tamil, Buddhist or Hindu.

This process of analysis and reinterpretation must also be extended to the colonial and post-colonial periods. One should re-evaluate imperialist strategies of 'divide and rule' and the use of ethnic consciousness by ruling groups as a diversionary tactic or as a means of winning popular support.

Part of the debate on the ideological roots of conflict, however, hinges on a much wider issue and leads one to a discussion of the relative autonomy of ideology and forms of consciousness and their articulation with the economic base. According to some, ethnicity has to be viewed as a constituent part of an ideology that is rooted in the recent past and persists in spite of economic changes or transformations.

It is significant that the concept of nationalism, or of ethnicity as we understand the term, is increasingly attracting the attention of Marxist scholars who find the Marxist and Leninist analysis of nationality to be

inadequate today. Eric Hobsbawm, for example, notes that "Marxist movements and states have tended to become national not only in form but in substance i.e. nationalist." Benedict Anderson, noting this same tendency in the non-socialist world, reflects that many old nations, once thought to be consolidated, "find themselves challenged by sub-nationalism within their borders - nationalisms which naturally dream of shedding this sub-ness one happy day." Indeed Anderson finds that this sense of nationality is "the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time."

While commenting on the weakness of many existing analyses of nationalism and ethnicity, Anderson proposes the concept of the nation as an imagined community, which in contrast to family and tribe, whose members know each other as:

Imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion, and 'a community' because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, it is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.

Anderson adds:

These deaths bring us abruptly face to face with the central problem posed by nationalism: what makes the shrunken imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices?

Anderson believes that the beginnings of an answer to this phenomenon are to be sought in the cultural roots of nationalism. (Anderson 1983:15-16)

Whatever the emphasis one gives to economic or ideological and cultural factors, the whole issue of ethnic and class consciousness, and the

interaction of economic and political factors with consciousness and ideology, must be closely analyzed. The assumption that pre-capitalist ideologies based on caste, religion and ethnicity would disappear or at least diminish with the development of capitalism has also to be reconsidered and answers have to be found to the central question: why does ethnic consciousness persist and indeed grow in strength during a period of development, a period in which education permeates the country, scientific and technological knowledge becomes widespread, and rationality, at least in theory, holds sway in the economic sphere? Those on the Left are also particularly concerned to understand why sections of the working masses of Sri Lanka, who had attained a level of consciousness which enabled them to lead militant class actions based on unity between workers of all ethnic groups, have now come under the sway of ethnic prejudices.

What is more, while division along ethnic lines is detrimental to the interests of the working class, intensification of ethnic antagonisms and their eruption into violence may also be against the interests of the bourgeoisie. Today the open economy demands for its success a stable polity which will be attractive to foreign investors - but sections of the very bourgeoisie who are behind the open economy have been responsible not only for rousing ethnic emotions, but also for taking up rigid positions which prevent a peaceful settlement of the ethnic issue. Why then is ethnic consciousness so powerful that it drives two classes - the bourgeoisie and the proletariat - to forget their class interests as well as their antagonisms, and band themselves into a block against other ethnic groups? This is one of the fundamental questions to which we must seek an answer.

We should remind ourselves that the persistence of ethnic consciousness is not peculiar to Sri Lanka. Ethnic conflicts explode periodically in many parts of India. In Malaysia, in spite of rapid economic growth, serious race riots erupted in 1969, and today the doctrine of the *bhumi putra* makes the Chinese a tolerated but disfavored group. In the case of Sri Lanka, as in some other newly independent countries, we have to recognize that in the process of 'nation building' after decolonization, the major ethnic group has attempted to equate its own ethnic identity with the national identity. In many other countries too, this has led to the marginalization of minority groups and to overt expressions

of frustration, which in turn have raised the levels of ethnic consciousness in the major group; this process has revived antagonisms that were dormant during colonial rule and has led to riots, guerilla warfare, and even civil war.

The earlier sections of this study discussed the contexts in which ethnic hostility had manifested itself in Sri Lanka at various periods over the last century and tentatively sought some explanations for these occurrences. Deeper studies are necessary of the complex ways in which ethnic and national consciousness originates, and of the interaction and interplay of economic and political factors with consciousness and ideology. Such an analysis of chauvinism in the majority community and the reactions to such chauvinism in the minority groups can only be done by scholars from all communities who are prepared to be objective and rational. Such studies can only be effectively done, however, in an atmosphere where academics and researchers are free from victimization, witch-hunts, and smear campaigns.

In conclusion, one must emphasize that chauvinism is not in the interests of the working masses and that it is not central to Left ideology. Sri Lankan workers can proudly claim that for forty years (from the 1890s to 1930) their organizations followed policies of joint class action, even in periods when revivalists of various hues tried to promote antagonisms against minority groups. In fact, even after the earlier working-class leaders of the 1920s became racist in 1930s, the organized workers in the following decades gave expression to class as opposed to ethnic consciousness, in a series of militant struggles under Left leadership. Today, too, it is the advanced section of the working people and the radical intelligentsia who can help to bring the country out of the ethnic mire into which it has descended. At the moment, rationality is at a low ebb. The myth of Aryan origin, the myth of Vijaya, and the promotion of 'heroes of the race' such as Dutugemunu, are all having a new lease of life and have again become powerful symbols for arousing ethnic passion. Buddhism, at least in its institutional and ritual aspects, is enjoying a revival and continues to receive the patronage of the state as well as of all political parties. The newspapers significantly are not only full of communalism and jingoism, but also abound in astrological predictions and, stories of ghosts, demons and poltergeists. An array of God-men, false bishops, charismatic monks, gurus, and mumbo-jumbo

men are also actively reflecting the tensions and uncertainties of these troubled times. The struggle will therefore be a long and hard one, but one can only hope that reason will sooner or later prevail.

* These chapters are taken from Kumari Jayawardene's *Ethnic and Class Conflicts in Sri Lanka: The Emergence of Sinhala-Buddhist Consciousness 1883-1983*. Colombo: SSA, 2003.

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7

Perhaps, I can forget

*R. Cheran**

Perhaps, I can forget
The sudden rush of fear
not of dying
but of dying
and you not knowing

and the jagged hip bone jutting
from an overturned and burning car

and the glaring eye ball
focused on infinity
its blood - glazed brow and socket
half a yard away

and six men aligned on Dickman's street
their skulls crushed in

and a bit of a ragged sari
scuttled in the dust

and the thin left arm
missing its torso and its watch

and the pregnant woman
stumbling from her burning home
a cradle clutched distractedly
but
not the tea bush where
waiting dinner for me

you, my sister, hid your kids
moments before your rape and execution,
the mountain fog in witness
the shards of pottery
the scattered grains of rice.

This poem has been taken from the collection *Yaman*, an anthology of poems which focuses on 1983. This poem has been translated from Tamil by Peter Michelson and R.Cheran.

8

July 1983: The Survivor's Experience*

Valli Kanapathipillai

Introduction

Sri Lanka has seen ethnic strife between the Tamils and the Sinhalese in 1958, 1977 and 1981, but the riots in 1983 were unprecedented in their scale of violence and brutality. Although they were aimed primarily against Tamils living in South Sri Lanka, the riots left the entire Tamil population of the country insecure and uncertain of their future. The middle-classes in the South saw mob violence and frenzy unleashed upon them: it brought home to them the painful fact that regardless of their political ideology they were identified as Tamils and not as Sri Lankans. The polarization of the Sinhala and Tamil communities, which was gradually widening, increased dramatically after the violence of 1983.

For this study I have mainly interviewed victims of the July violence from the predominantly Catholic areas of Hendala and Wattala in Colombo. The victims were primarily Tamils belonging to different social classes and a few Colombo Chettis. The violence subsequently spread to the South and Central highlands, including both urban areas and plantations, but due to limitations of time I have had to confine my interviews to the Colombo area. Given the sensitive nature of the subject and the political situation in the country, it was possible to interview only those with whom great trust had been established. Out of the thirty in-depth interviews that I conducted, I now present four case-studies. For the concluding section, however, I have drawn on all thirty interviews. The emphasis in my descriptions is not on validation and verification but on seeing the symbols through which narratives about survival and re-definition of everyday life were organized.

Communities, Riots and Survivors

Case 1

Name : Saroja Solomon
Area of Residence : Dehiwela
Occupation : Teacher
Age : Late 40

Saroja Solomon is a Hindu Tamil married to a Catholic. Her husband is a retired foreman. They have two adolescent children, a son of eighteen and a daughter of sixteen. The house that they presently occupy is rented from a Sinhala landlord. They have lived here for seventeen years. At the time of the interview, I found that their house (not unlike other Tamil houses which were attacked) was sparsely furnished since the occupants had lost most of their things during the riots. Dominating the two rooms was a figure of Christ mounted on the wall, with an oil-lamp beside it. In her narrative, Saroja often mentioned that this figure had provided constant solace during the troubled period. Two other Tamil families had lived in this area but, following the riots, they moved out, leaving Saroja's family as the only Tamil family in the neighborhood.

The events of July 1983 were recalled by Saroja primarily in terms of the changing relationships with her neighbors and the constant effort entailed in the interpretation of historical events as they impinged more and more on their personal lives.

On the morning of 25 July, according to Saroja, her children and husband had set off, respectively, for school and work, as usual. On hearing from various sources that there was likely to be 'trouble', she first went to the school where she taught and, having warned others of the impending trouble, she set off to fetch her son and daughter. When they returned home they were warned by a neighbor to close their windows and doors and stay indoors as Tamil shops were being broken at Galle Road. "So I closed the windows and doors and sat with a pocket radio in hand, waiting anxiously, hoping to hear that a curfew had been announced." After a while, the landlady advised them to open the windows and doors and go elsewhere: Tamil houses that were closed were being attacked.

The next few hours were shot with nightmarish uncertainty for Saroja. Having sent her daughter to a neighbor's house for safety, she

waited with her husband and son under a tree. Except for one neighbor who invited them to come into their house, they were completely ignored. At one point they saw about a hundred thugs coming in their direction, and they fled in panic. While fleeing from the crowd, running directionless, they met unexpected kindness from the owner of a bicycle-repair shop who urged them to take cover in his shop. He locked them into a small room for safety. They could hear the sounds of destruction as their belongings were vandalized and broken. As she said:

We waited for some time until the noise stopped; then as time passed, we began to wonder where the shop owner had gone. My son said that the man did not have a good reputation, and for all we knew he could be an accomplice of the crowd and could burn us in the room. We tried to open the door, but could not. In panic we pushed and banged; nothing happened. Then my son noticed that the door had only been latched. With great relief we unlatched the door and came outside.

The crowds seemed to have dispersed. However, they faced fresh trouble as their landlady tried to prevent them from entering their house. Fortunately a Muslim neighbor intervened on their behalf. They saw that their house had been vandalized, the furniture lay in ruins. Too scared to stay now, they went out and were roaming around aimlessly when a Muslim neighbor offered to take both the Tamil families of the neighborhood to a camp. They gratefully accepted this offer and were taken to the Ratmalane camp.

Life in the Camp

Saroja and her family stayed in the Ratmalane camp from 26 July to 24 December 1983, the longest period in camp spent by any of those who were interviewed. They had entered the refugee camp with just the clothes on their backs. Their houses were no safe havens, but, rather, scenes of destruction. They did not know who to trust among friends and neighbors and the future appeared bleak and uncertain.

Like many other Tamils who were similarly displaced, camp life appeared extremely hard in the beginning. In the first few days there were 10,000 people in the camp and they had to stand in queues to use the toilets or to get drinking water. However, a community life began to emerge in the camp soon after and Saroja found there her brother, teachers from her school, and other Tamils (even people who were married to Muslims or Sinhalese). In the camp they were not fearful for they felt protected by the crowds. The richer people soon left the camps going off to Jaffna or India or to relatives elsewhere. Towards the end only those remained who could not afford to leave.

In September the schools started functioning again and Saroja and her children began to go to school from the camp itself. Her husband also resumed work. One day, on her way back from school, she met an old classmate, a Sinhalese girl who was shocked to learn of their plight. She offered the facilities of her house. For the rest of their stay in camp, Saroja and her family bathed and took all their meals in their friend's house, returning to camp only to sleep.

Saroja found that although camp life was terrible in the beginning, things began to improve as they made friends with others, including the officials. Some of these friendships continued beyond the life of the camp.

The Changes in Local Relations

While violence of the kind that Saroja encountered can be seen to constitute an extremely important historical moment in the life of a nation, it was also simultaneously a momentous event in the personal lives of people that shook the nature of their everyday life. Relations in everyday life that were marked by a certain ambivalence, such as landlord-tenant relations, now became much more defined. Thus, it is not surprising that one of the dominant motifs in the narrative of Saroja came to be her changing relations to her Sinhala landlord, and the harassment which her family had to suffer at his hands. Prior to 1983, there were many irritants which are part of such relations everywhere, but after 1983 these irritants were transformed into open hostility.

Saroja resented the fact that the landlord had not offered them shelter when they were attacked by thugs. The landlord, on his part, was probably scared of having a Tamil family live in his house and by

the fact that REPIA (Rehabilitation of Property and Industries Authority), which had been set up by the government to help victims of the riots, had become involved in the dispute over the house. While in camp Saroja and her husband had appealed to REPIA for financial help to repair their house. The landlord, who found Tamil tenants an encumbrance, tried to create obstacles. In order to help Saroja and her husband, REPIA issued them a letter of authority, authorizing them to repair the house and move in; they were also instructed to pay Rs 200 per month to the landlord, which was their normal rent. The landlord sent a letter to the chairman of REPIA stating that the area was not safe for the habitation of Tamils and that he took no responsibility for possible future trouble.

Encouraged by the REPIA chairman, Saroja's family had minimal repairs done and moved into their house with police protection, despite the hostile attitude of the landlord. Thus, relations between Saroja's family and the landlord continued to deteriorate. The landlord subjected them to continuous harassment. The worst incident in the pattern of intimidation occurred on the night of widespread disturbances in the city after the Peace Accord had been signed between Sri Lanka and India (28 July 1987). Taking advantage of the fact that political discontent was being widely expressed, the landlord tried to harass them by the use of local headlines. As Saroja recalled:

On the 28th July, (1987), there were disturbances in the Mount Lavinia junction. That evening the power supply went off, so did the telephones. At 11.00-11.30 p.m. my children, husband and cousin were sitting in the living room casually chatting with each other when we heard a knock on the door. I opened it on the assumption that perhaps it was a neighbor. A thug walked right into the house and asked us to switch on the lights. We replied that there were no lights. Then he took the torch from my husband and flashed it into the room, asking if we were the only inmates of the house. Then he went round the house, came back and said: 'We have surrounded the house. In about ten to fifteen minutes we shall set fire to it. Do not shout for help, just wait here.' We were stunned.

After a while I stepped out to go to the toilet and my son and cousin followed me. The man asked, 'Where are

you going?' In a flash I saw the figure of another man standing by the entrance to my landlord's house. Later my cousin said he had seen another man on the other side. We knew we were surrounded. The man told me to get into the house. Then I remembered that in 1983 some Tamils managed to escape by pleading with the thugs. So I started to talk for whatever it was worth. I said, 'Don't you feel sorry to do a thing like this?' He went off without replying. Again he came back and said 'I spoke to the others but they refuse to go. They are quite drunk and I do not know what they may do.'

I was wondering whether to send my son through the side entrance to get help, but my husband thought that could be dangerous. The only thing was to pray, so we all gathered and prayed for our safety. The man came back again and said that his friends refused to go. He remarked, 'Anyway in 1983 also you escaped.' His remark made it clear that someone must have given him information about us. He challenged us to call the police, but he knew that the phones were not working. Then he said, 'Why can't you go and stay elsewhere even for 15 minutes?' We refused, for we could now understand that they wanted to loot the house. He went away, then returned again, and said his friends might throw stones at us. Then after a while he told my children to go and sleep but they refused. He went out again. By now it was between 2.30-3.00 a.m. He returned, sat on a chair, asked for a drink of water, then said, 'You do not look like Tamils. So why don't you go somewhere else and live like Sinhalese?' I was convinced this incident had been set up by the landlord. It was part of a continuing series to intimidate and harass us so that we may leave, and he may rent out the house to someone else at a higher price.

That night the man who had intimidated them thus, left without harming them. The family prayed together after he left. The next afternoon, when Saroja was out in the garden, the same man passed by on a bicycle and shouted, 'Remember me? I was the one who saved you last night'.

It is important to note that this particular incident did not happen at the height of ethnic violence but almost four years later, and it shows how patterns of violence become embedded into local contexts and continue even after mob violence has subsided. It is part of this pattern that every change in the Sinhala-Tamil relationship at the national level leads to a new uncertainty in the lives of the Tamils. For example, most Tamils feared violence on 18 August 1987, when Parliament was to meet over the Peace Accord. For Saroja it was not simply a generalized fear that there could be violence against Tamils by anonymous crowds, but also the fear that the landlord could use that occasion to intimidate and harass her. Her fears were confirmed when, on the 18th evening, the landlord's son and a few others came and started shouting filthy abuses at them: '*Ado Vareng*', '*Para Demala*', '*Chakhili Demale*' (low-caste Tamil). Saroja and her family did not join or respond. They had to simply bear up with the insults.

An unexpected consequence of these incidents was that Saroja, who at one point was considering reconciliation with the landlord, now became firm in her resolve that she would not allow herself to be intimidated by him: 'Even if I am killed I shall stay here. I do not want to take the house forcibly but I shall not come to a settlement after what they have done to us.'

In Saroja's account it seems that the deteriorating relationship with the landlord crystallized the meaning of national events in her everyday life. Thus, local-level events—such as fights in the neighborhood and landlord-tenant disputes—are grafted on to national events by reasons of contiguity. What dramatizes the impact of ethnic violence at the national level in the everyday life of the people is the transformation they see in local-level relations. There is, of course, a sharpening of conflicts, but there is also the creation of new intimacies which come about due to the need to offer and accept help and succor.

What appeared remarkable in Saroja's account was her ability to unravel and understand clearly the nature of the conflict in which she was involved. She said that she would continue to live in the house despite all the difficulties, for she realized that whatever happened to them was due to the landlord's interest in having the house vacated, for which the ethnic strife simply provided the pretext.

It is obvious that the violence of July 1983 and the protracted period of harassment required a new understanding of the self and the world

on the part of its victims. Such violence often seduces the victims to totalize the categories of their world.¹ It would have been easy enough for Saroja to translate the conflict with her landlord into the idiom of ethnic strife. As stated earlier, every event at the national level is also an event at the local level. This grafting of the two levels on each other allows victims as well as perpetrators of violence to constitute an event in terms of a variety of categories. Saroja showed courage and clarity in defining the conflict with her landlord as one over local issues rather than national ones. For such an interpretation to become a guiding force to action, as in the case of Saroja, her mental resistance to totalization of categories seems to have played an important part. Thus, in Saroja's account, we found not only reference to her intimidation by the landlord but also the help she received from her Sinhala friends.

Another important point here is the family's construction of reality. Saroja, though herself a Tamil, is married to a Catholic and her children practice the Catholic faith. Her construction of events, therefore, is part of the whole family's construction of reality. This comes out best in her reflections on her Tamil identity and what this has meant for her family.

We turn now to these reflections and their narrative framing. One may summarize Saroja's reactions to her Tamil identity by her poignant statement that 'to be Tamil is to live in fear'. She remembered with nostalgia the times when she used to dress up in typical Tamil fashion. Now she avoids wearing pottu. The children, she said, resented her Tamil identity. Whenever she wore an Indian saree and a pottu they remarked, 'She is dressing to go out and get hit again.' The fear of being identified as a Tamil pervaded relations within the family, for although Saroja and her husband spoke in Tamil, the children spoke Sinhalese even at home. Saroja encouraged the children to identify themselves more and more with the Sinhala community and to hide all marks of a Tamil identity. 'I have told them', she said, 'to marry persons from any ethnic community but the Tamil'. Ensuring a better future for the children, she felt, was to ensure that they moved away from being identified as Tamils. It is in these reactions of Saroja that we see the deep scars of violence.

The events of July 1983 and the subsequent intimidation that Saroja faced has meant that the family has had to make many adjustments within its own internal structure. It is noticeable that it is not the male head of the household who seems to have taken the difficult decisions since the violence erupted but Saroja. In fact it seems that in times of

violence women come to play a far more active role in decision-making, taking risks and dealing with the hostile external world. In her turn, Saroja has moved much more towards the religion of her husband to provide relief and succour. She explained that she had a figure of Christ mounted on their living-room wall in July 1983 so that the family could pray daily.

She firmly believed that in periods of crisis prayers have saved them. Her positive feeling towards Catholicism has been strengthened by the fact that Catholic church organizations have provided relief and help during times of need.

Case 2

Name : Sylvia David
Age : 42
Occupation : Primary schoolteacher in a leading Catholic school in Colombo.

Sylvia is a Catholic woman of Jaffna, of Tamil origin. She comes from a large family with six sisters and four brothers. Her father died in 1974. At the time of the riots the family was living in a suburb of Colombo, in a rented house, where they had lived since 1967. Sylvia remembers the initial few days of the riot as days of utter confusion and chaos. Pictures of shops burning, cars running amok, crowds smashing and hitting at old people and children dominate her memory. It was, she said 'a world gone mad.'

On the fateful day of 25 July 1983, Sylvia had gone to school as usual but discovered that there had been riot in Colombo. She was sent home in a van where she found that some members of her family had been taken to a Sinhala neighbor's house: others, including her brother, she was told, had taken shelter in a friend's house. She joined the family in the neighbor's house. What appears vividly in her accounts is the role played by neighbors as well as the Catholic church in saving the family. Sylvia and her family were themselves in such a dazed condition that they simply could not interpret the events and had to put themselves completely in the hands of the neighbors. Thus it was one Mrs. Pereira who had dragged her mother and sister out in the morning and taken them to her own house, insisting that 'their lives were at stake'. The

parish priest moved around giving messages and bringing news from the outside. He had tried to save their house, unsuccessfully as it turned out, which had been set alight by hoodlums.

Sylvia remained in Ms Pereira's house till the evening. At six o'clock another neighbor came rushing to the house where they were hiding and insisted that they jump over a side wall and hide there to avoid the crowds that were attacking Sinhala houses suspected of harboring Tamils. "Today if someone asked me to jump a wall," said Sylvia "I would not be able to do so, but that day I do not know how I got the strength." Across the wall they found themselves in the premises of a nearby convent and were given shelter there for two days. Sylvia emphasized that the convent sisters had taken considerable risks in giving them shelter, for the hoodlums suspected the parish priest and the sisters of hiding Tamils within the premises of the church and the convent. At seven o'clock the next evening, a van was organized to take them to a police station under cover of darkness, with an assurance by the sisters that their prayers would 'accompany them'.

The experience of the crowded police station stood up in Sylvia's mind as offering a complete contrast to her experience in the convent. 'The smell of blood was overpowering.' A pregnant woman asked for water but the policeman refused and joked saying, "get it from elam." The next day more people with injuries were brought to the police station. One of the fearsome incidents that Sylvia recalled was being told by a young Tamil boy to try and lose herself in the crowd because he had heard a policeman say that they would rape the two women (meaning her and her sister) and throw them into the river. After they had been herded in the police station in this manner till the next evening, the Tamils were told that their safety could not be guaranteed at the police station and, therefore, they should go to a camp. However, the police refused to provide them with any escort which would help them reach camp in relative safety. Finally, the Tamils collected money among themselves for petrol and a young Tamil boy who looked like a Sinhala agreed to drive them in a private van. It was during curfew hours and the roads were deserted but, as Sylvia said, crowds seemed to materialize from nowhere. Fortunately, there were two Navy personnel with them who fired in the air and the crowds vanished. "As I talk to you," said Sylvia, "I can see the crowds before my eyes." When they

arrived at the Mahanama camp at 6.00 p.m. having been on the road for four hours, the army personnel guarding the camp pointed guns at them and, ironically, made *them* walk with their hands in the air.

Fortunately for Sylvia, the other members of the family were safe and joined them in the camp. She stayed there along with her family till September. Her youngest brother fell ill and was diagnosed as having a 'nervous illness'. He had to be hospitalized. The doctors said he would suffer all his life. "At this stage," said Sylvia, "I lost whatever hope I had."

In reformulating their lives, Sylvia, like the other Tamils who were interviewed, has had to come to terms with a totally new way of looking at the world. A most profound change in the life of her family was entailed by the necessity to live separately after the riots. Sylvia rented a room in Bambalapitya while her brother boarded in a room elsewhere. Her mother and younger sister have had to accept the hospitality of her married sister. Thus, from a close and strongly-knit family, they became spatially dispersed. Not only was this financially burdensome, it was psychologically crippling. Sylvia missed, above all else, the comfort and closeness of her family, crystallized in her memories of the protected and sheltered life she had lived earlier. Especially difficult for her was the recognition that her mother and younger sister had become dependent relatives, with all the humiliation that such dependence implies.

The events of 1983 were in some ways a repeat of the earlier events of 1958, when their house had been attacked and when they had been robbed of all their possessions. Subsequently, their father had sold their house in Jaffna. Saroja felt that these riots of 1958 had so affected her father that he had been unable to recover from the shock. He had been a strong and active man earlier but had become totally dejected later, dying in 1974. The money they had made from selling the house was all lost in the riots of 1977. And then again there was a repetition of this experience in 1983. All this had left the family without a will to start anew to create a home. It was not only the large issues but the little things that gave pain. For instance, Sylvia grieved for the loss of all the knickknacks that had made up the memories of their lives together. Yet in 1987 Sylvia and her family had recovered enough to begin to make plans for the future and to try and find a house to rent so that the family could be together again.

We saw in the earlier case of Saroja that the individual's relationship to the group is inevitably renegotiated in the case of ethnic violence.

There is a strong tendency on the part of victims of violence to totalize the characteristics of a group. However, the notion that groups have characteristics comes in conflict with one's experiences of the particular individuals of a community, which is varied and rooted in concrete events.

Sylvia had to reformulate her relation with the Sinhalese as a group. As we saw, her experience of her immediate Sinhala neighbors who had helped her family during the crisis was a positive one. Yet feelings of anger and hatred were projected by her to groups of Sinhalese who were outside her immediate experience. For example, she had come to dislike intensely the armed forces. She referred approvingly to the terrorist attack at Chavakachery in which several soldiers were killed, as she felt avenged by this distant violence. Yet when she happened to meet the widow of a soldier killed in that attack she felt very sorry for the woman. It is significant that she always referred to those who attacked them as 'thugs.' For most middle-class people who were attacked during the riots, the source of violence was not from the immediate neighbors, but inevitably lower-class hoodlums. Thus they brought a split focus to bear in their attitudes to the Sinhalese as a group, for they identified them as the perpetrators of violence when they thought of them in the abstract. At the same time, the experience that they had (with exceptions) of concrete individuals, such as neighbors and friends, was of having received help and succor even when this endangered the lives and property of the people who offered such help.

Whereas Sylvia's attitude to the Sinhalese as a group was one of ambivalence, there was no such ambivalence towards the state; towards the state she had a feeling of complete betrayal. This feeling was compounded by the fact that Sylvia's family had been UNP supporters. During the 1977 elections her brother had campaigned for the MP of the area. Yet during 1983 when he called the MP and told him that their house had been burnt, the MP promised to look into the incident but did not follow it up with either help or sympathy. Sylvia had also heard rumors that the MP had personally told the Sinhalese in the area that they should not give shelter to Tamils. In addition to local factors, the first speech which President Jayawardena gave came as a great disappointment for not a word of sympathy was offered to Tamil victims in this speech. In Sylvia's words, "it was as if our suffering was nothing."

The recognized institutions of the state, such as the police and the armed forces whose duty it was to help the victims and to control the

violence, were seen as manifestly failing to do their duty, while, in contrast, the Church had offered kindness and help. For the victims it was the informal network of friends and neighbors, and the church organizations which had provided the means for reformulating their lives. It is not surprising, then, that they should have felt most betrayed by the state.

Case 3

Name : Kamala
Area of Residence : Wellawatte
Age : 41
Occupation : Teacher

At the time of my interview with Kamala, she and her family were preparing to migrate to New Zealand. In her case one could see the dilemmas faced by middle-class Tamils who had lived most of their lives in Colombo and who did not have many roots in Jaffna. Kamala had always seen herself as totally integrated with other ethnic groups in the country; yet she found herself a target of vicious violence during the riots. She found it difficult to come to terms with the ethnic polarization that she saw around her. She refused to identify with the emerging Tamil nationalism, which she considered chauvinistic, but neither could she cope with the Sinhala chauvinism that was beginning to emerge. She was equally opposed to the violent methods adopted by Tamil militants and considered that a non-violent struggle following the Gandhian methods would have been more humane and effective.

Kamala saw no future for herself and her family in Sri Lanka. More than anything else, she was very disturbed by the impact that the violence had on her children. She felt that the decision to migrate had become necessary to ensure that the children had a secure future; this did not seem possible for them in Sri Lanka.

I shall first give an account of the direct violence that Kamala and her family had to face in July 1983 and then describe how she had tried to reformulate her life.

This is how Kamala described the riots:

On Monday, 25th July, several Sinhala friends called in the morning and warned us that there was likely to be trouble in Colombo and it would be advisable not to send the children to school. The whole neighborhood became tense as information and warnings began to pour in. My sister and her family who live in our neighborhood joined us by 10 a.m. We decided that the best course to follow, under the circumstances, was to go to the Ramakrishna Mission, which was situated close by. As we set out, I saw CTB buses full of young men stopping at Galle Road. They got off and ran towards Ramakrishna Mission. This was followed by the sound of breaking and smashing. I was in a panic, when a Sinhala lady shouted at us to get inside our house. At that moment I had to make a quick decision. I could not stand outside exposed to the violence. So I took my family and ran into the house. I suppose at that moment instinct makes us run to the security of our home, but I regretted my decision. Anyway, my brother, my two children of 6 and 3 years, my 12-year-old niece, and I ran upstairs to a room on top of the garage and locked ourselves in. My mother, sister and aunt had got separated from us, as they were stopped by three men, holding large knives, who shouted at them in Sinhala, 'What are you doing here? Run inside.' In terror, they ran into my sisters' house.

In a while, we could hear shouts followed by sounds of glass breaking. We knew the mobs were inside the house. I was terrified. The children were crying. The sound of breaking and smashing seemed to go on for ages. We cowered and waited as quietly as possible. Then I heard a voice, from the vicinity of the garage, saying in Sinhala, 'There's a beautiful car here, let's burn it.' I heard another voice say, '*Aney pow*—do not burn the car' to which the first voice threateningly responded, 'If you do not, we will hit you and put you inside the car.' Then they probably set fire to the car for the smell of something burning wafted to our room. I felt trapped. Soon we heard footsteps coming

up. There was the sound of banging and pushing on the door. The thugs were trying to get inside. My nephew and I pushed with all our might against the door to prevent it from opening. We were terrified in case they broke open the door. Then with relief, I heard one of them saying, 'There is no one here, let's go away.' While holding on to the door all I could do was pray. I told the children not to make a sound, and told them to silently pray with me. One of them asked me, 'Amma are we going to die?' How could I answer that? Meanwhile smoke from the car started coming into the room. Once we were sure the thugs had gone away, I opened the door cautiously and looked out. The staircase was on fire. I had to find a way to escape. I decided to get on to the roof. I told my children to follow and in a flash my daughter, niece, and nephew ran up to the top of the roof. My son was clinging to me, frightened, but finally I persuaded him to do the same. From the roof I could see that my neighbor's house was untouched. Their name is Joshua, so probably the thugs did not realize they were Tamils. Meanwhile from the roof we could hear the thugs talking in a garden. It was imperative that we were not seen. The only course open to us was to jump from the balcony on to the neighbor's wall and into their garden. The other children quickly slid from the roof and got on to the balcony, but my daughter got scared. I told her that a broken foot is better than a burnt foot and cajoled her to jump. She finally jumped onto the balcony. Then I discovered that my niece was missing. I called for her and saw her still sitting on the flat part of the roof. I pleaded with her to get off. She was twelve years old and I was frightened to even imagine what the men would do if they saw her. I pleaded with her and finally scolded her. Then she slid down a pipe and landed on broken glass. As she went sliding down I saw two men approach her. I was terrified. She was frightened herself, but had the presence of mind to say, 'I don't live here, I come from the front house', pointing to the Peiris' house. She is a fair child and so is Mrs. Peiris, who was watching all this. Mrs. Pieris

promptly called to the men imploring them not to harm her as she was her daughter, and took her into the house. Stealthily we all joined Mrs. Pieris. When my niece saw me she cried in relief, for she was very afraid that her own mother had been killed by the thugs.

It was quick thinking on the part of several neighbors that saved many Tamils that day. My brother, at one point stepped out of the house to look for my mother when the thugs caught him and hit him. Seeing this, an 18-year-old Sinhala neighbor shouted that this boy (my brother) was a Muslim and not a Tamil. He took in my brother who was badly bruised.

After a while, a second crowd formed and started systematic destruction of Tamil houses. I heard a man on a motorbike shouting out the house numbers of the Tamils and warning the crowds not to touch Sinhala houses. The second mob even came into the Pieris house and enquired if any Tamils were hiding there. At grave risk to themselves Mrs. Pieris replied in the negative and chased off the hoodlums.

One of the most difficult situations that Kamala had to face that day was arranging the return of her father, who had been admitted to hospital earlier for a routine check-up. At about 9 o' clock one of their Sinhala friends drove by to see if they were well and on hearing about the father, agreed to drive him back from the hospital. On the way the car of the Sinhala friend was stopped several times by crowds and they were asked if they were Tamils. Somehow the friend managed to bring the old man home, but on finding their houses burning, he left his father in front of the Pieris house. Kamala saw her father and came out to take him in. He was pale and bathed in sweat. Right then, some men came running with big poles. They were shouting, "If you are Tamils, we will kill you." Kamala barely managed to drag her father into the house. "By 3:30 in the afternoon," said Kamala, "the noises of the crowd had died down. There was an eerie silence. The only sounds were those of the beams of the houses that were breaking and falling at regular intervals. There was no other sound, not even an echo of human voices."

Kamla's experience in the Ramakrishna Mission and subsequently in the camp was similar to the experiences of the others described

earlier. In this case Kamala and her family did not have to stay more than two days in the camp. As soon as their Sinhala friends heard of their plight, they came and fetched them to their own house, where they stayed for one month.

Subsequently, Kamala's sister decided to migrate to New Zealand as a refugee and at the time of the interview Kamala and her family had also decided to migrate.

It seemed in my discussions with Kamala that there were two major factors which led to her decision to migrate. The first was the constant fear with which the children had to live after the 1983 violence. The second was a construction of their own identity as minorities who would have to live in constant awareness of this fact, wherever they chose to live.

The children bore psychological scars from the violence and continued to have nightmares when asleep. Kamala related the following instances: 'One night my eight-year-old daughter came running to me, crying that some people were coming to kill her. Another day, early in the morning I was in the kitchen making coffee when my daughter came in crying hysterically and said that she had seen thugs come in and cut off amma's legs.' She was hugging Kamala and crying, and it took a while before she could be made to see that Kamala's legs were still intact, and that it was only a dream. Her children went for a holiday to visit her sister in New Zealand in 1986. As soon as her eleven-year-old daughter reached her sister's place from the airport, she announced, "Now I do not have to worry if the army is killing the terrorists, or if the terrorists are killing the army, and if the Sinhalese are going to burn our house."

As in the case of Saroja, Kamala's children also identified their Tamil identity as the cause of much pain and suffering. "After 1983 the children were pestering us to change our names to a less Tamil sounding one. And also to get rid of the name-board on our front gate."

Fear of revealing their Tamil identity would surface on all kinds of occasions. Once when they were in a shop in New Zealand, Kamala's daughter called her amma but was promptly scolded by her brother, "I told you not to call her amma outside the house but to call her ammi." Thus he wished to adopt the Sinhala term for 'mother', along with other Sinhala ways, so that they could be protected from the ruthless consequences of being Tamil.

The only positive transformation in the lives of the children, Kamala felt, was the deepening of faith in God. According to her, their belief in

God had been like a convenient vehicle before they had experienced the violence. For instance, just before the school sports-day, Kamala's son had been known to declare that if he said Muruga thrice, he would win the race.² In July 1983 the children discovered a different meaning of prayer when they stood behind the door which the thugs were trying to push open. They were convinced that the door did not open because God heard their prayers and they could save themselves despite the fact that the whole staircase was on fire.

Apart from the experiences of the children, which were very important for Kamala in making her decision to migrate, there was also a deep sense of betrayal by the state. The tragedy was compounded by the fact that the events of 1983 culminated in the death of her father.

It may be recalled that her father had been discharged from hospital on 25 July and had reached home when the violence in the city was at a peak. Kamala had just about managed to save his life by dragging him into the Pieris house, as the thugs came running to assault him. A month after this riot he died of a heart attack, and it is likely that the coronary attack was provoked by the trauma of the violence. All his life, Kamala's father had been a nationalist. He was a doctor and had done considerable work among the Sinhala peasantry. Now, after the violence, he was a broken man. He told Kamala to leave the country and "not to stay with these animals."

For Kamala and her father the violence of 1983, in which they were identified as Tamils and attacked, constituted a threat to their entire existence. The violence brought home the fact that despite their ideological commitment to Sri Lanka as a nation and their antagonism towards Tamil militants, they were objectified as Tamils. In the previous riots of 1958 or 1977, middle-class residential areas had been protected, because the residents had been able to use their influence to get police or army protection. In 1983 they were made homeless overnight. The violence happened so quickly that there was no time to call for help, and even when they did call for help it never came, or came too late.

Unable to identify herself with the Tamil militants and equally unable to find a place and an acceptance among the dominant Sinhalese, Kamala felt that the future of Sri Lanka now had no place for them. "If we have to live as minorities," she said, "we might as well live in a place that promises security to the children." In taking the decision to migrate,

Kamala had killed all those nationalist aspirations on which her father had brought her up. But in the final analysis it was not the daughter who was abandoning the father, but the father who had betrayed the daughter. Commenting upon the fact that the victims of violence received no support or protection from government officials, she made the poignant statement: "It is as though your own father has let you down, so all you can do is to leave."

Thus, the loss of her own father in death is conjoined with the loss of a legitimate place in the future and the betrayal by a government that she had come to regard as her own. The personal and the political meet in this instance is the decision to leave Sri Lanka as well as to relinquish the past on which Kamala and her father had based their political identity.

Case 4

<i>Name</i>	: Chellappa
<i>Age</i>	: 50s
<i>Occupation</i>	: Business executive
<i>Area of Residence</i>	: Kollupitiye

Chellappa is a Hindu of Jaffna, of Tamil origin, with a wife and two children of 26 and 23 years respectively. At the time of the violence Chellappa was living in his own house in the affluent area of Nugegoda where some of his other relatives had also bought property.

The violence of 25 June was preceded by a couple of strange incidents. On 21 July strangers came to Chellappa's house to raise a donation. Although he refused to give any money in donation, they invited him to inaugurate a new community centre at Kirillapone on Saturday, 23 July.

Chellappa had a premonition that all was not well. So he sent his driver ahead to check on the address to which he had been asked. The driver found the house in complete darkness. Chellappa assumed that he had been invited by 'con-men'. Only later did he learn that rich Tamils had been thus ambushed, and sometimes killed.

On 24 July Chellappa had gone to Havelock Town for community prayers when he heard rumors of the trouble that was brewing following the killing of thirteen soldiers by Tamil militants. Thus, unlike the other survivors whom I interviewed, Chellappa was a little better prepared in

anticipating the violence of 25 July. That morning he telephoned a high-ranking police officer to ask if it was safe to send his son to the university. The police officer warned him of the impending dangers and advised him to stay at home. However, Chellappa took all important documents, including passports, from the house and asked a Sinhala friend to drive him to the office.

As tension mounted in the area, the family moved out to the houses of various Sinhala friends. His daughter and a cousin moved to a different locality (Nawala) where he joined them later. His wife, his son, and his brother's family moved to the house of a neighbor. According to his wife, she was told by a Sinhala neighbor that a crowd of 400-500 hoodlums had gathered during curfew hours, set their house on fire and looted all they could carry.

Chellappa and his family decided to leave for Malaysia, along with a niece. Other close relatives could not join them, either because they did not have passports or because they could not make their way to the airport. Later on 31 July, when they reached Malaysia, they received a phone-call from Colombo and were given the tragic news of the death of a nephew, a cousin, and a friend. All three men had gone to Nawala to take a bath in a friend's house. While returning, their jeep was diverted by the army to another route on which it was ambushed by a gang of hoodlums. The three unfortunate men were hacked to death and burnt.

Although Chellappa returned after two weeks from Malaysia, he could not feel secure. So he sent his son to England to pursue his studies there and later arranged for his daughter too to study in England. In his account Chellappa dwelt upon the losses to his property and the economic reorganization of his life. Only when questioned did he talk about the three close relatives who died in the violence. For months after they heard of these deaths, Chellappa and his family blamed themselves for the death of their relatives. In the interview he said, somewhat defensively, "It was a case of each man for himself. I could only think of my family's safety. Anyway in those days of chaos, there was no means of tracing missing persons. I try to understand my losses in terms of Hindu karmic theory. Our experiences in life depend upon our past deeds. Maybe it was that boy's destiny to die. May be it was God's will."

Chellappa felt his son was the one who had to bear the brunt of the violence. He had been compelled to leave home abruptly for England

and then go to the USA, but he never visited Sri Lanka again. If ever asked about his plans to return, the son retorted: "Why should I come back? To get humiliated?"

Concluding Comments

The four cases presented here represent different ways in which families exposed to sudden violence reformulated their lives. These cases represent the kind of muted violence that seeps into the everyday life of ordinary people. The ethnic violence of 1983 was unique in the experience of so many Tamils precisely because the middle and upper-classes that were normally protected from such violence suddenly came to realize what it meant to become homeless over a single night.

The kinds of resources used by members of the upper-classes to reorganize their lives were not available to members of the middle and lower classes. For instance, richer people such as Chellappa left for Malaysia and did not have to experience camp life at all. On the other hand, despite his wealth and social position, Chellappa lost some close relatives in a brutal fashion, for in the anonymity of the streets they were identified by only one mark- their Tamil identity.

It is particularly useful to think of the concept of totalization in such situations, for violence homogenizes people and renders them indistinct. Kamala found that, regardless of her political ideology, she was identified as a Tamil. Conversely, the violence was seen to be perpetrated on behalf of the whole Sinhala community, even though the crowds consisted only of thugs and hoodlums, and even though many Sinhala neighbors and friends risked their lives to provide help.

Moments of political crisis such as the one witnessed in July 1983 become a crisis in the everyday life of the community. One notices the heterogeneity of everyday life reflected also in periods of crisis. Thus, some risked their lives to save their Tamil neighbors. Others used the opportunity to trick them out of jewelry or expensive belongings. It is, therefore, important to understand that time took on an extraordinary character, in which various events came together. On the one hand we saw the implicit renegotiation of power that took place, with hoodlums

and thugs controlling the streets, whereas people who normally wielded power in society searched for protection and help. On the other hand in the crowded camps, Tamils of the middle-classes lived in intimate contact with lower-class Tamils and, in some instances, felt themselves protected by the large crowds in which they could merge.

The impact of violence went much further than the two or three days of violence. We have seen, in all these cases that a virtual reformulation of life took place at the level of the family. The threat to the family was most visible in the case of Sylvia, for members of her family had to disperse spatially in order to survive. In the other cases, children started to demand that parents should take on a different social identity so that they did not have to face the humiliation of living with a Tamil identity. In some cases, the entire relationship to the past was altered as one or the other family decided to migrate 'for the sake of the children'.

We saw in these cases that the personal meaning of violence was organized around different kinds of narrative themes. In the case of Saroja the entire meaning of the ethnic violence came to centre around the conflict with her landlord. Thus, what was ethnic conflict seen from the perspective of the nation became landlord tenant conflict from the perspective of the neighborhood. Saroja, as the organizer of this narrative, resisted seeing such conflict as Sinhala-Tamil conflict and instead constructed it as located in local events.

For Sylvia the violence meant the dispersal of her family, whereas for Kamala it was the betrayal by the state that provided the narrative leitmotif. It was Kamala who felt most betrayed as a citizen: the death of her father and the betrayal by the state became interpenetrating themes in her personal experience of ethnic violence. Her sense of loss at the death of her father, who was traumatized by the violence, was projected on to the state, which had behaved like a father who did not protect his children and thus compelled them to migrate.

One of the striking features in the narrative of these women is the decisive role that they played in giving direction to the reorganization of the family. The qualities that they brought to this task of reorganization were those which were hidden in their normal life. Sylvia recalled her sheltered life and how she used to be accompanied by a brother if she ever had to go out alone after dark. Yet, after the riots, she was able to board alone and pay for her sister's education. It was she who

encouraged her mother to consider renting a house once again, so that the family could reunite and experience the closeness which had become threatened by their dispersal to different parts of the country. It seems that there was an aspect of the self which was like an outsider to the family; this the women were able to bring out, to the task of family reformulation.

The role of the outsider seemed very important in periods of crisis for the survival of the family. In each case we saw fleeing families helped by neighbors or even remote acquaintances. In the case of Sylvia, the entire rescue operation was carried out by neighbors. This opening of the boundaries of the family was sometimes experienced as threatening. Consider the case of Saroja who felt she had to be extremely cautious in dealing with the demands of her neighbors over the use of various facilities of her house, for she needed their support to deal with her landlord. But clearly, the opening of these boundaries was one way in which the family came to cope with continued stress.

The survivor's experience was strongly influenced by social class, kinship network and past history. Whereas the classic studies of survivor experience, such as those of Lifton have emphasized the processes by which the self is reformulated, in my own interviews I found that the primary concern of the victims of violence was reorganization of the family. Decisions regarding the future of children, the need to find safe areas to live, to reorganize economic life, and to constantly interpret political events as significant signs figured prominently in this reorganization. The violence did not just 'erupt' and then disappear. Perhaps the difference between threats from natural disasters, and violence coming from human agencies, is that the latter is experienced as *continuous* violence. It is not contained in time; like waves created by throwing a stone in the river, it has repercussions which far exceed the moment of its occurrence.

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¹ The concept of totalization in the context of violence has been developed by Perkin (1986).

² Muruga is the name of a Tamil deity, who presides over games of competition.

9

July '83 - The Survivors and their Narratives: Ten Years After*

Valli Kanapathipillai

Retrospecting ten years after July '83, one looks down into a chasm of bloodshed, hatred, suspicion, violence and more violence that has marked the political history of Sri Lanka for the past decade. As politicians, militants, terrorists and the armed forces play out their game of power in the larger arena of politics and warfare, the numbers who have become victims of the ensuing violence spirals upwards. There are those who perish in the face of violence, and there are also those who survive. The survivor plays an important role in the history of a nation which is torn by warfare and violence. For it must be recognized that the "[s]urvivor is the one who is touched by violence, but manages to 'get away' and lives to testify to the brute facts of 'violence'."¹

The following is the story of the survivors, specifically those who lived through the violence of July '83, their retrospection of their survival ten years after, against the backdrop of the civil war in the North and East of the Island, which followed the aftermath of the violence of '83 and threatens to tear asunder the country.

These are the narratives of three persons, and the common thread connecting them is the violence they experienced in 1983. The main focus is on their experiences and their recollections.

July '83 and the Experience of Communities Caught in-between

Case Study I:

Name: Fatima Suleiman
Age: late 30s.
Occupation: Typist in a Legal Firm in Colombo.
Residence: Block of Flats in the suburb of Colombo.

The July 1983 violence affected Tamils and those the marauding mobs considered as Tamils. Thus for the first time since the ethnic violence of '58, '77, and '81, there were two instances of other minorities, i.e., Colombo Chetties and Bharathas, being subject to violence. These minorities made no claims to being Tamils, but seemed to have been identified as Tamils by the Sinhalese, by their names, manner of dressing and in some instances by the fact that they spoke Tamil, which were merely cultural traits they carried over from the past, that did not necessarily identify them as being Tamil. In the case of the Colombo Chetties, the violence they were subject to awoke them to the fact that they had to assert their identity, if they were to survive in a Sri Lanka which was becoming ethnically polarized. Therefore, they formed a Colombo Chetty Association with the primary aim of bringing all Colombo Chetties under one organization and to assert that they were neither Tamils nor Sinhalese but Colombo Chetties with their own unique identity. As told to me by one of the chief organizers, the Association was formed to prevent violence against the Colombo Chetties in the event of another ethnic riot. It would do so by helping the Colombo Chetties assert their own identity, as separate from the Tamils and the Sinhalese. It was also to bring together the Colombo Chetties who themselves were fast losing their identity and becoming diffused among other ethnic groups. I interviewed one of the organizers of the Association, and I also interviewed three other Colombo Chetties who were themselves subject to violence. Of the three I interviewed I chose to illustrate the experience of Fatima Sulaiman as she seemed to be one who had suffered much, financially and emotionally, by the violence.

The violence has left her confused. She has been subject to an ethnic conflict in which she was never a part. When I first contacted her

for an interview she was quite willing to be interviewed and stated firmly "this is what happened to us, what is the point in hiding it." In speaking of her experiences she was frank and open, requiring little prodding from me.

She still bore the scars of ethnic violence. Often I felt I was opening afresh old wounds, for when recalling particularly painful moments, she would break down and cry. However, she determinedly continued with the interview. One sensed as with many other interviewees, there was a need to be avenged, a need to tell the world of what had happened to her.

Fatima's husband Sulaiman is a Catholic converted from Islam. He is employed as a salesman, while she is a typist in a legal firm in Colombo. They have a 21/2 year old daughter. Presently they are living in a block of flats in the suburbs of Colombo. Their flat is small and sparsely furnished. They share it with Sulaiman's aged mother.

Fatima comes from a family of 7, consisting of 5 brothers and 1 sister. Her father died one year before the 1983 violence. Her mother died in December 1984. Except for the younger brother and her younger sister, all the others in the family are married.

At the time of the 1983 violence they lived in a large house in Ratmalana. She was then living with her younger brother, sister and mother. She was also engaged to be married to Suleiman.

Events of July 1983 (as narrated by Fatima): Monday, 25th July

My elder brother phoned us in Ratmalana and said there was trouble in the city and not to send the children to school. The rest of us adults set off to work as usual. My husband, then my fiance, came home as usual, and we both left for work. On the way I saw fire everywhere. The bus could not take the same route and had to be diverted along another road. By the time we reached office, the situation had got out of hand. There was looting and destruction all around us. My husband therefore advised me to go home. I collected my things and returned. By 9 o'clock I was at home. We saw mobs going past our house, shouting,

jeering. But we were not frightened, as it did not concern us. We were not Tamils. That evening at 4:00 p.m. my husband came to check on us. When passing he had seen fire down our lane and wondering what was happening he had stopped by our road. He saw mobs burn the factory of a Tamil industrialist along with houses belonging to other Tamils. Meanwhile curfew had been imposed. My mother told my husband to spend the night with us as it did not seem safe to be on the road at a time like this.

Part of our house was rented out to Jaffna Tamils. A mother and daughter stayed there. We could not tell them to leave and where could they go. We advised them to go indoors and not be seen. They were very religious, I think they were Pentecost. They did not show fear, but prayed all the time.

We were quite calm, not disturbed by what was going on around us. We listened to music, played with our nieces and nephews. At about 10:00-11:00 p.m. we switched off the lights and retired to bed. Then we heard sounds like people jumping over the wall. There was a tapping on the door. On opening the door my husband saw a crowd of men standing there carrying long knives. He asked them "Why come here, we are not Tamils." They replied "You may not be Tamils, but you are encouraging Tamils by keeping them in your house, Tamils who have killed our brothers in Jaffna. We have come to take revenge." They then raised a knife to cut my husband who ducked, held out his hand and got the cut on his hand. Then they pushed him against the piano and held him there. They wore masks, some with hats. I was near the switch, I put my hand up to put on the lights, when one thug cut at it and we were left in darkness. They pushed the rest of us into one room. My husband they covered with a blanket, and a gun or knife or something was pushed against his mouth. He was also bleeding from his head. Then they started smashing everything, glasses etc., shouting "*deepang, deepang*" (give us, give us). There may have been about

75 men. They went into the different rooms. In the middle room was my mother and myself. We could not recognize them. But one asked me "where is the wristlet you wear on Sunday?" I don't wear much jewelry when I go to work but on Sundays when going to Church I wear jewelry. This was obviously somebody from the area, someone who had watched me.

In the middle room was my mother, myself, my sister and sister-in-law, who was with her 3 children. One child was only 3 months old, the other 11/2 years old. The elder boy only 5 years old, just closed his eyes and sat, frightened. My mother was 72 years old, it was only a year since she lost my father. She too just sat on the bed shocked. When the mobs went from room to room, I do not know how I got the courage but I followed them. In the last room were all the electrical equipment, some of it mine, bought for my wedding. They dashed everything to the floor. The central room had cupboards with our clothes. The cupboards were emptied and things thrown to the floor and they kept shouting "*deepang*" wanting money. Otherwise, they said they would kill us. My brother came forward and said we are not Tamils, but they kept pushing him back, pricking his stomach with a knife. Then my younger brother took money from the almirah and gave them. But they shouted for more. There was a bag full of coins, they took that too. Then they asked for "*ran badu*" (gold jewelry).

Our house was like a *maha gedera* (family home) all would keep their jewelry there for safekeeping. My mother had made my weight in jewelry. She too had her weight in jewelry which she kept for my sister. But when the thugs asked for jewelry we pretended we had nothing. They asked me "where is the chain you wear on Sunday?" Then they put a knife on every woman's head and asked us to remove our ear studs. My sister-in-law told me to give them my chain then perhaps they would go away. So I opened my cupboard drawer and pulled out a box, but by

mistake I handed them a piece of costume jewelry. One of the thugs looked at it and said "*me ratharang neve*" (this is not gold) and raised his knife to strike. I shouted and said the chain was in the next room. They left in a while, but before that they told us they would come back and burn the house, and warned us to leave the house before they did so. They also warned us not to tell anyone of what happened, then they all walked out. I felt the thugs were in our house for hours and hours, although perhaps the whole episode would have happened in less time. It was as though the whole house belonged to them in that time and we had no say in anything. They had kept my husband against the piano with knife or gun against his mouth. Before they left they pointed it at him, and warned him not to tell anyone of what happened or they would kill him. He was all covered in blood. When we helped him up, he fainted. We did not know what had happened to our Tamil tenants. We locked the front door. Except for the rooms, the rest of the house was in darkness. All a mess with things broken, smashed.

When they were ransacking, the telephone rang, it may have been my brother, because he kept calling us every few hours and telling us the situation in the country. He would do this for any crisis. When the thugs heard the phone ring, they said "so you have a phone also" and cut the wires, we never knew who rang.

When my husband revived we dressed his wounds. Through the connecting door we looked in next door but no one was there, but the back door was open.

As it started dawning we got ready to leave as the thugs had already warned us to leave by morning. My mother carefully packed all the jewelry in a folding bag.

In the morning the two ladies next door appeared. They said that when they had heard the noise in our house they got scared and had run out of the back door and hidden by the well in the neighbor's garden. We had to go somewhere, we did not know where but we told the two Tamil women they could come with us if they wished.

My brother went to his office to find a vehicle and also to get a curfew pass for us to go away, but he had to return unsuccessfully as his office was closed. His boss had been threatened for sheltering Tamils, so they had closed office.

My husband went to the opposite house to use the telephone, but the phones were not working. Meanwhile, gangs had been coming towards our house, but the neighbors had managed to stop them for the time being.

At 9:30-10:00 in the morning a Police Patrol car cruised past our house. Our neighbor persuaded us to leave with the policemen assuring they would look after our house. We had to jump over the neighbor's barbed wire fence to get to the car. The policemen were very rude. When my mother took time to climb over, they said she was only an old lady and to leave her behind. We could not possibly do that. If we were to die, we would die together. So we pleaded with them to be patient and got our mother into the car. My brother's 3 months old infant was with us. Before leaving the house we prepared her feed, and took a change of nappies and baby clothes with us. My mother wrapped the jewelry case in the baby clothes and was holding it tightly in her hand. Meanwhile a neighbor who was helping us to get into the car noticed my mother clinging to this bundle, and offered to keep it till she got in. Despite my mother's protest he forcibly took it off her, put her into the car, and sent us off promising to bring the baby clothes along. We were then taken to the Ratmalana Camp.

Camp life was terrible. We were not used to this type of life. The children were crying all the time. They developed a temperature, fortunately the first aid people were able to give them Disprins at least. There was nowhere to sit. My brother removed his shirt and put it on the small bit of floor space where my mother could sit. As we went, there was no food, only water to sip. 2-3 days later our neighbor, the one who took the bundle off my mother's hands came to see us. He also happened to be

an MMC for a suburb of Colombo. He brought Milk food for the baby, and clothes for each one of us. He even brought the bundle of baby clothes he had taken off my mother. But when she asked for the jewelry case that was wrapped in them, he denied even having seen it. He declared there had been no such thing wrapped among the baby things. We were sure he had ransacked the house for although he was considerate enough to bring something for each one of us, most of the things were not valuable. And the clothes were what had been on the clothes rack in our rooms. He even brought my Bible which I had kept in my dressing table drawer.

Our house was burnt the day after we were attacked. For the shock of losing the jewelry and later the house, my mother had a heart attack, and had to be taken to hospital. On Kotiya day (Friday the 29th) my sister-in-law brought help, and we were taken to my brother's house in the outskirts of Colombo. From then on our relations looked after us.

We had lost everything. Our relations had to give us even clothes. This dress I am wearing now, I got on charity. I got married in September '83. It was a simple wedding not like what we had planned. My brother gave a small reception.

What was left of the house we brought to the ground, and now we are trying to sell the land. We have not had any satisfactory offers yet. I was living with my brother until I got married in September '83. My sister and younger brother continue to live there. My mother died in December '85.

Loss of Home and Jewelry

For Fatima the loss of her house and jewelry were irredeemable. As she said, whatever wealth and property they owned was not inherited, but came from her father's earned income. She spoke wistfully about her home which they had occupied for only 5 years. It had 6 bedrooms, and all the comforts they wanted. She said to her family it was like a

maha gedara where they came periodically even after they were married. On describing her reaction on seeing her house burnt she said "I got a shock when I went to see the house, from the front step when I looked into the house all I could see was the sky. There was no roof. My piano was a heap of twisted metal lying on its side out in the garden. Now, when I see my daughter going up to the church organ and listening to the music, I think back regretfully of the piano I had, and which I can never share with my own daughter."

Fatima was to be married in September, and she had collected household goods which were all destroyed. What perhaps makes it particularly painful for her is that she keeps comparing her life now with what she once had. Now she lives in a small flat, sparsely furnished with little or no luxuries. "I do not possess even a fridge. Since I cannot afford to keep servants, I have to do the marketing daily, cook in the morning and go out to work. If our house had not been destroyed I would have been living comfortably in my own family home."

"I had never seen poverty except in '83. Father kept us in comfort. He was old fashioned and therefore did not approve of his daughter's going out to work." Understanding her liking to become a montessori teacher, he planned to open a montessori in their house to enable her to work without leaving home. "But finally all was lost, and we were left with only what was in the bank." Ironically, she has to go out to work now.

She was bitter about the loss of her jewelry. She was particularly upset by the manner in which they were tricked by their neighbor. She did not elaborate on the exact number of the pieces of jewelry she lost, but it seems she had a considerable amount, as she kept referring to the fact that her parents had made her "her weight" in jewelry. One can conclude her parents would have made her the traditional items of jewelry given to a daughter of marriageable age in a middle-class home. "My mother made my weight in jewelry, *thali*, rings, chains and all. Everything was taken. Even the wedding ring I now wear is the 2nd ring that was made for my wedding." She had the traditional notion that daughters should be provided for with jewelry. "When I was pregnant I wanted a girl. But after she was born I thought of all my daughter would have had. The pair of earrings I wear now are the only pair I possess. I made them out of my earnings after my daughter was born. Since I have a daughter I must have something for her when she grows up."

Her losses have helped mould her attitude towards her child's future. She said she will not only provide her daughter with jewelry, etc., but most importantly, see to it that she is educated too. Fatima was grateful for whatever education and training she had, because of which she is able to earn and be independent. She had montessori training, also experience in shorthand and typing. She earns Rs. 1,500/- a month as a typist, while her husband, a Sales Assistant, earns Rs. 1,500/- out of which they have to pay Rs. 1,500/- rent on the flat, and meet other household bills.

Today, whatever she possesses has been bought with her-hard earned money. After the riots she was left without even basic clothes, and had to depend on her relatives to provide for her. "Even the dress I am wearing at present was given by my relatives. When I first set out to work I went in a saree gifted by a relative. On receiving my first salary I straight away went out and bought myself hand bags, shoes, and other basic items needed for work. I work hard sometimes even late at nights. I proved myself and got my increments. Even now I sometimes do overtime till 5:30 p.m. If we don't work hard then we have nothing." Fatima was bitterly disappointed at not being able to have a grand wedding as planned. From what she told me, much preparation and planning had gone into it. And as any young bride to be she obviously looked forward to her wedding day, but fate would not have it so. "June 25th I was engaged to be married, on July 25th I lost everything." In July she lost everything, including her jewelry and household things that had been bought for her use. She did marry in September as planned, but it was on a small scale, with only her close relations attending. Whatever household efforts she bought since then has been out of savings from her salary.

A Colombo Chetty

Fatima cannot comprehend as to why she was affected. "I was not bothered by the previous riots; it was between the Jaffna Tamils and the Sinhalese. We had nothing to do with it. I have not even seen the color of Jaffna, nor stepped there even. We were not affected in 1958 or 1977. Riots did not affect us in thought or physically. But in '83 we were taken unawares. "She was not aware of the Colombo Chetty

Association or its purpose. She seemed skeptical of its effectiveness. She felt that in a situation there was no guarantee that they would be spared as Colombo Chetties. To her, the Sinhalese were opportunists and the riots were more to satisfy their personal greed than anything else. Therefore, they would use any opportunity to loot anyone who was vulnerable.

Her attitude reflects sadly the disillusionment and skepticism that has grown in her since 1983. For on the one hand while those who were organizing the new association were full of hope in its effectiveness to prevent any more violence against those of their community, here was Fatima a victim of the violence, who has lost her strength to even hope. Once a victim she would perhaps continue to anticipate victimization. (On the other hand, one wonders if she is perhaps being realistic. For given the nature of the violence in 1983, there is ample evidence that the ethnic issue was used for looting. Fatima and a few other Colombo Chetty's I interviewed were attacked by mobs who had prior knowledge that they were not Tamils. The mobs used the fact that Fatima's family had Tamil tenants, as a pretext to loot and rob her house.

She said as a Colombo Chetty she was aware that they were a distinct and separate community, but she never felt any need to stress it. She never felt threatened because of her identity, and as far she was concerned, all communities were equal in her eyes. Whatever differences there existed was between the Tamils and the Sinhalese, and the resulting conflict between the two did not concern her.

However, since 1983 she feels she can no longer distance herself from the ethnic conflict. In fact, with July 1983, in her eyes the Tamils and the Sinhalese have become visibly polarized, leaving the Colombo Chetties in a vulnerable position. As in a crisis, the Colombo Chetties cannot expect support from either community. Moreover, since July 1983, in the eyes of the Sinhalese, a Colombo Chetty is equivalent to a Tamil, which means if there is an ethnic riot in the future, the Colombo Chetties can expect to be attacked again.

On the one hand, she declared that she was proud to be a Colombo Chetty. She would always try to get her daughter married to a Colombo Chetty. On the other hand, like many other Tamil victims I interviewed, she too has the need to hide her identity. No longer does she feel confident to openly assert her identity as a Colombo Chetty. Therefore,

she was glad that her new neighbors did not realize she was a Colombo Chetty. She felt the less they knew of her, the better it would be. She hides behind her non-Colombo Chetty name. Indeed she said she feels more confident because her name does not identify her as a Colombo Chetty. As a result if she hears of troubles in the city, she fears for her own brothers and sisters safety as they carry names that identify them.

The 1983 violence has influenced her attitude towards the Tamils and Sinhalese. Prior to 1983, her family rented out their house to Tamils. They had no preference for any community but rented to whoever was suitable. However, she was generous enough to say she had no regrets at having rented to the Tamil family despite being affected because of them. She seemed to genuinely like her tenants as individuals. On the other hand there was the feeling that she was affected because of the 'Tamils' collectively. While in camp she would argue with the other Tamils that it was because of them that she was subjected to this violence. She even resented her employer's wife wearing jewelry, thinking, in her own words, "they have one foot here and one foot in the North, and are safe and happy." But she is perceptibly more antagonistic towards the Sinhalese. She is convinced that she was attacked because the Sinhalese wanted to loot, which goes with her fundamental belief that the Sinhalese are lazy and would take any opportunity to loot. She described them as "grabbing type, opportunists." She called them time savers. Her attitude is probably sharpened by her domestic situation. Since of 1983, her mother-in-law (a Sinhalese) in moments of domestic quarrels would insultingly refer to Fatima as a "*chakkili demala*" (low caste Tamil). "It hurts as I am drawn into the Tamil community, when I don't even belong." During arguments, her Sinhala sister-in-law too insults her for being a Tamil.

Fatima said she had lost her sense of trust in anyone after the 1983 violence, be they Tamil or Sinhala. She feels insecure as she's caught between both communities. She harked back to her young days when she was brought up to believe that all were equal, but she said "today one never knows who is next to you. One never knows if your neighbor is a friend or a traitor." A feeling obviously heightened by her experience with the Sinhalese neighbors, the majority of whom did not help for fear of being threatened themselves, or those who pretended to help and robbed them in the process.

Attitude towards the Government

She had voted for the UNP all along but now feels let down by the party and the Government. "I think we only give a job to these people. I will not vote again. I never voted for the other parties because I did not have faith in them, so how can I vote for them when I still do not have faith in them?" Therefore the only alternative for her is to stop exercising her power to vote, rather than vote against her conscience.

When I asked her opinion on the militants she said what went on in the North did not bother her. She was not a part of it, but she blamed the Government for the general situation in the country. She deplored that unfortunately on both sides, among the Sinhalese and the Tamils, it was the innocents who suffered.

She declared she would never go abroad. "This is my country." When I told her of the good prospects possibly open to her, she did not seem interested. Perhaps her closeness to her family does not encourage her to think in these terms.

Religion

Many victims I interviewed seemed to turn to religion to explain and help them come to terms with their misfortune. Fatima comes from a strong Catholic background. Yet one sensed in her, a feeling that God did not protect her in her hour of need. Her child-like trust only met with disappointment. With tears in her eyes she told me "After the mobs came and threatened to set fire to the house, we knelt and prayed, yet God did not give us the house."

On the other hand, like many of those who have suffered there is a sense that all material things are not permanent. There is an acute awareness that wealth and property can be lost overnight as they so painfully witnessed in July 1983. This feeling seems to have strengthened her will to lead a good and moral life, as she said "One thing I have learnt from this. Not to have attachments to material things. If one lives well, one can meet one's maker."

Documents

She lost all her documents in the riots, and like many others, she found it extremely difficult to replace them. Her bank account number, identity card etc. were all destroyed. To get the identity card she said she was sent from pillar to post by officials in various departments. Finally her husband said the truth does not get one anywhere, so she told the authorities she had lost the Identity Card in the bus. Perhaps that explanation proved more effective, but she said she got her Identity Card soon after. She has got it under her married name which seemed to give her more confidence.

Scars of violence

"Soon after the riots when walking on the roads, every man I saw seemed to be the one who came to attack." She said even now at times she wakes up at night dreaming of the mobs who came to attack her house. "It is still buried inside. As I talk to you I can picture that night, the thugs, the noise. Talking about it makes me feel awful." She believes her mother died a year after the violence, as a result of the shock. She said "she died sad, she died cursing those who robbed her."

Refugee camp

Recalling her experience in the refugee camp was undoubtedly painful for her. Halfway through her narration she broke down crying, so I had to stop awhile, and continue on another less painful topic. They went to camp on Tuesday morning, carrying nothing on them, except the clothes on their back. They were in the Ratmalana Camp until Friday, after which relatives managed to trace them to the camp, and took them to their house. They all went to camp, including a 3 month old infant, 2 small children and their 72 year old mother.

As they went, the camp was not properly organized. In fact the so called camp consisted only of two airplane hangers which had hastily been converted into a camp. As the violence continued, victims were brought in for safety. There were very few facilities in terms of food and

shelter. With the greatest difficulty Fatima's brother found a place for their mother to sit. The infant was crying, and the children developed fever in the camp. Fatima too, for the shock of her experience, got her period, and there was nothing she could use as protection. She had to tell her fiancé of her plight, and he provided her with his own vest which she used until she left camp. There were no proper toilet facilities, water was brought in carts, for which they had to queue. Food was brought periodically, for which there was a mad scramble. She broke down crying on relating to me, the one instance when her brother managed to get bread for them, in return for helping to unload food from the van. To her, this act was symbolic of the absolute deprivation they faced in those few days, and perhaps, what made it more frightening was that they were cut off from the rest of the world, not knowing how or when they would be able to escape from their plight.

For Fatima those few days in the refugee camp were ones of absolute deprivation. From the comfort of her middle-class home she was thrown into a situation she had no control over. She had to share those days with people from all walks of life, all victims of the conflict.

Comments

Fatima is a victim of an ethnic conflict she never associated herself with. It has left her confused, distrustful and full of bitterness. She never anticipated the violence. What was so pathetic was the fact that on the morning of the violence she and her family were trying to protect their Tamil tenants, little realizing that they themselves would be subject to violence.

Her circumstances now are much reduced, making the change doubly painful, especially as she keeps comparing the comforts she had and what she cannot give her daughter. Her father brought her up traditionally, believing she would never have to go out to work. But now she has to go out and earn to maintain her family. I heard her say what many other Tamils affected by the violence have told me. "Ultimately it is education that sees one through life, not property and wealth, which can be easily lost." Like many others she wished her daughter to be educated to ensure a better future for her.

As a Colombo Chetty she has not felt herself a part of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, and therefore up to now treated all communities as equal. As she said, even within her own community, there are no caste barriers. All were equal in her eyes, but with the violence she too has become prejudiced in her attitude. She looks upon the Jaffna Tamils as having caused her troubles. In that sense she has become prejudiced towards the Tamils. When her Tamil neighbor in the flats told her of the hardship she faced in 1983, Fatima could not sympathize. In fact, she said she could not help feeling that the Tamils deserved what they got, for having brought upon the ethnic violence on themselves of which she was an innocent victim. Yet she was generous enough to say that she never regretted the fact that she had Tamils as tenants. Perhaps it was because of her good relations with her tenants. On the other hand her attitude towards the Sinhalese was not too generous. She is quite sure that her home was affected because the mobs wanted to loot. Not for ethnic reasons.

Retrospecting Ten Years After

The following are two persons, who look back on the events of July '83 and speak on its impact on their lives. Each speaking from his/her different class, gender, socio-economic circumstance and background.

Case Study II:

Name: Chellapa
Age: 50s
Occupation: Business executive
Residence: Kollupitiya

Chellapa, a Hindu of Jaffna Tamil origin, is a successful business executive now residing in the affluent area of Kollupitiya, with his wife. His two daughters and son are married.

At the time of the July '83 violence he was living in Kirulapone and his children and his wife were with him. They moved out to safety from their own house which was set on fire and their possessions looted by the mobs. He lost a nephew, who was killed in the heart of town during the height of the violence. His immediate response to these events was

to leave the country with his family, and although he later returned, his sense of insecurity continued, prompting him to send his children abroad.

At the time of the first interview in 1987, his sense of insecurity remained, and the death of the nephew is still a painful experience, which he did not talk of openly. The focal point of his conversation was the losses to his property, and the economic re-organization made necessary in his life.

By the second interview with him, six years later in 1993, he was a very different person. He was much more positive in his view of his future in Sri Lanka, he expressed a certain confidence in the Government which had not allowed another pogrom like July '83 to happen again, despite the endless violence in the country. He even encouraged his son to come back to the country.

He expressed happiness at his decision not to leave the country for good after the July '83 violence. It was his belief now that this was the right decision, as he is satisfied with the professional advancement he has had since then. Economically he is very stable, and he has bought himself a house in one of the leading residential areas in Colombo, where again his security in times of crisis is guaranteed.

His satisfaction at not leaving the country then is doubly enhanced when comparing his life with that of the other Tamils who have fled the country since then. In his opinion most Tamils who have settled in other countries, live there as second-class citizens. They do not live with dignity, as they are alien to the country and the culture.

He is glad that he has stayed back, as he feels it's only by staying in the country that one can contribute in some way towards achieving peace. It was necessary to live, not as Tamils and Sinhalese, but to work together. "If the country grows economically, the ethnic problem can be solved" he affirms.

In sum he has personally been successful in re-building his career, which has contributed much to the positive attitude he takes. His daughter is married and settled in Colombo, his son is also married and living in the United States. In a sense his financial stability, and personal and family security, has helped divorce him from the ethnic conflict in the North and East, and helped him overcome to a certain extent his trauma of July '83.

His experience and view of life is in sharp contrast to that of the woman presented in the case study given below.

Case Study III:

Name : S. Sakuntala
Age: early 40's
Residence: Saraswathy Hall refugee camp, Colombo 4.

Sakuntala is a woman I interviewed in a refugee camp in Colombo. She and her husband are Tamils of Indian origin. Sakuntala is the mother of six children, two boys and four girls. She did not go out to work, but her husband did *coolie* work outside the camp, when work was available. She and her family had come to the camp in Colombo from Batticaloa, but the actual story of her survival of violence begins in Bandarawela, up in the hill country ten years ago in July '83.

Prior to the violence of July '83, she and her husband came from a middle-class background, and they were relatively well off. She stayed within the protected environs of her home, and looked after her family. Since July '83, her life has been an endless survival in the face of the violence that has pursued them ever since.

In July '83 her house in Bandarawela was burnt, following which she and her family settled in Batticaloa under greatly reduced circumstances. Her successful adjustment to her new life was soon shattered by the violence that broke out in the Eastern Province with the onset of terrorism and counter terrorism, forcing her to flee her home with her family once again and seek the shelter of a refugee camp in Colombo. In the camp she faces the uncertainties of life that is the burden of refugees.

Her survival and the narrative of her survival is shaped by her marginalization as a person belonging to a particular ethnic group and by her gender.

Events of July '83

In 1983, she was 34 years old, married with very young children. She was living in her husband's house in Bandarawela town, in the hill country of Sri Lanka. They were some of the few Tamils who were living in that area. On the 25th of July, at about 7 p.m., she heard a terrible noise, shouting and men screaming '*demala maranda'a*' (kill the Tamil).

I saw them coming in a mob, they were in a tractor and carrying swords and sticks, swords with blood dripping on them. Since our house is by the road, we were frightened and ran. Each one of us picked up a child and ran. Even my old mother of 60 years ran with us. We fled to a hotel run by a friend. A Sinhalese hotel run by a Tamil. We stayed there for a week in fear. We hid under the beds that week. One of us would climb a tree in the day time, to watch if the Sinhalese were coming. The people who came to attack were not Sinhalese from the town but from other areas.

We lived like that for a week. We would go to our house to cook, but at the slightest commotion or hint of danger we would drop what we were doing, and rush back to the hotel and hide. Then when things got calmer, we decided to leave town and go to a relative's house on an estate in Hakgala. We left the house in Bandarawela, taking only minimum clothes and money.

My relative's house on the estate was small, consisting of a verandah and two small rooms. About 18 persons lived there for about a month, which included other relatives who had fled the violence like us. But we had to manage as we had nowhere else to go. The children were small then, and since the climate is cool, living under such cramped conditions was bearable. To meet expenses we sold my children's earrings and we cooked together and lived off the vegetables in the garden. Since we were with my relations, including my mother and youngest sister, we did not feel alone.

After a month, my husband's friend, who ran a tobacco trading business in Batticaloa advised us to go to a place called Sinnapillu, in the Batticaloa district. He said it would be possible for us to buy a small piece of property and start establishing ourselves in relative peace. Therefore, in December 1983, we set off to Batticaloa in the van belonging to our friend.

Adjusting to Life in Batticaloa

In Batticaloa, they settled in an area called Sinnapillu where for about Rs.5,000 they bought a two acre piece of land, with a small house built of mud. For water they had to walk very far. They were isolated, as the next hut was quite a distance away. They did not live in comfort or peace.

The climate was quite different from what they were used to in Bandarawela, as it was hot and dry in Batticaloa, unlike the cool climate they had been used to all their lives. They were alone, it was an unknown area, and they were terrified of snakes and thieves.

The area was strange to us. It was hot so the children could not sleep in the nights. We would prefer to spread our mats outside and sleep in the open, with one of the men keeping guard, as we were frightened of being attacked by thieves, and being bitten by snakes which were plentiful in the area. We were alone, the place was new to us, the climate was new to us, we did not know what to do next, nor how we were going to live.

In 1984, life changed for her somewhat when they came into contact with Father Soysa from Batticaloa town. He offered her husband a job as a driver, which made a considerable improvement on their outlook for the future.

We were grateful to Father Soysa, without looking into differences of religion or caste, he helped us. He offered us a house in Sathrukundan which was a settlement created by Father Soysa's church to re-settle those who had fled their homes with the '83 violence. There were about 67 houses, and we occupied one. It was a brick house, with a well in the compound. Later Father Soysa helped us to build an extension to the house. As we began to settle into the new house and surroundings, for the first time since so many months we experienced peace and looked forward to the future. I planted trees in the garden,

coconut, limes, mango and vegetables. With the help of the Father, my children started schooling at St. Cecilia's Convent. I also started doing some handwork, through a co-operative system which had been started by the Father in the settlement. I received a small payment for the handwork articles I made. From '84 until about '90 we were settling and looking forward to a reasonable life in Batticaloa.

We felt secure because we had neighbors close by and they were all Tamils. Some were Tamils of Indian origin like us, who had been affected by the '83 riots. The others were Batticaloa Tamils. We lived with them peacefully.

The Violence in the Eastern Province

She and her family lived in peace until about June 1990, when the violence started again. This time the violence was caused by the fighting between the LTTE and the Sri Lanka army. It was not her concern as to who was against whom. But the violence was terrible all the same.

We did not know who was at fault. We were new to the area and had no idea of the different terrorist movements that existed. The local people knew but we did not, nor did we want to know or get involved. My children do not belong to any group, and we did not have any opportunity or interest in finding out the ground situation from the people of the area. My children went to school, my husband went to work, when I finished my housework, I had just enough time to make some handwork to sell or attend to the garden. We had no time to talk to the neighbors of such things.

The violence was terrible. We saw bodies on the road. Bombs were going off frequently. There was shelling from planes in the air. We saw it with our own eyes. We heard that 67 people were taken in a truck and cut to pieces. We saw bodies without limbs, bodies under trees, even bodies of young girls. We did not know who had committed

these atrocities, whether it was the army or the LTTE. Our one thought was to save our children. We were frightened as we had young daughters. Our first thought was to take them to safety, not analyze as to who was behind the violence. We wanted to escape the violence.

Sakuntala then described their daily life with the onset of violence in Batticaloa:

We were all Tamils in the neighborhood, so if there was some news of any violence, we could all run together. People were on the alert. If the army or the militants were approaching, we would tell each other to run and all would run to safety together. We were constantly in readiness to flee. I kept a bottle of tea, a bottle of sugar, and some clothes bundled up, which we could pick up and run with in case of emergency. We ran like that countless times.

The striking difference between the violence Sakuntala experienced in 1983 and in 1990 was that in 1990 she did not feel alone like in 1983. They were all Tamils, and they all ran together. But both forms of violence came as a shock:

In both instances we had no time to think, we just ran. Both came as a shock. I have not analyzed which was worse, both were equally bad. After '83, we began to live peacefully in Batticaloa, and then again we faced violence. Again we had no sleep in the nights, again the same tensions. Makes me wonder whether this will continue throughout our lives?

Life in the Refugee Camp in Colombo

Finally, they left the area and traveled to Batticaloa town where they stayed in camps for about a month. Then they traveled to Colombo where they arrived at Saraswathy Hall in Bambalapitiya. She has lived in this camp for the past three years. The one thing she has in the camp

is a certain sense of security. "In Batticaloa, we never slept in the nights, there was a frightening noise all the time, from the bombs and the planes and the sound of burning. We were constantly on the alert to run. That tension and noise is no longer here in the camp, in that sense we are at peace here to a certain extent".

But their living conditions are appalling.

The toilets in the camp are insufficient. In the morning, we have to stand in a queue. There are only two taps. The water supply is inadequate. Those who go to work and school children have to spend a long time to at least wash themselves. Particularly affected are young girls. But we should not complain, as the authorities can only help us this much. I cannot blame any one.

Sakuntala's constant worry is her children's future, particularly that of her daughter's. She mentioned several times that they were young unmarried girls, and her constant fear through these troubles was that they would be shamed in some way. In the camp she despairs for her daughters as they are in the public gaze. "My daughters have to sleep in the open, there is no privacy, and I feel ashamed and frightened when young men, walk past." She expressed worry that no one would marry them as they live in a camp.

Though there is relative peace in the camp, her mind is not at peace, she constantly worries about her children. "Sometimes, I fight with my husband, I tell him it's better for the whole family to take poison and die". Sakuntala is a Catholic and continues to go to church in Colombo, but that does not stop her from questioning the role of religion in her life. "Sometimes I curse God, and ask why He's testing me like this. There is no rest, no peace."

Their family house in Bandarawela was taken over by the army after '83. She did not seem interested in getting it back.

We cannot go back to Bandrawela, the people in the area will find out we have lived in Batticaloa, and call us LTTE. I know because a relative in Banadarawela said there is talk to that effect. Also the house is occupied by someone in the army. We do not want to involve ourselves with him

unnecessarily. We have neither the money nor the courage to start a court case.

The house in Sathrukundan is also broken. All she wants now is to rent a house in Colombo and move out with the family. If the camp is closed, she said she would not go back to Batticaloa nor to Bandarawela, but stay and try to survive in Colombo.

* This paper was presented at the ICES 1993 conference "July '83: Ten Years After."

¹ Amrit Srinivasan, "The Survivor in the Study of Violence," in *Mirrors of Violence* ed. Veena Das (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990)



10 The Dissecting Board' by G. Kailasanathan

In the Shadow of a Riot: 1983 and After

Pradeep Jeganathan

In August 1992 a land-mine at Araly Point, on a Sri Lankan army-held island off the Jaffna peninsular, killed nearly the entire commanding staff of the Sri Lankan armed forces.¹ Among the dead was General Denzil Kobbekaduwa. A scion of a powerful family and product of the right schools, widely regarded as the most astute military mind of his generation, Kobbekaduwa was to be honored in death by the state: an enormous military funeral was planned at the national cemetery in Colombo. A little over nine years before, the death of thirteen, low-ranking soldiers, in a similar land mine explosion, had been marked by another funeral. In the midst of that abortive funeral began the events of '1983.'²

From the vantage point of Patupara, the Araly Point bomb shattered the long calm of the early nineties. We seemed to teeter, briefly but palpably, at the edge of a space within which a riot could take place. For Tamils who lived in Patupara —both those who had lived through '1983' in southern Sri Lanka, and those who had not— such times recalled, with moments of great intensity, '1983.' Such recollections straddle both times, past and present. But they also differ, or at least extend into another kind of time. That of anticipation. The practices I seek to anthropologize here are not only recollections of things past, told in the context of the present, but also they are pointers to the future. They concern the possibility of future riots: repetitions of '1983.' Such practices are by no means confined to the verbal or the explicit domain of life, rather they encompass a range of ways of being, both subtle and sharp, muted and strong that are both spoken and unspoken, explicit and implicit. I shall call this repertoire of practices 'tactics of anticipation' and they will be the primary anthropological objects of this chapter.

It is only possible to draw this distinction between 'recollection' and 'anticipation' because of another distinction between the practitioners in

the two instances; Sinhalese on the one hand, and Tamils on the other. Even as these two fields of practices, recollection and anticipation are marked apart, therefore, they constitute a distinction between Sinhalese and Tamilness. And just as my examination of moments of recollection in other work³ centered on how both 'violence' and 'Sinhalese' emerged, co-constituted in and by those moments of recollection, my concern with 'tactics of anticipation' in this paper center on how 'Tamilness' and the possibility of future 'violence' are co-constitutive through those very tactics.

By so doing, I attempt to chart yet another path to 'violence' through anthropology. In a now conventional, and productive strand in the anthropology of violence, the practices of Tamils who lived through '1983' in southern Sri Lanka, might be thought of as practices of 'survival.' I seek, in this chapter, to shift that categorization. Valli Kanapathipillai, a practitioner of this strand of anthropology, in her pioneering efforts, has examined, closely and sensitively, the (female) 'survivor' of '1983', tracing the effect that event had on particular life histories, and telling of particular reconfigurations in the wake of that event.⁴ The analytic category of the survivor in this work is produced through (oral) biographies of the survival of direct 'violence.' As such, then, the place of violence in this work is that of a "cause." It is through this causal relationship that the "survivor" is produced: the "survivor" exists because she has experienced violence. Such efforts in the anthropology of violence⁵ operate in relation to an object that is always already visible to the ethnographic eye sensitive to the effects of violence, an object whose existence is indisputable to the ethnographer because it is marked out prior to her arrival in the field, an object, in other words, that is always already available to an anthropology of violence. Its analytic equation, in the summary, then is Violence => Survival (suffering). It is therefore, distinct from the kind of anthropology that would seek to 'explain' violence; rather it belongs to that strand of anthropology that seeks to read the non-instrumental effects of violence, locating 'violence' itself as an hermeneutic. While such a move is an important step in the anthropology of violence, it may, I suggest, run the risk of taking 'violence' as a given, self-evident object.

I do not wish to run this risk, and therefore seek to draw a distinction between Kanapathipillai's work, and my own. My concern, as I have said, is with how practices of anticipation constitute the possibility of violence, not with how 'violence,' assumed as self-evident, produces

practices of survival. There is, therefore, an analytic distinction to be drawn between our objects, and subtle though it may seem, I would plead its importance. By refusing to position violence in a direct causal relationship with another anthropological category of investigation — 'survival'—I am able to both think the emergence of 'violence' in a way that may have not been possible before. By repositioning my anthropological object as that of the anticipation of 'violence,' I can attempt again in this chapter to constitute an object that tracks the emergent location of violence in an ethnographic field without assuming its place, and treating it as self evident.

1

The day after the Araly Point bomb, Muttiah and I talked for the first time about '1983.' Throughout my time in Patupara, it was always at times like this that Muttiah would speak to me of '1983' —and seeing as he did in those times the sharply etched shadow of a riot across his life— he produced then in his narratives a rich texture of detail that was not available at other times. For Tamils like Muttiah, life had changed in Patupara, after '1983.' It was not only that he and his family had lived through the event in the community, and lived on to remember. But also even as '1983' was recalled, it made the possibility of such future events visible. After '1983,' there were times, like those days in August, when Muttiah, and others like him thought that another riot would be upon them again.

In 1983, Muttiah had been married to Carolis' daughter, Leela for eight years. They lived on the same plot of land that Carolis lived on; they had just built a new shack, abutting the old one upon marriage. Yet this was the same plot of land that had been disputed even then—it was the plot that Carolis did not have deeds for, and the Pereras claimed ownership of. In early 1983, Michael Perera had requested that Carolis move — but he had done nothing. It was not Muttiah's marriage to Leela, as much as the growing family that resulted from it, that made it imperative that the land not be handed over to the Pereras or their nominees; and Muttiah, a newcomer to the intricate relations between

this particular master and his servants, was caught in an uncomfortable middle. His Tamilness had never figured explicitly in the dispute, but he had felt, he told me, that it might. This question of property, of course, paralleled that of the Josephs': there matter had come to a head and a court-case was pending.

When I knew Muttiah he was still a young man. He was short, a lot shorter than I and always seemed to narrow his shoulders, and bend his body forward as he talked to me. In census categories Muttiah is an 'Indian Tamil,' a descendant of immigrants who began arriving in colonial Ceylon in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁶ Even though Muttiah, himself, traced his ancestry back to India through his grandfather, he never seemed to be connected to that place in any organic way, and had never visited the mainland. He had been born in Colombo, where his father, like his father before him worked as a municipal sanitation worker. This was Muttiah's occupation as well. Even though the municipal council had, as the Mayor liked to say, made great strides since Muttiah's grandfather's day: he moved garbage in a tractor. He spoke Sinhala well, as he must have all his life, but with a distinctive accent that marked him as a Tamil. He and I always spoke in Sinhala, and he assumed, I would imagine, that I was Sinhala, and in fact a relative of the Pereras. This positioning, for everyone in the community, was one to be negotiated, but Muttiah negotiated me in his own way. While I would feel exchanges or even battles of power at every look or glance with other Sinhala men of the subordinate classes, I never did with Muttiah. It was as if he did not participate even in the idea of equality that had so strong a hold among the other men— as a Tamil, it seemed, he knew better. Muttiah never met my eye confidently as other men did and he did not ask me where I was going when he saw me on the street as some of the other younger men did. Rather, if we passed each other on the street, he would tell me where he was off to, looking down or away, stooping often as if expecting instructions or orders. I do not know if these practices predated '1983,' and so can not tell if his body itself had become inscribed with the recollection and anticipation of violence over time. But I would not be surprised if it had. In any event, Muttiah was not of the 'boys'—he did not keep the company of Suda's or Gunadasa's group. He had never been that kind of man, I gathered from Leela —a

teetotaler, he did not even smoke very often; he worked hard, saved regularly and was not one to hang out with anyone in the evenings. Nor did he know the Josephs very well before '1983.' His two children used to go to the Josephs to watch TV in the early 1980s, but after that practice had stopped there had been no contact at all between the two families. Nor is this odd, since the Josephs considered themselves to be Tamils of a different sort from Muttiah, marking themselves as "Sri Lanka Tamil" on official forms.

Muttiah first realized there were 'disturbances' about when he went to work on the 24th of July, 1983. He heard then that Tamils had been attacked in Borella and Maradana, and that the police were doing nothing. He came home at once, knowing that he was a marked man on the streets. But at home there was confusion. "I didn't know what would happen," Muttiah remembered, "maybe they would come for me, just me, or they would burn the house, also. If it was just me, it would be all right, but without the house we would have nowhere to live. I thought if I wasn't in the house, when they came, things would be all right. So I left." Suddenly, Muttiah, who usually saw himself as the protector and master of his family, becomes in his own eyes, its liability. It was his own "Tamilness" that made him want to banish himself from their midst, acting as if his presence was a taint on their being. Even as he left home, warning his wife and two daughters to be careful, he stopped by the Josephs, to warn them of the impending danger. Here and now, in the face of violence, class and origin did not matter as much as they might have on another day: Muttiah opened the gate to the Josephs' house, and knocked on the door. Only Joseph was home: his family had been sent away that very hour, with a few documents they had thought were invaluable, to a Sinhala friend's house in another neighborhood. Joseph had stayed behind, as he told Muttiah, "as the man of the house to keep the house safe." There is an obvious reversal of movement here, when Joseph is contrasted with Muttiah's own departure from home; here Joseph is not a liability, rather despite his "Tamilness," he remains a true patriarch, a protector of hearth and home. But what I find significant here is the intersection of masculinity with the anticipation of violence. To wait for a riot is to wait in a space for violence, at its shifting, porous boundaries. A space for violence, is a space of danger, one in which particular masculinities can emerge. And in

Muttiah's subordinated, sacrificial leaving home in an attempt to save the house, to Joseph's desire to face down any intruders single-handedly, we have similar but different plays of masculinity in the boundaries of such a space.

But Muttiah talked Joseph out of it. Exercising the rare authority of street-wisdom that his working-class status gave him, Muttiah told Joseph that it was unwise to stay; so unwise that he could risk death. Joseph capitulated slowly, but then in the inevitable unraveling of the logic of bourgeois order in the face of violence, asked for time to put a few belongings into a bag. And as Muttiah waited, Joseph scuttled about the house first picking up one, and then another, possession, commodity, heirloom, keepsake or knick-knack, only to put it down again in confusion. Such uncertainty is familiar, I would argue, to Tamilness in Sri Lanka; to be a Tamil is to both remember and anticipate the destruction of property so treasured by bourgeois society. The many Tamils who have safe deposit boxes, deep in the vaults of banks in York street, live in the vise of this anxiety, of not knowing what in their lives must fit into a box two feet by three. It is not — as Joseph's dilemma demonstrates — easy to know what from one's home, that terrain of lived detail made over years, must be fitted into a box or shoulder bag.

They went off together, Muttiah and Joseph, to hide, deep in the marsh, until the danger had passed. They walked far, until their bodies had sunk in up to their waists, shrouding their heads with banana leaves. Joseph who had rarely been near the marsh before, and certainly not this far had been appalled by the grime and the stench, but Muttiah knew it was their safest bet. What Muttiah remembers about that day is the smoke. First, it looked like a rain cloud darkening the sky, but then it grew larger, blackening not just the sky but the earth as well. It filled the air with the smell of charring, and tiny particles of ash. By tracing the movement of smoke, they could tell the neighborhoods that were on fire, and those that were yet untouched. They waited in the marsh for the fires to come to them.

A common Tamilness emerges here in this example, between Muttiah and Joseph—despite differences of class— as it did among thousands of southern Tamils in that week. Two men, who even though they lived a few hundred yards from each other had never done anything together, who had, in every sense of the phrase, “kept their distance” from each other, now crouched close and together. It was, of course, a

momentary proximity, yet it is worth noting that the anticipation of violence produces a ‘Tamilness’ that works against forces of inequality and power.

On that day, in a complex set of events I have examined in other work⁷, the Josephs' house was attacked and looted by Gunadasa and his friends. This violence perpetrated in Patupara depended on a particular, unstable class alliance between the men who carried out the violence, and the Pereras, the overlords of the neighborhood. The Josephs had been marked as enemies in local, working-class memory before the riots, in a way that Muttiah or his family had not been. So the Tamilness of the Josephs was made to matter, by both the toughs and the Pereras, while with Muttiah, local working class solidarities were too strong for rupture. As Gunadasa told me when I asked him about Muttiah: “he had nothing to be afraid of, we would never touch one of our own.” But Muttiah was not to know that, with any certainty. The intricacies of the production of violence, were not with any certainty available to Muttiah in ‘1983.’ All he could do was wait. For Tamils in southern Sri Lanka the violence of 1983 was sudden and extraordinary, but not unexpected. The Muttiahs and the Josephs, like so many other Tamils in the south, did not know when and how violence would be upon them, or even perhaps, what shape it would take. But they would have known it was coming: the possibility of riots was real before ‘1983,’ given that Tamil civilians had experienced collective violence, years ago in 1958, and more recently in 1977 and 1981.⁸ But it is the overwhelming nature of the last riot that makes this very history of violence visible. And that visibility, after ‘1983’ acquires a new depth, not of ten years but of forty.

2

I will try to both distill and reinforce my point here with recourse to a well crafted literary text, that concerns itself with “Tamilness” in southern Sri Lanka: “Rasanayagam's Last Riot.”⁹ In this play—which is set on the 25th of July, 1983— Rasanayagam's ‘Tamilness’ is constructed in relationship to what I have called ‘tactics of anticipation’ that are available to him. He visits (the Sinhala) Philip Fernando, an old university roommate, on occasions when a riot is imminent. Their friendship is then made manifest during these regular interludes of violence; as

Rasanayagam is, on each occasion, sheltered from the “mob” in the streets outside. On these occasions of sheltered intimacy with the Fernandos, Rasanayagam — apart from his case of belongings— also brings bottles of liquor with him; the number of bottles corresponding to the possible duration of the violence.

Sita [Fernando]: I must say Rasa and you do some marathon boozing, whenever these riots take place!

Philip [Fernando]: What do you expect, confined here days on end with all the murder going on around us!

Sita: But still, it is bad to drink so much!

Philip: Don't exaggerate Sita, how frequent is that, '56 '58 '61 '74 '77 '81...

Sita: Don't play the fool, Philip you are trying to make a comedy of the whole thing.¹⁰

The string of dates “'56 '58 '61...” that emerge here, are repeated in this and other forms, throughout the play; as such they are succinct markers of the intense visibility of prior events of violence, that the current riot—now available to be added to the end of the list — makes available as chronology. ‘Tactics of anticipation,’ then, can be produced in relation to this visible chronology of violence. In the play I am reading here, many parts of Rasanayagam's self are produced through these tactics: so the bottles of alcohol that fills his bag, in each successive visit, and the “boozing” it produces, are gentle parodies, of that repertoire of practices.

The most succinct example of a ‘tactic of anticipation’ emerges in this text both as farce and tragedy. It is what might be called a “master” tactic of anticipation, the kind of tactic that is learnt by Tamils, so that they maybe mobilized when confronted by a Sinhala mob, during a riot. Rasanayagam has learnt, over the years to pronounce the Sinhala word *Baldiya* (Bucket) the Sinhala way, as opposed to what might be thought of as a distinctively Tamil way of pronunciation -*Valdiya*. The point for Rasanayagam is this: when he is confronted with a Sinhala “mob” who present him with a bucket and ask him to ‘name’ it, he is able to perform his Tamilness as Sinhalaness, given the “tactics of anticipation” he has learnt. He continues to perform these tactics throughout the text, negotiating the line between the serious and the parodic, until finally, as it were, he refuses in one profound moment to do it any more —refuses to perform his Tamilness as Sinhalaness— and is then killed by a “mob”

that has surrounded him. I have dwelt on this text to bring into relief the remaking of “Tamilness,” in the wake of '83. The story of Rasanayagam's life and death focuses on the central importance of a repertoire of practices, tactics of anticipation, for those Tamils who have lived on. The simple point is this: to be a Tamil in southern Lanka, after '83 is to produce one's identity, one's Tamilness in relation to the anticipation of violence. To live as a Tamil then, is to learn such a repertoire of tactics.

Muttiah and his family, who stayed on in Lanka, are then, such Tamils. Like many working-class Tamils in Colombo, they could not muster the capital, symbolic and otherwise, to plan migration.¹¹ When I got to know Muttiah and his family in the early 1990s, the consequences of this position had slowly but subtly manifested itself. His children were becoming Sinhala and Buddhist. Such an assimilatory movement in working-class, urban Sri Lanka has a history as old as migration itself, with the intensive movements of Indian Malayalee labour in the early twentieth century and subsequent inter-marriages being a good example.¹² In fact, Muttiah's own marriage to a Sinhala woman had not provoked a social crisis on either side, and the relationship, as noted before, did not provoke comment in ordinary community life. Yet, the emerging configuration of Sinhalaness and Tamilness in the lives of Muttiah and Leela's children seemed to have undergone remarkable shifts in the space of a decade. There are five children in question here; two girls born five and three years before the riots, and three others born in rapid succession after a long hiatus, in the four years following '83. The elder two, young women when I knew them, had been given two names each, one with a Sinhala ring to it, and another with a Tamil ring. Such names, of course, are official appellations only invoked at sites of governmental power such as the school, hospital or the courts. But urban working-class people take such institutions seriously, and the question of a name, and the practice of naming have similar importance. With the first two children, “he [Muttiah] named them his way, and I named them my way,” said Leela, when I asked her. Then the couple had just filled in the two names in the certificate of birth, that crucial piece of government paper. But the other three children, including the much awaited boy child that was the reason for the couple's remarkable fertility had only Sinhala names. “He still names them his

way," said Leela, "but we don't write the names on the certificate." Muttiah, she said, thought it would be a way to avoid trouble in the future.

3

Tactics of anticipation also locate the possibility of riots in relation to practices of "religion" in southern Lanka. A consideration of the "tactics of anticipation" practiced by the Muttiah family in relation to "religion" finds that the possibility of 'violence' emerges unexpectedly in that well-known ethnographic terrain. This terrain, which Jonathan Walters has recently called a "multireligious field," is a field where the practices of "multireligion" can be thought through.¹³ The specific field that concerns me in relation to the Muttiahs is that of the "Vel festival"—where Hindus and Buddhists perform public acts of faith as a "sacred spear" moves between two temples in the city in a complex ritual procession. The Vel festival itself can be seen both historically, and anthropologically in relation to the multireligious field of Kataragama, which has of course drawn significant anthropological attention.¹⁴ I could, given the framework this rich literature provides, proceed to analyze the interactions of "Buddhists" and "Hindus" in this field in an attempt to understand the "how" and "why" of political violence in Lanka in general and 'multireligious' communities like Patupara in particular. But I will not. My efforts take me in a different direction. What I want to point to is the reconstitution of this multireligious field in relation to particular 'tactics of anticipation.' Observing the festival in the summer of 1993, for example, what was dramatically apparent was the shrunken nature of the celebrations. An event that had flowed and overflowed along the main thoroughfares of Colombo producing an orgy of petty consumption for the middle and working-classes, that rivaled the spectacular displays of faith that accompanied the fulfillment of vows by the believers, had retreated almost entirely into non-public spaces, the grounds of the temples themselves. After 1983, the hoopla of Vel—not the movement of the spear itself, but its associated practices, could not be public, out there on the city streets any more, it had to be contained inside a demarcated and defined boundary. Given that the festival had not even been held for several years after the riots, it would be possible to argue

that there is here a clear cause and effect relationship: Vel was not held because of the riot. But to my mind this causal relationship does not sufficiently illuminate the ethnographic field in this case. I want to think of the multireligious field as produced in anticipation of violence. In this reading, the revived, but now non-public and withdrawn nature of the event is a sign of its self-effacement, a way of positioning it as something other than a public celebration of Tamilness and Hinduness, which would be unwise given the constant anticipation of the possibility of violence.

In the period before the riots, the Muttiahs regularly attended the Vel festival in the city. But they do not do so any more and that annual event is only a distant memory for the elder children; and the family hasn't been to "see Vel" since the riots. They have felt, and this was expressed with some subtlety to me, over several conversations, that to go and "see Vel" might not be "safe." They were right in their anticipation. In July 1993, when I visited the temples concerned with Vel and spent time there, anthropologizing the complexities of that ethnographic field with a senior and distinguished colleague, a bomb exploded in that very space just minutes after we had left. Tamils I talked to believed that the bomb had been planted there by the army, as a disapproving warning against even limited celebrations of Tamilness.

Leaving events like Vel behind, the Muttiah family have moved cautiously into the sphere of Buddhism. Most inhabitants of Patupara are nominally Buddhists, but as in many urban neighborhoods only the very old and the very young display any interest in regular temple visits. What matters for everyone else, is the observation of festivals like Vesak and Poson, with great energy and display. The older Muttiah children have begun to participate in these events, and the younger children now go to *Daham Pasal* the Buddhist "Sunday School" at the local temple, with other neighborhood children.¹⁵ It is not my suggestion here that all working-class Tamils have moved to assimilate Sinhala Buddhist socio-cultural practice after the experience of collective violence. On the contrary, there are other communities where spaces of "multireligion", and "multiethnicity" operate with success.¹⁶ Yet the options Muttiah's family have exercised are not idiosyncratic, rather, in my experience, it is becoming increasingly common.

I turn now to another set of tactics of anticipation by way of another Tamil family that moved to Patupara after 1983, the Pathmanathans. They were Jaffna Tamils, and they had just moved to Colombo from the north, where they had lived all their lives. They had tired, after several years of privation and hardship, of life in the northern war zone, and had decided to move to the south with whatever they could bring with them. The Pathmanathans had never lived through civilian-led, civilian-directed violence as had Muttiah, since they had always lived in Jaffna. They recalled, of course, military and police violence that had been civilian-directed, but '1983' did not recall for them an immediate set of experienced images. Yet, they had relatives in Colombo who had lived through the violence, and who had shared their travails with their northern cousins. As such, '1983' even though not a place of recollection for the Pathmanathans was a site of anticipation: "another riot like 1983..." was a phrase that would reoccur in our conversations.

For the Pathmanathans, the search for a place to live itself, had been constituted by these anticipations. First, in a separate set of circumstances, they found the going very tough in the rental market, because they had just moved to the city from the north, and especially since their son, Ravi was seventeen. Young Tamil boys who had just arrived from Jaffna were under suspicion in the city as possible Tiger suicide killers. No landlord wanted to be accused of harboring a Tiger, and the few who would agree wanted inflated rents. The Pathmanathans knew this however, having been alerted to this sorry state of affairs by their relatives, and were willing to ante up. They were not wealthy, but their interests in Colombo were commercial, and they did not seem to have difficulty raising cash. It was the other problem that seemed much more serious to them: avoiding another riot. As Pathmanathan put it to me one day: "if Ravi were to be arrested on suspicion or something, then we can always talk to someone, or even pay some money or something, and get him out, but if they come like in 1983 then what are we going to do...?" It was with this worry on their unsettled minds that the Pathmanathans looked for accommodation in the first place, wondering, wishing, asking and probing if the area they were to move into had been 'safe' in '1983.' And when they finally decided on Patupara

in May 1991, they thought finally, that they had found such a haven. Since they were outsiders in the neighborhood, with no social links to other families in Patupara, they had little idea that anything at all had "happened" in Patupara in 1983, accepting at face value the bland, oft repeated assertion that everything had been "fine" during that time. Pathmanathan liked the location of the house they rented because it was hidden from the road, and therefore shrouded his wife's Hindu ritual practices—which were carried out indoors—from Sinhala eyes. All Parvathi Pathmanathan did was worship at a little shrine room she set apart inside the house, burning a little camphor and incense in the evenings. This, I gathered used to be a set of regular, naturalized practices for her, but here in Patupara, in troubled times, they were reconstituted. Both Parvathi and her husband wondered if their neighbors could smell the camphor they burnt, and worried if this would draw unnecessary attention to them as Tamils. In addition to these everyday rituals, Parvathi also had another set of delicate practices that made her home both auspicious and sacred: for example, she would tie mango leaves from last years Ponkal festival¹⁷ pot across the beam of the front door, under the picture of the God Pillayar that hung on the lattice. This in Patupara, marked their house as Tamil in a way that Muttiah's house never was. It is not that these practices drew hostile comment or derisive looks from their neighbors in Patupara, rather I do not think they ever came up in conversation. Yet Pathmanathan was glad that the family house was behind another house, hidden away from the road and the public eye, and therefore, from the possibility of censure.

After the Pathmanathans had lived for about a year at the place, the landlords, no relations of the Pereras, decided to raise the rent on the house. Now this was understandable since price inflation in Colombo had to be countered; yet the rise was steeper than might have been expected. For the Pathmanathans who had rented the place on the understanding that the rent would be constant for two years, the demand seemed unjust. They refused to pay, until one day, not altogether by accident, they heard about the Josephs: the long-standing dispute the Josephs had had over the rented house with the Pereras, and their sorry plight after the violence. This story was merely hinted at, not told in stark cause and effect tones or terms; but it struck right at the heart of life. Nearly ten years after '1983', the possibility of another riot was

real as it was terrifying. The rules of the game, between landlord and tenant, were suddenly suspended: the Pathmanathans paid up silently.¹⁸

Things changed for the Pathmanathans after that; they grew cautious and wary; said little and walked quickly. Parvathi who went out infrequently any way, took to spending days at a stretch indoors avoiding even the grocery stores by the road. When she did go out she still wore her pottu, the little red dot on her forehead that marked her as a Hindu, and therefore Tamil, but it was smaller, just a necessary and unavoidable speck, not as it used to be: a large, wide red circle that set off her face from its place between her eyebrows, that complimented the other extended mark on top of her forehead that blended in with the parting of her hair.

The Pathmanathans also changed the exterior of their house to adjust to their new circumstances. Gone, suddenly, were the signs of auspiciousness, the mango leaves and the picture of Pillayar; they were replaced with another icon that attempted to proclaim, against the odds, that they were after all, 'good' or patriotic Tamils. What the Pathmanathans pasted over their door was a flag of Lanka. But it was not just another flag, randomly purchased in a store—rather it was the glossy paper version that was inserted into every daily newspaper on the 4th of February, Independence Day. This, of course, was what the flag that was distributed was intended for; it was meant to be stuck on to ones wall or door, to make, I suppose, the national community visible to itself. Yet, few in Patupara did this, many did not get their own copy of a paper anyway, but even among those who did, independence day usually passed unnoticed and unmarked. Some Sinhala families did, however, use the flag to decorate their walls; these were usually those families who wanted to display their place in the community. The competing grocery stores always had one up, together with other colorful stickers and posters, such as soap advertisements or movie pinups. And Piyaratna, an ambitious man who, it was rumored, might actually be nominated as a candidate for elected office some day soon, had one up, prominently and boldly on his front porch. But most Sinhala bourgeois families that lived in the community had little truck with such trappings. They, like others of their class, believed that Independence had been a complete wash out, a lame and now stale joke played on them by uncouth and corrupt politicians. Similarly, the Pathmanathans who had been in

Patupara in February and bought the *Daily News* everyday, might have had good reason to see 'Independence Day' cynically. In any event, they had not pasted their flag anywhere since they had got it. But now, it was this icon of the nation that was dredged out, and put up on the lattice work. When I commented on it, Pathmanathan said incongruously: "Parvathi thought it would be nice to put it up," and then added, smiling nervously, "it is a good thing she kept it, no?"

5

The day after the Araly Point bomb, late at night, I went over to the Pathmanathans. The flag was still up where it had been, but now another sign had joined it. This was a makeshift banner, a white cloth that had been twisted on to stick — it protruded from the lattice above the door, just under the pasted flag. I didn't even have to comment to grasp the import of this move— with it the Pathmanathans announced that they, together with everyone else, mourned the loss of military officers in the north. This tactic of the Pathmanathans I knew was common among the sophisticated city traders with whom the old man dealt with and kept company. That day, as I traveled down Galle Road, I saw what I was to see several times in the next year as the war took its toll. Stores that were run by Tamils, or owned by Tamils in the city, were the first to raise white flags given the news of a fresh crisis in the north.

But, of course, despite all these precautions, they were worried. The Pathmanathans, given their recent arrival from Jaffna, did not, in relation to the possibility of future riots, have open to them the range of tactics that were available to Muttiah, or for that matter to 'Rasanayagam.' Sinhala was like a foreign language to them, and Pathmanathan barely spoke enough to get by — but his accent was so distinct that it was truly unmistakable, there was no way that he, Parvathi or Ravi could perform their Tamilness as Sinhalaness. Nor, could he like Muttiah seek shelter in a certain permanent Sinhalaness; that move, if it ever were to be possible was a generation away. All they could do was wait in anticipation, and on that night they waited in terror.

I want to grasp here, through the anthropological object that I am attempting to construct—anticipation—the extraordinary, intense visibility

of 'violence' on the Pathmanathan verandah that night. All around me it seemed were signs that violence was at hand, from the frowns over the door to the lines on the old man's brow. At times like these '1983' as a past sign of the possibility of the future emerges before southern Tamils, not just as one event, a terrifying punctuation point of incomprehensibility, but as a string of dates, a chronology of violence that is as seamless as it is encompassing: — '58, '77, '81, '83. On that night we wondered if '92 would be added to that list. This is, of course, the same chronology that we saw in relation to Rasanayagam, but for those who did not call it a day in 1983, in short, for those who endured and lived on, the chronology is open ended. If '1983' was not your 'last riot' then another date, could always be added to the end of that chronology.

I tried, that night, to assure the Pathmanathans that this would not be the case; that there would not be—at least that week—a repetition of '1983.' I do not know if they found me all that very convincing—the old man and his wife had me down, I believe, as a nice, well meaning but rather naive Sinhala boy, who when things came down to the very basics of life, would have been lost. But they listened politely enough, and seemed swayed into a calmer place than they had been earlier in the evening.

But Ravi, their son, felt differently.

"No," he said. "No. They are going to come," he went on angrily, "they are going to come and hammer the Tamils."

"Shh..." said his father, frowning at Ravi's words, but the boy went on to insist that "there had already been trouble" in another part of the city.

No, I maintained, that wasn't correct. I had checked earlier in the day, and found this particular story, that some Tamils were repeating, not to be true. As it turned out, there were no incidents of violence in the city that night or week, and there have not been in the fourteen years that have elapsed since '1983.'

But Ravi shook his head.

It was not my particular set of facts that Ravi sought to dispute, he had a more general disagreement to register.

"It is going to happen," he said, "it is going to be like '83 again. And that is going to show the world what the Sinhalese are like. That is why we Tamils have to leave and go abroad, no. Because of these riots."

As we argued late into the night it became increasingly clear that there was a great deal at stake for Ravi in this conversation. If there had been violence that night or the next day, Ravi would have felt vindicated. For him, the reality, not just the possibility of Sinhala-led, anti-Tamil violence was important. This reality, would have been then, incontrovertible and succinct proof of the unlivability of Lanka for Tamils.

As I got to know Ravi over the next year in Patupara I realized that he anticipated the possibility of violence very differently from his parents. He was not, unlike they, in mortal fear of a riot. On the contrary he had his papers in a bank vault, and a few clothes in a case. He lived in anticipation of a riot, not with helpless anger, but with clear foresight: it would help him to leave Lanka and migrate to the West. Ravi's cousin Bala was in Canada; he was doing well with his own grocery store, and would take Ravi in. Except he thought he had little chance of obtaining political asylum, given the relatively peaceful conditions in southern Sri Lanka. If there had been a riot in 1992, or if there was one in the future, then, what Ravi called 'refugee immigration' would be easier. Or in other words his Tamilness would be worth something in the West.

Ravi, who had never experienced the kind of violence he anticipated, did not, I think, see its possibilities in graphic terms. He had not considered, for example, the plight of his parents in such an event. A riot like '83, for Ravi, was an abstract possibility, but that abstractness did not foreclose the re-constitution of his Tamilness in a remarkable way. Ravi wanted a riot, for it would, more than any other event that might be available to him, produce his Tamilness as beleaguered and prosecuted in the metropole.¹⁹ Ravi is not alone; he is not an extraordinary exception. The possibility of riots has loomed large for southern Tamils for too long for such a response to be unthinkable. But mere possibilities are not enough for a visa: for embassy doors to open, people must die.²⁰

A consideration of Ravi's practices, and other similar practices of Tamilness is crucial to the anthropological object I have been trying to construct here: 'tactics of anticipation.' Let me step back to consolidate

this object, and concomitantly the argument of this chapter. I have attempted in this paper to construct yet another anthropological object that might grapple with '1983' and therefore with 'violence.' This object is a set of practices that is co-constitutive of Tamilness and the possibility of future riots: 'tactics of anticipation.' Through an examination of this object, I have attempted to mark, to make visible to anthropology, the emergent location of a particular kind of 'violence' in the ethnographic terrain of Patupara. That location was not, and is not always already available to anthropology. It is both ever present and ephemeral; shifting position, only to seem re-centered; disappearing gradually, and re-appearing even more strongly and suddenly. Violence, as anticipated, flitters across Patupara like the dark shadow cast on a cloudy day by the setting sun.

It is that fleeting object that I have tried to capture in the lived world, and signifying practices of Muttiah, Joseph and Rasanayagam, Pathmanathan and Parvathi, and finally their son Ravi. If the violence that Joseph and Muttiah saw coming when they watched their city burn from the marsh, that Rasanayagam learnt early in life to confront through performance, has a particularly explicit form, then, the slow, pervasive spread of the possibility of another riot through the lives of Muttiah and his children has another, rather more implicit place. The Pathmanathans, to whom '1983' was an unexperienced but ever visible possibility, learnt anew from their landlord of its strength. And then in the face of another event like the Araly Point bomb, that recalls the purported 'origins' of '1983,' violence, as anticipated darkens the landscape with terrifying intensity.

But this emergent location of violence, that I have been at pains to delineate here, is not, by any means self-evident or obvious. Its existence can not be assumed. The object of violence that emerges in the anticipations examined above, then, is a political object. And therefore, the practices of anticipation I have examined are also practices that have a politics, and practices that are, at times at least, interested. Ravi's anticipation of violence is such an interested, political practice. Ravi not only anticipates violence, but he seeks, astutely, to incorporate that very waiting as part of his own self. In other words, the very proximity of Ravi's Tamilness to 'violence' is itself objectified, and made available to the repertoire of practices I have called "tactics of anticipation." Hence,

my effort to encompass a series of very differently situated practices of anticipation as *tactics*, which allow, finally, for the Tamilness of Ravi to emerge in relation to the Tamilness of Joseph, Muttiah, Pathmanathan, Parvathi and that extraordinary fictional figure, Rasanayagam.

Put another way, my move in this paper, has been to delink the powerful and pervasive fit in a particular anthropology of violence between 'survival' and 'suffering.' When these two categories are intertwined in an unself-reflexively humanist field of politics, 'violence' becomes a self-evident anti-humanist cause of that 'suffering' and 'survival.' By shifting my anthropological object from survival to anticipation, I have been able to treat 'violence' itself as emergent, constituted through the very practices under investigation. As such, it is now possible to see that in Ravi's practices, 'suffering' itself maybe a politically positioned and interested set of tactics, that complements and supplements his tactics of anticipation. The emergence of 'violence' in such a context, in relation to such a repertoire of practices would then be irreducibly political. What counts as violence, and what does not, its very emergence and the location of that emergence, and then given its emergence the texture and quality of the category itself, can only be known with and through the politics that constitute it.

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- 1 Earlier versions of this chapter were presented at the European Inter-University Development Opportunities Study Group conference on Globalization and Decivilization, Wageningen, Dec. 1995 and the Association of South Asian Studies, 25th Annual Conference, Madison, Oct., 1996. I am grateful to all those who commented.
 - 2 See T.D.S.A. Dissanayake, *The Agony of Sri Lanka: An In-depth Account of the Racial Riots of 1983* (Colombo: Swastika, 1983):103-110 and S. J. Tambiah *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1992): 132 for standard versions of the events at the funeral. I have begun to explore an alternative version in "Traces of Violence, Spaces of Death: National and Local Identity in an Urban Sri Lankan Community," a paper presented at the 24th annual conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin at Madison, November, 1995.
 - 3 Pradeep Jeganathan, "All the Lord's Men? Ethnicity and Inequality in the Space of a Riot," in *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited* Vol. II (Colombo: Marga Institute, 1998).
 - 4 Valli Kanapathipillai "July 1983: The Survivor's Experience" in *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, ed. Veena Das (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), and "The Survivor Ten Years after the

Riots," paper presented at the conference "July '83: Ten Years After," International Centre for Ethnic Studies, July 1993. See also this collection for these papers.

5 See for example, Veena Das' work "Our Work to Cry, Your Work to Listen," in ed. Das, and also more generally essays in *Critical Events: an Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

6 Important accounts of 'Indian' immigration, and social life include P. Deveraj, "Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka" in ed. Social Scientists' Association, *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1984): 200-219; Sunil Bastian, "Plantation Labour in a Changing Context," eds. Charles Abeysekera and Newton Gunasinghe, *Facets of Ethnicity in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1987): 171-191 and S. Nadesan, *A History of the Upcountry Tamil People* (Colombo, Nandalal: 1993).

7 Jeganathan (1998)

8 There is not, as I have argued in "Violence as an Analytical Problem," (see this collection) a significant anthropological literature on any one of these events. Tarzie Vittachi's account of '1958' remains unsurpassed. See *Emergency '58: The Story of the Ceylon Race Riots* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1958) James Manor's "Self-Inflicted Wound: Inter-Communal Violence in Ceylon, 1958" in *The Collected Seminar Papers of The Institute of Commonwealth Studies*, University of London 30 (1982): 15-26 only hints at the sociological complexities at stake; and Edmund Leach's "What the Rioting in Ceylon Means" in *The Listener* (June 1958): 926, is quite incidental.

9 Ernest Macintyre, *Rasanayagam's Last Riot* (Sydney: Wordlink, 1993)

10 Ibid.:4

11 After the violence, the Josephs, their house and home in ruins, emigrated to Australia from a refugee camp. As such they joined hundreds of thousands of Tamils who have made their way out of Sri Lanka to metropolitan nations in the last twelve years. See for a reading of such migration Valentine Daniel "The Nation in Sri Lankan Tamil Gatherings in Britain," in *Pravada* 2 no. 6 (1992): 12-17.

12 For a close reading of debates surrounding these "mixed" working-class marriages, in a different historical period see Kumari Jayawardena *Ethnic and Class Conflicts in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Centre for Social Analysis, 1986)

13 See Jonathan Walters "Multireligion on the Bus: Beyond 'Influence' and 'Syncretism' in the study of Religious Meetings," in *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, eds. Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association: 1995): 29, passim.

14 James Cartman has suggested that the Vel festival comes into being in the wake of the regulations and restrictions imposed on the festival held in Kataragama, by colonial authorities, given fear of cholera epidemics in the late nineteenth century. See *Hinduism in Ceylon* (Colombo: Gunasena, 1957): 124. For an account of the

ritual relationship between Kataragama and Vel see Don Handelman "On the desuetude of Kataragama" in *Man* (n.s.) 13:157. For ethnographic accounts of Kataragama see, Gananath Obeyesekere "Social Change and the Deities: Rise of The Kataragama Cult in Modern Sri Lanka," in *Man* (n.s.) 12 (1977): 377-96, and "The Fire Walkers of Kataragama: The Rise of Bhakti Religiosity in Buddhist Sri Lanka," in *Journal of Asian Studies* 37 no. 3 (1978): 457-76 and Bryan Pfaffenberger "The Kataragama Pilgrimage: Hindu-Buddhist Interaction and Significance in Sri Lanka's Polyethnic Social System," in *Journal of Asian Studies* 36 no. 2: 253-270.

15 For a historicization of this practice of pedagogic religion see Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988): 189-192.

16 I think through such a community in other work: "Traces of Violence," op.cit.

17 See for an account of this calendrical ritual Bryan Paffenburger, *Caste in Tamil Society: The Religious Foundations of Sudra Domination in Northern Sri Lanka* (Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, 1982): 219-222.

18 Such situations are not uncommon; Kanapathipillai, 1990: 322-6 has also noted an instance of the inflection with violence of a landlord-tenant relationship, as has Sumitra Rahubadha in her Sinhala novel *Sura Asura* (Colombo: Kosala Prakashakayo, 1986)

19 What Ravi seeks, it could well be argued, is a place in a "postnational formation." See Arjun Appadurai "Patriotism and it Futures" in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 164-168.

20 It is not only Ravi who anticipates this possibility. There is more at stake than desire of Lankan Tamils to migrate seeking a better life for themselves. Immigration itself is part of a globalized circuit of capital with its own logic and imperatives, and large scale migrations of Tamil political refugees to the metropolis from Lanka after 1983 have inserted "Tamilness" into those circuits. On the one hand are the many hundreds of thousands of Tamils in north America and Europe who live in the 'half-light' of migrancy. They are not quite in yet; so they could be sent back. Every so often bureaucrats will look down at the files, and wonder if Lanka could be re-classified as "safe." This would spell disaster for those who have paid tens of thousands to immigration "brokers" who got them to the West. where they thought the good life was at hand. On the other hand, of course, are the "brokers" who have a good thing going. There is something to be made off every refugee. They too, live in anticipation of violence. A consideration of this ethnographic field, however, is beyond the scope of this paper.

12

To the Victims of Welikada 1983*

S. Sivasegaram

Like the *Nandhi*** stepping aside to make way,
the tall iron gates of Welikada Prison
open voluntarily.
Unknown to jail guards
murder is committed within prison cells
surrounded by stone walls.

In this era of enlightenment,
who will believe in a miracle
that occurs just once –
so it happens once again.
The stone wall
frozen by the sight
turns dumb.

(1983)

* Over 50 Tamil detainees at the Welikada Prison were killed by Sinhala inmates on two successive nights. To this day those responsible have not been identified.

** Refers to the legend of Nandhan, a dalit devotee of Siva who overcame various social obstacles to visit a shrine of Siva. It is said that the stone statue of the sacred bull Nandhi obstructed his view, and on the command of Siva, Nandhi moved aside to allow Nandhan a full view of Siva. It is alleged that Nandhan, when he subsequently tried to enter the famous Siva temple of Chithamparam, was thrown into fire by conspiring Brahmins, who then declared that he integrated with the great light of Siva.

13

The Welikade Prison Massacres*

Rajan Hoole

Britannicus was handed a harmless drink. The taster had tasted it; but Britannicus found it too hot and refused it. Then cold water containing the poison was added. Speechless, his whole body convulsed, he instantly ceased to breathe. His companions were horrified. Some, uncomprehending fled. Others understanding better, remained rooted in their places, staring at Nero. He still lay back unconcernedly - and he remarked that this often happened to epileptics [and soon Britannicus'] consciousness would return... After a short silence the banquet continued.

Britannicus was cremated the night he died. Indeed, preparations for his inexpensive funeral had already been made. As his remains were placed in the imperial mausoleum, there was a violent storm. It was widely believed that the gods were showing their fury at the boy's murder - though even his fellow-men generally condoned it, arguing that brothers were traditional enemies and that the empire was indivisible.

Publius Gaius Tacitus, from *Histories*

An Acknowledgement

In what follows, the basic facts are culled from accounts of the inquest proceedings - the Magistrate's reports themselves [Mag] and the reports in the *Ceylon Daily News* [CDN]. Where they differ, it will be indicated. The CDN reports are of value because the reporter has been good at recording the English nuances. Where other sources are used, they will be indicated. To begin with, a special acknowledgement must be made. It was the Civil Rights Movement of Sri Lanka and the Home for

Human Rights which first set out to bring justice to the victims and their families and to put the record straight. At the request of the Home for Human Rights, the Civil Rights Movement in 1985 assisted families of the victims to file 30 civil actions in court. To this end Suriya Wickremasinghe, secretary to the CRM, had carefully sifted the evidence and interviewed outside this country all but one or two of the 19 survivors. She is currently working on a book on the affair. She has kindly made available to us her analysis of the inquest proceedings and certain other materials. Where we have availed ourselves of her notes and analysis, it will be acknowledged by the initials SW.

The First Massacre: 25th July 1983

The Tamil prisoners detained under the PTA were housed in the ground floor of the Chapel Section of Welikade Prison. Being in the shape of a cross, it had four wings A, B, C & D, with A3, B3, C3 & D3 being on the ground. Six convicted Tamil prisoners including Kuttimani, Thangathurai and Jegan of the TELO, detained and convicted after the Neervely bank robbery of 1981 and who had appealed against death sentences, were in the front section of B3. B3 had a wooden partition and the rear section had also gallows. These 6 were each kept in one cell. D3 had 29 Tamil prisoners detained under the PTA and C3 had 28. Nine others were in the Youthful Offenders Building (YOB). They were Dr. Tharmalingam, Kovai Mahesen, Dr. Rajasundaram, A. David, Mr. Nithiananthan, Fr. Singarayar, Fr. Sinnarasa, Rev. Jeyatilekarajah and Dr. Jeyakularajah. According to Mr. C.T. Jansz, then Deputy Commissioner of Prisons, those in D3 were mostly young boys taken in on suspicion and were due to be released soon. Mr. Delgoda, Commissioner of Prisons, was then abroad for a conference.

A3 housed dangerous criminals and those who had attempted to escape, and were nearly all Sinhalese. A prominent figure there was Sepala Ekanayake, convicted after hijacking an aircraft in 1982.

The two upper floors, or gallery, of the Chapel Block housed 800 - 850 ordinary convicted prisoners. The space on the ground floor between the 4 wings is the lobby, the entrance to which is through an iron door in between B3 and C3. These ordinary prisoners performed manual work

The Welikade Prison Massacres

during the day in the industrial section or elsewhere and their sections and cells were locked up only when they were occupied; that is during the night and during the lunch hour. We understand that during lunch they were in practice not locked up. Two guards were always stationed on each upper floor.

On the ground floor there was a passage leading into each wing with a row of cells on either side. The prisoners were locked into their cells with guards holding the keys stationed in the passage. There were two guards in the passage of B3 and 4 each in A3, C3 and D3. The iron door to each passage was locked and there was a guard in the lobby holding the key to each wing. But in practice the prisoners were not locked into the cells during daytime, but the passage door was locked and the prisoners were in the corridor with the guards, talking or playing games like cards. On a normal day there were 4+4+4+2+2 (in the lobby) = 16 guards on the ground floor. But at the time of the incident on the 25th, there seem to have been fewer.

On duty outside the prison gates were men from an army platoon. Their job was formally to prevent the Tamil PTA detainees from escaping. A precedent was set in the early '60s when army personnel were similarly posted when suspects in the 1962-attempted coup were detained.

Two days before he was murdered, on 23rd July, Kuttimani, a leading member of TELO who had appealed against his death sentence for murder during the Neervely bank heist, approached a prison official. He told the official very politely, 'Sir, I have a request to make.' The official was a little anxious. Kuttimani explained that the Tamil prisoners are given coconut oil to apply on their head, which does not agree with them. He requested gingelly oil for the Tamil prisoners, which was their traditional hair oil. The official knew that everyone was being watched and no one wished to be seen as being considerate to these Tamil prisoners. He wondered why someone more appropriate, such as the superintendent, had not seen to it.

Seeing the official in a dilemma, Kuttimani said, "Sir, I see that you have a difficulty. We made our choice. We became liberation fighters of our own accord. It is our duty to endure any privation, any suffering that fate has placed before us. I will, sir, not trouble you any further." Kuttimani smiled, saluted the official and withdrew. That was the last time the official saw him alive.

On the evening of the 24th the prisoners heard the commotion in Borella. At 8.00 A.M. on the 25th morning the prisoners on the ground floor were taken out for an airing. The prisoners condemned to death, received newspapers, and Kuttimani whispered to some of the prisoners that 13 soldiers had been killed in Jaffna on the 23rd night. At 10.00 AM., the prisoners could feel the tense atmosphere inside and then they were locked into their cells. About 2.15 P.M. the prisoners heard noises from the direction of B3 from blows being aimed at the door, and from a huge crowd in the lobby. They knew there was danger. They asked the guard in their wing, and he said nothing. Manikkadasan who was in C3 climbed up, peeped through the ventilator, and told the others that Tamil prisoners had been killed and that their corpses were being drawn out into the grounds.

Those from C3 attribute their survival to the jail guard in their wing whom they described as a decent man, whose name unfortunately has evaded us. He asked the prisoners to move back from their cell doors and told them, *"If they are to get you, it will have to be over my dead body."* He then took the keys to the cell doors, hid them in the toilet, came back and stood at the barred entrance to the wing. When some of the attackers turned their attention to his wing, he stretched out his arms and faced them. The attacking prisoners turned away. It has been suggested by knowledgeable persons that prisoners as a rule will never attack a jail guard. As compared with the thousands of prisoners, only about 50 or so jail guards would be on duty at any time. It is the authority exercised by the guards that keeps the system going.

We will now move onto testimonies given at the magistrate's inquest into the jail massacre of 25th July.

Alexis Leo de Silva, Superintendent, Welikade Prison:

He had never noticed any hostility between the Tamil prisoners on the ground and the convicted prisoners upstairs. About 2.15 P.M., after lunch, he heard the blowing of whistles and the alarm being raised. From his office, he ran off towards the Chapel Section where the commotion was. Among those who ran along with him were his two ASPs (Assistant Superintendents), Amarasinghe and Danny Munaweera. The door to

the entrance was open, but was barricaded by prisoners. He used force to get into the lobby.

He saw 300 to 400 prisoners inside the lobby and heard the banging of cell doors and screams from B3. About 20 to 25 attackers had entered B3 and were banging on the last door of B3, where all six prisoners in that wing had been locked up. The guards tried to push the attacking prisoners out, but without success. He (de Silva) managed to enter B3, but was pushed out into the lobby. From the lobby he heard thudding sounds of objects falling on human bodies, with screams.

Leo de Silva shouted to the guards to bring the mob of prisoners under control and to call for help from the army personnel at the prison gate. He then saw some of the prisoners entering D3 followed by thudding noises and screams. He saw some of the prisoners themselves trying to control the mob, but they were overwhelmed. This went on for several minutes when he saw army personnel.

He saw Acting Commissioner of Prisons Christopher Theodore (Cutty) Jansz using physical force. But 'none of them, Jansz, the Army nor the prisoners trying to help, was able to enter the wings.' A few minutes later he saw the prisoners moving to the cells upstairs. Mr. Jansz remained with him in the lobby. From the lobby, he saw several bodies lying in the corridors of B3 and D3. After some time the situation was generally under control. Some prisoners were walking about the lobby. There were no army personnel at that stage.

C. T. Jansz, Acting Commissioner of Prisons:

His office facing Baseline Road adjoins the prison entrance to the north. About 2.00 P.M. his peons came running to him and informed him of a commotion in the prison. Rushing through the main entrance, he forced his way through the human barrier into the lobby of the Chapel Section that has space for 300 to 400 persons. He saw a mixture of prisoners and prison officers. There were, prisoners watching him from the gallery above and some had entered the wings. There was general unrest with prisoners carrying rods and other weapons. Forcing himself in with great difficulty, he observed Leo de Silva trying to control the mob. The passages leading to the cells of B3 and D3 were jammed with prisoners,

and prisoners with Weapons were trying to assault persons on the ground. Jansz tried using physical force to prevent the attack, but was helpless.

Jansz observed army personnel standing in the lobby *"who appeared to be helpless in the situation."* [CDN]. According to [Mag], *"They [the army personnel] were also helpless and could not do anything."*

Realizing that 'nothing could be done,' Jansz got into his car, and went to the Borella police station to seek assistance. He learnt from the inspectors he met that they were not in a position to give any immediate help because they lacked manpower. He then went to Senior DIG Police, Suntheralingam, who lived close to him in Gregory's Road to see if 'at least he could help' him 'under the circumstances.' *"It was clear that he (Suntheralingam) was helpless at the moment because he was on his way to attend what witness (Jansz) believed was a Security Council meeting. Suntheralingam undertook to take' all possible steps' and also 'mention' the matter at the Security Council meeting. Jansz went back to the Borella Police and was told that a police party had gone to the prison. (It is not clear from the inquest record if Suntheralingam had anything to do with this change of mind on the part of the Borella Police.) Going back to the prison, Jansz saw the police party standing outside.*

The Police, Jansz said were *"reluctant to enter as it (the prison) was guarded by army personnel."*

According to Lt. Mahinda Hathurusinghe of the 4th Artillery who was in charge of the platoon guarding the prison, he occupied a billet with 15 other soldiers; 5 soldiers were in a guard room at the prison entrance, 11 in a guard room 200 yards from his billet and there were also soldiers on mobile duty. In the afternoon of 25th July, he received a message from the soldiers at the main entrance that *"a riot had broken out inside the prison and that the Commissioner of Prisons had called for army assistance with a view to controlling the mob."* He went into the prison with seven soldiers-all of whom forced themselves into the Chapel Section through the crowd that was blocking it. His next statement contradicted what both Leo de Silva said and Jansz had said. According to Lt. Hathurusinghe:

"The crowd upon seeing us dropped their weapons and started running upstairs."

According to de Silva and Jansz however the soldiers" *appeared to be helpless in controlling the mob. "*

What is clear is that the soldiers came armed and did nothing. According to a survivor interviewed by SW, the soldiers had SLRs (Self Loading Rifles). Jansz recently confirmed to us that this had been the case, but suggested that the officer who later had told him that what transpired was 'a dirty thing to do', may have been helpless. They had not fired a single shot.

Moreover from Jansz's own testimony, he left the melee, got into his car and went to the Borella Police, to DIG Suntheralingam and back to the Borella Police, and then to Welikade Prison, only because the Army and prison staff were not being at all helpful. He was desperately trying to find someone to 'help' him, as though it were not their duty. Even a senior Tamil DIG *'appeared to be helpless.'* When he got back to the prison, a police party had come, but the Army refused to let them in. SW points out that the Army had no right to do this because the **Prisons Ordinance** stipulates that the **Prisons ought to call in the Police when there is sign of trouble.**

From this point the testimonies in the Magistrate's inquest record become so muddled up that the reader is bound to pass them over thinking that the main drama was over. SW's painstaking work becomes invaluable in straightening out the events here and would undoubtedly form an illuminating part of her book.

In Leo de Silva's testimony, there are some inexplicable gaps. He said that neither Jansz, the Army nor the prisoners trying to help, could between them muster the force to enter the wings and relieve the Tamil prisoners being attacked. (As for the prison staff, Jansz told us recently that 'they were not doing anything constructive!') From this point Leo de Silva jumped to, *"After a few minutes I observed the prisoners moving to the upper section of the building. Jansz remained with me in the lobby."* Considering that Jansz had gone out, we will see that there is more than one gap here.

His answers to questions from the Magistrate shed further light. Asked what steps he took to bring the situation under control, L de S replied, *"After some time the situation was under control, some prisoners were walking about the lobby. I managed to bring the bodies to the lobby. At that stage, I did not observe army personnel. It appeared to*

me that all the inmates of B3 and D3 were battered. Medical officers were summoned IMMEDIATELY (our emphasis). AFTER SOME TIME (our emphasis), it was apparent to us that all those inmates were dead. The medical officer pronounced them dead."

Leo de Silva's answer suggests that no steps were taken to bring the situation under control. The violence just petered out. The dead and injured were brought out, the prison doctor and medical staff were summoned immediately. During this process, Jansz who was not present earlier had arrived, while the Army had left. Note that it was 'after some time' that all were pronounced dead. This suggests that for some reason the prison doctor had examined them twice.

According Lt. Hathurusinghe, "the injured persons were brought and kept in the main lobby by the prison officers with the help of some prison staff." This is an admission that he and his armed men were around until the 'riot' petered out. He covered it up by saying that the crowd dispersed upon seeing them. Having said that the injured person 'appeared to be dead,' Hathurusinghe added, "the prison doctor (Dr. Dan Perinpanayagam) had been sent for and arrangements were being made to send the INJURED PERSONS TO HOSPITAL" (our emphasis). This means that Dr. Perinpanayagam or someone else found some of the victims to be injured, who could possibly have been saved by medical care

Hathurusinghe in his testimony added immediately following the reference to the injured above: "But it soon became apparent that all were dead. Dr. Perinpanayagam stated that they were all dead."

Jansz's testimony throws some sinister light on what really happened. Having returned to the lobby after failing to get help, and the police party prevented by the Army from entering, he found some bodies heaped up and other bodies being brought out. Jansz then issued orders for vehicles "to CARRY THE INJURED TO THE ACCIDENT SERVICE of the General Hospital" (our emphasis).

He then said, "Having made arrangements to carry the injured to the Accident Service of the General Hospital I found that the Army personnel were of the view that we should seek permission from higher authorities to take the injured out of the prison premises."

Jansz was thus very clear that some of the prisoners attacked were not dead and needed urgent medical care. Upon being refused by

the Army at the gate, Jansz used the telephone at the gate to contact the Major in charge of the unit/whose name we have not been able to find. He was probably at Panagoda. The Major then informed him that that the 'permission for such a removal would have to be granted by the Secretary to the Ministry of Defence.'

We have here a strange situation. If Jansz had to contact the Major, he had then been prevented by Lieutenant Hathurusinghe from removing the victims. In army terms, Jansz's rank was something like a major general or senior brigadier, and as acting commissioner of prisons on several occasions since 1974, he clearly knew his duty. On the part of the Army it was a perverse interpretation of their task of guarding the prisoners to prevent those battered from getting medical treatment. The Lieutenant who would have been taught the Geneva Conventions should have known that giving medical care to injured enemy does not require reference to the top. Clearly, he would not have acted alone on such a cruel refusal that would be on record.

We may take it that Lt. Hathurusinghe upon leaving the lobby of the Chapel Section told his superiors of the situation and of the injured, as he was bound to, and was instructed not to allow the injured to be taken out. After all it would have been much easier and more appropriate for those at Army HQ to get clearance from Secretary/Defence, than for Jansz.

In a crisis of this nature, it would have been the duty of field officers to keep the Army HQ informed. If the Army authorities would not allow Jansz to take the injured to hospital under prison security, they should have promptly taken them to the Army Hospital. If they could not or did not want to do that, they had no business to stop Jansz.

An even greater irony is that President Jayewardene was then at Army HQ. On the testimony of Bradman Weerakoon, Jayewardene was in the Army Commander's room when he was informed of the prison massacre and 'was deeply upset' Moreover, DIG Suntheralingam had told Jansz a little earlier that he was going to a Security Council meeting. Such meetings, it turns out, were then, during the crisis, held in Army HQ. This means that Secretary/Defence, Colonel Dharmapala, too was almost certainly there. It is probable that Jayewardene had heard of the massacre before, Suntheralingam raised it at the Security Council, which would have been about when Jansz was trying to get permission to

take the injured out. 'We have confirmed from a police official present that the Security Council, when it met that day, was *'very much aware'* of the prison massacre."

A particular point needs clearing up. Jansz said that he had made the arrangements to take the injured to the Accident Service. He told us recently that he had gone to the General Hospital, met the Hospital Director Dr. Lucian Jayasuriya, and made arrangements to admit the injured. He also admitted that it was such a traumatic experience, that, after 16 years, his memory has rejected a good deal that was unpleasant. In the circumstances it would appear that he had gone to Dr. Jayasuriya after ordering the vehicles to take the injured, and had got back to accompany them when he was stopped. It gives the picture of a man hopelessly, painstakingly, and yet passively, begging for help, as it were, battling against a system that was primed to defeat him at every turn.

Jansz evidently tried ringing desperately and either did not get through, or was not put through to those at the top, all of whom were presumably at Army HQ. Jansz did however get through to DIG Ernest Perera at Police HQ who would have been his contemporary in the University of Ceylon, where Jansz earned a degree in Veterinary Science. Perera suggested that he come over, presumably because he may have better luck getting through from his office. There were probably reasons why he did not want to intervene personally, as grave and urgent as the matter was. This would have saved time and lives.

Jansz went to Police HQ with Leo de Silva, leaving the two ASPs in charge at Welikade- Leo's two assistants who on his testimony had run out with him to the Chapel Section. He got through to the Army Commander, Tissa Weeratunge, who had returned from Jaffna by that afternoon, and told him about the injured prisoners. According to [CDN], *"the Commanding Officer told him that he has no objection to the request and to communicate this to the army personnel at Welikade prison."* But according to [Mag], Jansz requested Weeratunge to communicate his consent to the army personnel at the prison gate. It is likely that both happened. Jansz's testimony makes all this sound natural, but it is very unnatural. Weeratunge already knew what had happened through several channels. One would have expected more concern from him about how men under his command had behaved. But he too, like Ernest

Perera, wanted to keep out of it. We also further learn that at the Police HQ Jansz also met IGP Rudra Rajasingham and DIG Suntheralingam just after their return from the Security Council meeting where the massacre had been discussed. The Army Commander is thus without excuse.

On getting back, Jansz and Leo de Silva saw a truck parked in the compound and *"were given to understand that 35 bodies in the truck were heaped for removal."* There was no more talk about taking the injured to the Accident Service. Jansz was no doubt deeply disturbed. He told the inquest, *"Dr. Perinpanayagam had arrived by then. The truck was taken to the passage near the main gate. The bodies in the truck were removed on stretchers to the room adjoining the passage. Dr. Perinpanayagam made his observations and I was informed that they were all dead."*

Dr. Perinpanayagam lived on the premises and did not go anywhere that day. He was summoned after the violence had abated. This means that he was examining them at the gate after an hour or more had elapsed, after Jansz and Leo returned. These grave disparities could have been dismissed as surmise and speculation without much value, arising from the testimony of confused witnesses, if not for Suriya Wickremasinghe's work in filling the gaps.

SW says in her notes: *"we know from eyewitnesses, and which appears likely from the inquest evidence, that the bodies were attacked again on the floor of the lobby to make sure they were dead. They were dragged into the compound and attacked there. They were thrown into the truck, and according to some eyewitness accounts, the sound of bodies being attacked even inside the truck could be heard. Indeed according to one of our witnesses, one young prisoner [Kanapathipillai Mylvaganam, 19 years, 5 ft 1 in] who had succeeded in hiding, was actually killed in the compound by a jailor."*

On the matter of Jansz having the bodies taken out on stretchers and examined, SW says: *"There would have been no need to do this had Dr. Perinpanayagam already examined them and declared them dead. If Dr. Perinpanayagam had not done so, nobody had any business to "heap" them into a truck. Who permitted this to be done?"*

Although Jansz's memory is now a little, hazy, he did say that the injured had been attacked and killed. SW's reconstruction puts that in place. That prison staff were involved in such an attack was told to us

by a Tamil detainee in 'H' Ward, who was told this by Sinhalese prisoners who were outside watching. Jansz also said that some prison staff were involved in the instigation. Two very faithful jailors, he said, had used their revolvers and had injured about 5 attackers. These jailors, he added, could not, for the fear of being attacked, come to work for some time afterwards.

Indeed, the fact that the injured prisoners were attacked before being heaped into the truck of which Jansz had a hazy recollection and which is established in Suriya Wickremasinghe's investigations and other testimony, is confirmed from a different context.

Although it had been said at the inquest that the 'medical officers' and the 'prison doctor' were summoned immediately, we reliably learn that Dr. Perinpanayagam did not get to the scene until about 5.30 or 6.00 PM. This is also suggested by Jansz saying, 'Dr. Perinpanayagam had arrived by then.' This was after his return from Police HQ. There were two doctors in the prison quarters. The other was Dr. de Alwis. The sounds and reports of violence had made such an impression that de Alwis thought it dangerous and advised against going. If any medical officer had seen the injured earlier, it may have been Mr. Somaratne, the male nurse. As a veterinarian, Jansz too would have been amply competent.

Dr. Perinpanayagam, a Tamil, arrived after the bodies were loaded into the truck and were about to be taken out. He had them taken down, and he spent over 3 to 4 hours examining them, and found them all to be dead. During this examination ASP Danny Munaweera and some other prison staff were present. It turned out that the bodies of Kuttimani and Jegan were at the bottom of the pile of the bodies in the truck.

While the examinations were going on, one of the officers present observed firmly, that **some of those whose bodies were taken out of the truck, had been breathing before being loaded into it.** The implication was that they had died of suffocation. This was a remarkable revelation from/someone who was upset by what had happened. It was moreover made while a responsible, officer, an ASP, was present, who should have been answerable for why living persons were piled up in this manner.

It is clear that the ASPs had witnessed something very disturbing and had not been in control of the situation while even some jailors were setting the lead in attacking injured prisoners. No doubt, it was from the ASPs that Jansz had learnt of this attack.

The inquest had thus failed to ask the questions that were staring in the face, and so failed to reveal what was most disturbing. For example, neither the Magistrate nor the two senior lawyers from the Attorney General's department who were leading the evidence tried to resolve the glaring discrepancies in the testimony about the Army's role.

There was something else very disturbing, which most readers of the inquest proceedings would have missed, but has been pointed out by Suriya Wickremasinghe. The hierarchy in the prison service was as follows:

- Commissioner of Prisons
 - Mr. J.P. Delgoda (on overseas leave)
- Deputy Commissioner,
 - Mr. C.T. Jansz (acting for Commissioner)
- HQ Superintendent (all Island)
 - Mr. HG. Dharmadasa (acting for Deputy Commissioner; had just returned from overseas and had gone home to Nugegoda early on the 25th July, not present during incident.)
- Superintendent of Prisons, Welikade
 - Mr. A. Leo de Silva
- Two Assistant Superintendents, Welikade
 - Mr. Danny Munaweera
 - Mr. Amarasinghe
- Chief Jailor
 - Mr. W.M. Karunaratne
- Jailors Class I
 - Generally if not always university graduates
- Jailors Class II
 - Similar to Inspector or ASP in Police
- Overseers
 - Similar to sergeant in the Police
- Senior Jail Guards
- Jail Guards - Similar to police constable

There were about 17 jailors then in Welikade prison. SW observes: *"No jailor testified at the inquest. This is a most remarkable omission. We know from our other sources, that there was always one, usually*

two, jailors in the Chapel Section. The jailor on duty in the area concerned would appear to be the person on the spot responsible for discipline. He should be able to say how the riot started. Instead we are treated to the evidence of high-ups" [who arrived much later] ... and to lowly jail guards (whose educational level is not high) and who do not play any sort of supervisory role.

"Who were the jailors in the Chapel Wing? There appears to be a conspiracy... to pretend that jailors just don't exist. The SP (Leo de Silva) describes in detail the security arrangements, how many jail guards in each wing etc - but never mentions the presence of a jailor."

As suggested earlier, it is what happened after the main violence was over, which was also obscured in the testimony, that is most disturbing. The first part could have on the surface been passed off as a spontaneous riot: At 2.00 P.M. hundreds of prisoners had rushed from upstairs and perhaps from outside with wooden poles, clubs, spikes, improvised knives of the kind kept by prisoners and iron bars pulled out from the gallery railings, apparently smashed open the wooden doors with metal frames leading to B3 and D3, either forced open or opened cells using the keys from the jail guards, and attacked the prisoners.

Indeed there are awkward questions: How it started is unclear. If prisoners were allowed to take and store some of these weapons upstairs, then there has been a serious lapse. Only one lowly jail guard who was locked inside B3 has testified. The two jail guards in the lobby who were supposed to be holding the keys to the wings were not called upon to testify, nor were jailors who have an office in the lobby itself. If they were all absent, as they should not have been, they should have been called and the reasons for their absence recorded. This is an inexplicable, if not deliberate, omission on the part of the Magistrate and the AG's department lawyers leading the evidence. We reliably understand that Leo de Silva had complained strongly in private; that some of the important things he had said were left out by the Magistrate.

There are also serious questions about whether it was a riot at all. A riot implies or entails defiance of forces of order and a struggle by the latter at restoring order. A jail guard in B3 testified that he had been locked up in a cell before his charges were bashed. Leo de Silva had been carried out when he tried to enter B3. But not one member of the

prison staff had complained of any medically confirmable hurt or injury. Jansz told us something interesting. When he tried to intervene, he was not bodily resisted. He was surrounded by prisoners at more than arm's length swinging something the air, but he was allowed to go out. The prison staff were, in his words, *'not doing anything constructive.'* It was an ordered or controlled riot - one of a kind not expected from irate criminals acting by themselves.

It is what happened after Jansz wanted to take the injured to the Accident Service that vividly points to complicity from a broad spectrum of the State: The Lieutenant On the spot prevented the injured from being taken out. He was almost certainly acting on instructions from Army HQ who certainly knew about it. Jansz was required to get permission from a member of the Security Council, which was then by all indications meeting at Army HQ and had been told about it. It looks as though Jansz was purposely made, or allowed run around town around in circles.

During the absence of Jansz and Leo de Silva the injured prisoners were attacked by the prison staff and others under their supervision, by which time the riot had petered out. At least two jailors have been named in a later EPRLF document. Why did Leo de Silva's two assistants (ASPs), who were in charge at this time when Leo was out - who again were not summoned to testify at the inquest - remain passive then and thereafter? It was as though, the powers that be - the country's leaders wanted it to happen.

We also received testimony from a member of the prison staff present, that shortly after the riot had begun at 2.00 P.M., an Air Force helicopter arrived and was stationary over the prison for 10 to 15 minutes. By contrast it was noted in the last chapter that helicopter patrols were singularly absent when the City was being attacked in the morning. A curfew had also come into force at 2.00 P.M.

Two persons had entered the passage of C3 by breaking the wooden floor upstairs. But by that time things had petered out and they left peacefully. The convicted criminals in A3 apparently remained locked up during the riot. The prison staff as well as the surviving Tamil prisoners failed to identify a single assailant. Fear?

The Magistrate entered a verdict of homicide, from a *'general state of unrest'* among 800 prisoners housed upstairs in the Chapel Section, *'which had ended up as a riot.'* He further concluded that, *"None of the*

prison officers or the army officers summoned thereafter could have done anything under the circumstances to prevent the attack. They have [sic] all been completely overpowered. "

Circumstances Leading to the Magistrate's Inquest

The Emergency Regulations, the latest of which were gazetted a week before the violence, on the 18th of July, provided for the disposal of bodies without inquest. The circumstances of the inquest tell us something about the atmosphere. One factor that may have prompted the inquest is very likely that Jansz's attempts to take the injured to the Accident Service had resulted in the bodies ending up in the Medico-Legal Mortuary. It is notable that the Army had been initially obstructing steps which, whether the victims were dead or injured, would have led to commencing a formal legal process with the Police having to record statements. Once in the mortuary it became awkward to dispose of the bodies under ERs without an inquest.

According to Jansz, it was Mr. Mervyn Wijesinghe, Secretary / Justice, who persuaded the powers that be that it was best to have an inquest. However, there was much confusion around. Mr. Keerthi Sriial Wijewardene, a bachelor of age about 41 years, was then Chief Magistrate, Colombo. As he records, Wijesinghe and Mr. H.G. Dharmadasa, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Prisons, informed him orally of the prison deaths and 'requested' him to hold an inquest.

Back in the Medico-Legal Morgue the 35 bodies had been laid out and policemen and jail guards were talking confusedly. The JMO, Dr. M.S.L. Salgado, asked the Police for the magistrate's order to perform the post-mortem examinations. The Police tried to avoid the issue. Since the Magistrate's telephone was not working then, Salgado went to his residence in Havelock Town and told him that he wanted such an order. While Salgado was in a hurry, Mr. Wijewardene seemed oblivious to what was going on in the world and particularly in the City. He asked Salgado to come in and have a cup of tea. This Salgado could not refuse. Further to his annoyance, Wijewardene asked his manservant to make sandwiches.

Wijewardene, a keen member of the Medico-Legal Society, started chatting about the problems of the young related to heroin abuse—something completely outside the immediate. He was in no hurry to face the present. Then Salgado reminded him that he wanted to go, and asked Wijewardene to accompany him. According to Wijewardene's record: *"Though I informed him that I would accompany him to the JMO's office, I would not commence inquest proceedings unless and until the Police made an application seeking such an Inquest."*

Subsequently at the JMO's office, OIC Borella and Mr. Hyde Silva (H.Y. de Silva), Detective Superintendent, Crimes, came to him with such an application. Then Wijewardene, still not sure of himself, a state of emergency prevailing, read Gazette Extraordinary No. 254/ 3 of 18th July 1983, to satisfy himself that a judicial inquest could be held under the circumstances. Having satisfied himself, he ordered the JMO to hold a post-mortem inquiry. But he had not finished with the JMO. He asked Salgado to accompany him to Welikade Prison. Salgado agreed to this unusual request. Salgado recalled, "I think he was scared."

This brings us to a startling absurdity in the law. Emergency Regulation 15A of the Gazette Extraordinary made by President Jayewardene under the Public Security Ordinance, allows any gazetted police officer (i.e. not below ASP rank) or any other authorized officer, with the approval of Secretary, Ministry of Defense, to arrange for taking possession and disposal of any dead body, without reference to any other legal provision. It allows an official to decide when murder is not murder, even in such a blatant instance as the prison massacre.

Regarding this massacre the Government was anticipating, if not already being flooded with, expressions of concern from abroad. Groups in the US were already active with respect to the detainee Nirmala Nithiananthan who had her university education in the US. With the bodies already with the JMO, ER 15A had become a difficult proposition.

Then suddenly Secretary, Ministry of Justice (as distinct from Defense) popped up and wanted an inquest held. The Magistrate was naturally puzzled. Then the Police were waiting for the Magistrate and the Magistrate for the Police. The process of the law is deprived of its independence and impartiality when the executive is given the option of deciding when a crime is not a crime. When in an embarrassing affair the executive forgoes its option of outright suppression and requests a

magistrate to hold an inquest, it comes with an unspoken, but self-evident, undertone to hush it up legally. Little wonder then that Magistrate Keerthi Srilal Wijewardene was an unhappy man.

Shortly after he arrived at the prison about 4.20 P.M. (26th), in came Mervyn Wijesinghe, Secretary, Justice, with Mr. Tilak Marapone, Deputy Solicitor General, and Mr. C.R. de Silva, Senior State Counsel, 'offering their assistance to this court', as recorded by Wijewardene. It was hardly the kind of assistance to be rejected. We know how they led the evidence. Why were the counsels who were representing the victims and survivors not called? An Amnesty International statement a few days after the massacres in September '83 stated: "*The lawyers of the Tamil detainees are reported to have claimed that they were not allowed to bring evidence at the inquest proceedings which they allege would have implied participation of some prison staff.*" We have had no independent confirmation of this so far. A lawyer who checked recently with C.R. de Silva, was told that if a lawyer representing the victims had applied to the AG, he would almost certainly have been allowed, but if he had simply come to the prison gate, he may have been turned off on grounds of security. It would have been a brave lawyer who would have tried under those conditions.

An incident during the inquest, which began in the evening and lasted through the night until the 27th morning, is revealing. The AJMO, Dr. Salgado's assistant, a Tamil, Dr. Balachandra, was taking photographs of the bodies during the post-mortem examinations as was normal. There was alarm among the minor staff that a Tamil was taking photographs for use as propaganda. A jail guard came in alarm and informed DSG Tilak Marapone about it. Marapone telephoned Dr. Salgado from the prison to find out what was going on. Salgado assured him that the camera and film were his, and, it was he who had asked Balachandra to photograph the bodies. The proper thing was for Marapone to have informed the Presiding Magistrate if he thought something objectionable was going on. Such overbearing conduct by the Attorney General's department men to the cost of the judiciary is now endemic to our system.

Again, everyone knew that the Tamil survivors were in no position to testify. Putting together what different survivors—all those in C3 - had seen, it was clear to them that some influential jailors were involved.

One prisoner, Kandiah Rajendran (alias Robert); who was in a cell nearest to the passage entrance had witnessed what was going on in the lobby and had given a running commentary. He was killed in the second massacre. The accounts gathered by Suriya Wickremasinghe are largely based on Rajendran's running commentary.

The survivors knew that Leo de Silva and Jansz had no part in what had happened, but also had no illusions about their ability to protect them. It is interesting that these survivors in C3 decided to seek an interview with Leo de Silva and ask him to unlock the cells and let them stay together in the passage. They had rightly discerned that they were more vulnerable locked up in ones and threes - a fact made clear in the second act of the drama. This request, if made, was not granted. That same night (25th), the Sinhalese radio news which spoke about the massacre was heard clearly by the C3 detainees from the jailor's room nearby. They thought it was deliberate. No one testified at the inquest giving any names. The Magistrate observed, "*None of those prisoners who could be eye witnesses... have volunteered to give evidence.*"

At 3.00 P.M. in the afternoon of the 26th, Panagoda Mahesweran, Paranthan Rajan and Douglas Devananda went as representatives to meet Leo de Silva. At 1.00 AM. on the 27th, the 28 detainees were woken up and taken to the Youthful Offenders Building. These detainees were housed in 9 of the 10 cells on the ground floor, 3 each in 8 cells and 4 in one cell. The 9 detainees, i.e. the professionals (Dr. Tharmalingam, Dr. Rajasunderam et. al.), who were in those cells were sent to the dormitory upstairs. This was done before the inquest was concluded.

With all the 35 post-mortem reports in, the inquest proceedings were concluded by Magistrate Wijewardene in the early hours of the 27th morning. He issued a formal order to the Borella Police to pursue investigations and produce any suspects before him. Then came more anomalies in the Law. The Magistrate conducting the inquest should normally have handed over the bodies to the next of kin. That had become awkward or difficult. At this point, Detective Superintendent Hyde Silva applied for possession of the bodies for disposal, under section 15A of the Gazette Extraordinary of 18th July 1983; Deputy Solicitor General Mr. Marapone, presumably representing the Attorney General, stated that he had no objection to the request. Magistrate

Wijewardene perused the Gazette and agreed that it should be allowed in law. The relevant section, however reserves such authorization for Secretary, Defence, and not the Attorney General! How laws change according to need! When it came to taking badly injured prisoners to hospital, it was prevented by dubiously bringing clearance from Secretary, Defence.

Shortly before dawn, the bodies were taken in a prison truck wrapped in white sheets to the Kanatte Cemetery, where a huge pit had been dug. The bodies were thrown onto the ground by the prisoners assisting the authorities. There was dead silence, in sharp contrast to the two tumultuous days that preceded it. Not a soul was about. Dr. Salgado, driving home after a tiring night of post-mortems, stopped by to have a final look at those whose remains had passed through his hands. A police inspector asked an army officer and soldiers who were standing by to help them by fetching more logs. A highly offended army officer protested that they were there only to give them security. The funny part was lost amidst tempers being frayed. In the circumstances, it was as though the army officer was referring to security against ghosts. DSP Hyde Silva quickly stepped in to settle the quarrel.

The flames from the pyre leapt up against the glimmering dawn, as the dead were turned to ashes. However, unknown to the army officer, those above him, and the highest in authority, the ghosts of these victims were to haunt this land for a generation and more, denying it any prospect of peace. Dr. Salgado driving home heavy with sleep was in for another strange encounter. On a lonely road, a policeman stepped out of the shadows and stopped him for driving on the wrong side! The tribe that was conspicuously off the streets during the mayhem of the preceding days seemed not totally out of business.

The Second Massacre: 27th July 1983

Jansz and his leading officials had an unenviable problem on their hands. They could maintain order in the prison only through jailors and jail guards. They knew that some politically influential jailors were behind the massacre on the 25th. Having transferred the survivors to the YOB, they could only hope for the best. To whom could they go for help, to the Government? to the Army? the Police? The events of the 25th had

taught them that the prisoners were in a vicious environment where everything was against them. Had Jansz been a tougher nut who could arm-twist his jailors, the Army and the Government by threatening to make things awkward for them, these events may have been avoided, or at least limited. But there he was, asking if they could 'at least help him' as though it had nothing to do with them. Even those who perhaps would like to have helped, sensing what the Government wanted, tried to avoid the issue.

Senior DIG Suntharalingam who had been a confident law enforcer six weeks earlier, was apparently helpless because he was then going to a Security Council meeting! The deterioration of state culture had gone too far down the road where it had become very difficult to find someone in authority who would in a crisis tell another, "*You jolly well do the right thing or, whatever happens to me, I will tell the world about it!*"

The one thing going in favor of the survivors was the expressions of concern from around the world. This, the Government had to respond to. Jansz was summoned to the Security Council meeting at Army HQ Slave Island, in the afternoon of the 27th. It turns out from Jansz's testimony at the 2nd inquest that he had on the same morning informed Mervyn Wijesinghe, Secretary, Justice, that he feared a second attack on the prisoners. Jansz found Jayewardene 'concerned' about the fate of the surviving Tamil detainees. Jayewardene also had a sympathetic word of concern for Jansz. He told him, "*You must be tired after all that you have been through,*" and called for Jansz to be served with a glass of orange juice.

Evidently, there had been many messages of concern, especially regarding Nirmala Nithiananthan. Jayewardene accepted that it was not safe for the survivors to be in Colombo. A council member objected to the suggestion to fly them to Jaffna prison on the grounds that they would escape. Jayewardene settled the matter by saying that their safety was the first priority and decided that the survivors should be flown to Jaffna. (There was later a change in plan and the prisoners were flown to Batticaloa. This may have resulted from objections raised about possible escape.) Jansz was asked to liaise with Brigadier Mano Madawela, his schoolmate, regarding the arrangements for the flight. Jayewardene was a "cultured man" who was decent before the decent. Madawela also agreed to Jansz's request to keep a squad of soldiers

always ready, should they be needed to quell another riot. Barely had Jansz returned to his office when he was told, about 4.15 P.M., of a second prison attack. 18 Tamil suspects were killed.

Again Mervyn Wijesinghe had gone to Magistrate Wijewardene's residence at 7.30 AM on the 28th and asked him to hold an inquest. Hearings commenced in the office of the Superintendent of Prisons at 1.30 PM. The evidence was again led by OSG Tilak Marapone and Senior State Counsel C.R. de Silva; assisted by ASP Pakeer, CDB. Also present were Mervyn Wijesinghe, Theodore Jansz and Leo de Silva. The inquest ended just after mid-night, at 12.05 AM on 29th July. The gaps in the inquests and the grave unanswered questions were even more glaring than before. Once again, there were jailors on duty at the scene, who did not testify. Instead those who testified from the staff were Jansz and the Chief Jailor who came to the scene later, an overseer (similar to police sergeant), a vocational instructor and three jail guards.

The Chief Jailor, Mr. W.M. Karunaratne, had testified that through the prison intelligence system he had learnt of unrest among the prison population, and of a plan for a mass jail break and an attack on Tamil prisoners and that he had communicated this to Jansz in the morning. (He referred to PTA detainees as 'terrorist prisoners,' while Jansz as 'terrorist suspects' and Leo de Silva in the earlier inquest as 'suspects under the PTA.') Jansz confirmed in his testimony that he had been told this by Karunaratne and had verified it through his own inquiries. He in turn had made representations to the Government through Secretary, Ministry of Justice, from which followed moves to expedite the transfer of the prisoners. He had been clear, he said, that the accommodation of the 28 survivors from C3, Chapel Section, in the YOB, was only a temporary move at the direction of the Chief Magistrate, and that he had that same day arranged for air force planes to fly them out.

When reminded of this recently, Jansz expressed surprise as to why Karunaratne had told him, while it was to Leo de Silva that he should have reported. A possible answer appeared in the record of Karunaratne's testimony. He said at the beginning that the Superintendent of Prisons (Leo), leaving out the Assistant Superintendents (ASPs), was his immediate superior. Later when describing the attack, he said: "Up to this point...to the best of my recollection there were no officers superior to me in office in the compound. As the most superior office available..."

The leading prison officials knew that there was a bad situation in prison from the 25th. On the 26th night, the Magistrate had made an order about the safety of prisoners and the Secretary, Justice, had made the new Youthful Offenders Building available for that purpose. It was a time when all the staff who could be trusted should have been asked to be available on the premises until the Tamil prisoners were transferred. The Secretary, Justice, should have demanded that reliable troops be stationed at the prison, or at least have got the Army Commander to tell the platoon at the prison, which the Commander on his own should have done after the first experience, that they must act firmly to maintain order in the event of a disturbance. None of these appears to have been done.

Even more seriously, curfew had come into force at 4.00 P.M. and Leo de Silva and his two ASPs who had run to the trouble spot on the 25th, were apparently not available when trouble broke out sometime between 4.00 and 4.15 P.M. on the 27th. Even if they had taken turns to rest after breaking rest the previous night, they should have been about the premises. Leo de Silva was not an irresponsible man, and those who had worked with him have a high regard for him as a sportsman and a gentleman. It is also significant that the inquest aided by three competent legal minds failed to address this glaring issue.

One is driven to suspect that there was something very loose about the place, which the top officials knew from their first experience. There was a surface of normality, and the prison routine was going on. But in reality, a section of the staff with political patronage appear to have taken over. From this vantage point, what took place at the inquest, with some very tall stories given as testimony, falls into place.

What follows is the story one gets from the inquest proceedings. The Overseer Don Alfred (51) began serving the night meal to the prisoners on the ground floor of the Chapel Section at 4.00 P.M. By then C3 and D3 were empty. Dinner was first served to those at the back, behind the wooden partition, who were the ones remaining in B3. At this time, the door to the lobby entrance was locked, and that key, along with the keys to the wings, was held in a bunch by Don Alfred. The food was taken to the entrance of A3, which housed condemned criminals, escapees and those considered dangerous. A jailor who was supervising was standing by. The normal procedure, according to Alfred, when serving high security prisoners on the ground floor, was for him to

unlock the passage entrance after the food was brought, and leave it ajar. Inside, he said, the prisoners were free to move about in the passage, with the jail guards, for it was mainly during the night that they were locked up inside their cells. Then the jail guards would send them out five at a time to get their food, the next five coming out after the earlier five were inside.

On this occasion, according to Don Alfred, the inmates of A3 who were earlier looking normal, rushed out, grabbed him, took his keys, assaulted the jailor, and threw away the telephone. They then instigated the 800 prisoners upstairs to join them, opened the lobby gate and rushed out. [The jailor responsible for discipline, who was supposedly assaulted, did not testify!]

According to the Vocational Instructor M.E. Thillekeratne (37), some prisoners ran about 25 yards to the wood shed, apparently broke open the cupboards, and helped themselves to poles, axes and a saw. (The post-mortem reports suggest that they had acquired some long bladed sharp instruments.) From the wood shed, they ran about 50 yards eastwards to the YOB, with a large unarmed crowd following them.

The YOB was in a compound surrounded by a six-foot high wall, with a gate directly opposite the main entrance, and a side entrance to the YOB was barricaded with tin sheets. Don Nicholas (25) was on this occasion the jail guard on duty inside the gate controlling the entry and exit of persons. He retained on his person the keys to the main entrance of the YOB, to the passage leading to the cells on the ground floor, to the cells and to the gate of the dormitory upstairs where the 9 professionals were held. With Don Nicholas were three jail guards in the compound and the supervising jailor. Two jail guards were locked into the passage with the cells and one in the lobby for those upstairs. Note that according to Don Nicholas, unlike in the Chapel Section, the jail guards locked inside did not have the keys to the cells. But this appears to be strange, as prisoners have to call the guards locked inside to open their cell to attend to a call of nature. Does this mean that additional precautions were being taken as though to prevent these traumatized prisoners from escaping? Escape where?

According to Nicholas, the armed prisoners came in by jumping over the wall and by breaking through the barricaded entrance. In all, there were 200-300 within the compound. The prison staff in the compound was overpowered, the keys were taken from him and the

entrance to the YOB was unlocked. The crowd poured in. Others went upstairs and hammered at the dormitory gate.

As soon as Jansz had heard of the second outbreak, he telephoned Army HQ, as arranged earlier with Brigadier Madawela. President Jayewardene, who was with the Army Commander, asked Major Sunil Peiris, a pioneer commando in the Army, if he could handle the matter. Major Peiris left promptly in two jeeps with 12 other commandos. Assuming a 5 minute delay in Jansz phoning Army HQ, a further 5 minutes and 7 minutes to drive the 4 miles, it would have taken Peiris a minimum of 15 to 20 minutes to reach the trouble spot.

As though to explain the tragedy, the Chief Jailor was at pains to describe the precautions he took to prevent the jail break. In the morning he had asked the commander of the army platoon to strengthen the guard outside the prison walls and claims to have posted armed jail guards at the gate. It may be noted that the purpose of the army platoon was to guard the Tamil PTA detainees, a half of whom, had already been killed and not the normal prisoners. Although he claimed to have received information of a plan to attack the Tamil detainees besides an attempted jail-break; the only precautions he described concerned the latter. This observation was made in her notes by Suriya Wickremasinghe, through a reading of the Chief Jailor's testimony. His priority, she observed, appears to be - prevent jail break first, protect life second. This, after the terrible events of the 25th.

We will now see what he further said. On hearing the whistle blasts, he rushed out of his office to the main gate, ordered the sounding of alarm sirens and gongs. He saw 300 - 400 prisoners running from the Chapel Section to the YOB, scaling the wall of the YOB compound and breaking through the barricaded entrance, and *'he got the distinct impression that some of them were attempting a mass jail break'*. The wall behind the YOB leads not to the outside, but to the remand section of the prison compound on the eastern side! He then said, *"As the most superior officer available at that time, I took immediate steps to prevent a mass jail break."* He deployed all the officials available *'to various points, 'others within boundary walls, 'some armed officers positioned outside the boundary wall with arms, 'made sure that all exit points were with armed personnel'* and tried to get other officers to enter the enclosed compound housing the YOB.

He had done all this from the main entrance from which he called the army platoon stationed there by telephone, asking them to come immediately with assistance to quell the attempted jail break and 'the riot within the prison.' All this time he seems to have been oblivious to the most urgent threat that was manifest from what happened on the 25th and what he had seen going on around the YOB. He had kept on reminding the inquest that being the senior most person available (4th in the Welikade hierarchy) he had to take decisions on two conflicting priorities.

He then ran to the YOB, entered the compound through the broken barricade, and appealed to the crowd to get back. He heard the crowd inside banging the cell doors, threatening to kill the Tamils and to axe any officer who came. Then he said, "At that stage the armed prison officers whom I had stood in readiness for such an eventuality turned up." (Where were they till then and what were they doing?- SW.) He ordered them 'to shoot warning shots in the sky' as he deemed customary. He then said that he made an announcement asking the crowd to disperse or face direct firing. This he said he did not have to do as the army commandos arrived within a minute or two of the warning shots. But the army platoon stationed at the prison never arrived!

The Chief Jailor here spoke of armed prison officers turning up at his side, who were not with him when he ran to the YOB. Earlier he had given the impression that all armed officers had either been posted outside the prison or at exit points to prevent a jail break.

As to what was happening to the Tamil detainees, we quote from a survivor's account published in the Tamil monthly *Amuthu* of July 1999: "In view of the earlier discussion among ourselves, on the 27th we requested the authorities to allow us together inside the passage, as was usual during daytime. This was refused. [Note that Leo de Silva with whom their representatives had spoken was not questioned at the inquest. Note also that despite the warning from prison intelligence, even the dangerous prisoners in A3 were by contrast allowed free in the passage to escape and attack the Tamils, while the latter were locked up in the cells.]

We prepared ourselves by storing up gravy and curries to be thrown on the faces of attackers. [Others questioned by SW had also spoken of preparing small weapons with tins and plates.] *In the-afternoon we*

heard a crowd approaching us with the same kind of banging noises as on the 25th. I put my face to the cell bars and peeped. I identified the person leading the mob as Sepala Ekanayake, the plane hijacker. I saw another who came with him having a bunch of keys. [They had come in by opening the main door and the Passage door.] Our cells did not have locks that had to be opened with a master key such as in the Parade (Chapel), but had padlocks.

Those who came into the passage with axes, long jungle knives, pounding poles, rice ladles and iron bars tried to open our lock. In the excitement, Thurairajah who was in our cell threw all the curries in one go. As the result, we could not ward them off from breaking the cell lock for a long time. The three of us looped the bed sheets around the cell bars and pulled to delay their opening the door. Once they cut the bed sheet, we held the door with our hands. Our hands were hammered and we could do no more.

The attackers who came into our cell rained blows on Thurairajah in our cell threw all the curries in one go. As a result we could not ward them off from breaking the cell lock for a long time. The three of us looped the bed sheets around the cell bars and pulled to delay their opening the door. Once they cut the bed sheet, we held the door with our hands. Our hands were hammered and we could do no more.

The attackers who came into our cell rained blows on Thuriarajah. I saw him drop dead with knife cuts. I hammered out at the two assailants in front of me. One swung an axe at me. Though I parried it with my hand, I received a cut on my head. Despite the pain I held an assailant in front of me as a shield with one hand in a vice-like grip and wedged myself into a corner. With my remaining hand and a leg I hit out at those who tried to get me. While I once kicked out, a huge blow fell on my leg, and the leg could no longer support me. As soon as I fell down blows rained on me in quick succession. I stopped resisting and feigned death.

Suddenly the blows stopped, and the attackers started running away. Then I saw soldiers with gas masks moving in. I thought to myself that I should not lose consciousness. I heard some Tamil voices and movement. I spoke out, 'I am alive, save me!' Douglas Devananda came to me, and behind him, Manikkadasan, Alagiri, Subramaniam and Farook.

While the attack was going on downstairs, the upstairs dormitory door padlock had been opened or broken. In the meantime hearing the

commotion, most of the nine prisoners prepared themselves with bits of furniture and the legs of a table. From a letter written by one of the survivors, Dr. Rajasundaram went to the entrance to talk with the attackers, appealing to their humanity. Someone took Rajasundaram by a hand, pulled him out, and he was slain. His companions immediately rushed to the entrance and using the objects in their hands, prevented the attackers from coming in. Effectively six of them were involved in this task. Dr. Tharmalingam, a septuagenarian, stood behind but played a central role in the defense by constantly encouraging his companions and shouting warnings. The defenders, few in number, occasionally fell down, either physically exhausted or when a blow found its mark. But with Dr. Tharmalingam's urging they got up and sprang into the breach. Tharmalingam told SW in England many years later with considerable amusement, that the remaining member of their group had removed himself to a side and was praying.

This experience demonstrated the point of the survivors from C3, Chapel Section, who wanted to be allowed together in the passage, where the 28 of them had a fighting chance of defending one entrance, rather than being picked off in their cells. Among those upstairs, all survived except for Rajasundaram. The attackers stopped and ran as the commandos entered.

We now continue with the testimony of the victim downstairs.

They (Douglas Devenanda and ...) carried me out and placed me in the front (visitors) lobby, just inside the main gate of the building. On the way, I saw the dead body of Dr. Rajasundaram, and the body of Mariampillai (50) whose head had been crushed. Where I was placed, I saw Thevakumar next to me unconscious. (He died later in hospital.) The SP came there and I told him that I was, losing blood. He asked me if I could walk and I impulsively said 'yes'

Some prisoners employed by the authorities in manual work ('loyal' prisoners) who were carryin the corpses and heard me speaking, talked of taking me to a room and silencing me for good. Understanding what was said in Sinhalese, I shouted, 'Sir, Sir.' An army officer came there and I told him, 'They will kill me here, take me to hospital.' Thevakumar and I were taken to the hospital in a truck.

At the Colombo Hospital, the doctor asked for me to be X-rayed. But because of a staff shortage I was simply left there. People came to look at me out of curiosity. Some called me a Kotiya (Tiger) and some

spat upon me. A nurse came near me. I held her hand and told her in Sinhalese, 'You must save me!' She came with a bottle of saline, but there was no stand to hold it. I held the bottle up. Another nurse came and pulled away the bottle and tube. The first nurse scolded her and reconnected the saline. We were then taken to a women's ward and a lady doctor stitched me up. We were then taken to a men's ward. Thevakumar had not regained consciousness and was making an unusual noise. We were chained to our bed by one of our legs. I later learnt that Thevakumar had died. On the following day, the Magistrate recorded my testimony. "

The name of this witness transpires as Yogarajah in the inquest report. Suriya Wickremasinghe makes the observation: "Note how not a single prison officer is able to identify a rioter... why are they not asked, whether they could perhaps identify some if an identification parade is held... Similarly, the Tamil survivors were not asked... Particularly shocking is the question put to Yogarajah by the Magistrate

'Other than for the fact that they were prisoners were you able to identify any single prisoner as being one known to you?' Naturally the answer was no..."

We now go back in time to when the Chief Jailor observed the army commandos coming in. On reaching Welikade prison, Major Peiris noticed army personnel placed at the outer perimeter of the prison wall, and armed jail guards at exit points. He told the Court, "I did not notice any prisoners attempting to break out! Therefore I gathered that the attempted mass jail break had been contained before our arrival." Noticing the commotion and warning shots at the YOB, Peiris and his men left their vehicles and ran there. What follows is an account of the commandos' actions not in the inquest report.

The first thing that caught Peiris' eye was Sepala Ekanayake, who faced the officer with an object in his hand, which horrified the officer. The officer immediately recognized Ekanayake, who being Sri Lanka's pioneer hijacker, had been built up into something of a folk hero in the Press. Ekanayake spoke to Peiris confident that the commandos, who were a part of the Army, were on his side. His words with reference to the object in his hand were: 'Sir, komade vade?' (Sir, what do you think of this job?) Peiris, who was rushing towards the building with gun in one hand, used his other fist to give Ekanayake a blow on the face. Ekanayake found himself flat on the ground. This happened outside

the boundary of the YOB. Having seen the behavior of the soldiers on the 25th, Ekanayake probably thought that this group was also coming to cheer them. We note that Ekanayake had been the first to enter the YOB. This is meant that he had done his work there and had come out with something that he was proud to show off.

The commandos entered the YOB compound by either jumping over the wall or through the gap where the fence had been flattened. Peiris found the entrance to the YOB blocked by a large crowd. The commandos ploughed their way through the crowd firing into the air. At the entrance, a few prisoners armed with logs, resisted the commandos. When the commandos tried to push them aside with their gun butts, one prisoner hit out at Peiris with a log. Peiris remembers firing at this man and saw him being carried away. At least one more prisoner was fired at.

Entering the YOB, Peiris found the attackers still at it. The commandos put on their tear gas masks and fired tear gas. As the attackers started dispersing, some commandos rushed into the passage on the ground floor while Peiris rushed up the staircase. Going upstairs, Peiris found the 8 survivors in the washroom washing their faces to relieve the irritation from tear gas.

Major Peiris' encounter with Ekanayake did not come out at the inquest. Under the prevailing circumstances, in addition to the manner in which the question was posed, Yogarajah too had not told the Magistrate about Ekanayake. All members of the prison staff who testified claimed at both inquests that they could not identify a single attacker. Surprisingly the question of an identification parade never arose. SW points out that in the second attack the survivors who were warding off their attackers saw them at close quarters for several minutes and could have identified them. As inmates of the Chapel Wing, they had been familiar with those in A3 who led the attack. It was as though the legal minds guiding the inquest were determined not to have any names.

Even after the attackers were pushed out of the YOB, some were still in a militant mood while some had withdrawn. Those in a militant mood saw the arrival of the commandos as an aberration and were waiting to have another go. They were shouting each other's names to check if some had slunk away. Senior prison officers who were present still fear to talking about it. One former commissioner admitted seeing Ekanayake at this stage. 17 of the 28 prisoners downstairs were killed.

Only two of the nine cells with 6 prisoners in all remained unopened. One was killed upstairs. Whether one Sinhalese attacker was killed by the accidental blows of his fellows, remains the subject of rumor and speculation. (eg. Wijitha Nakkawita, in *Sunday Observer* 25 July '99) That such possibilities existed is suggested by the testimony in which a Tamil prisoner protected himself by using an attacker as a shield.

Major Peiris had seen an injured attacker shot by him being carried away. If he had died, it was not recorded. Had he survived, he would have had much to tell the inquest. This has been hushed up.

We now come to another one of the blatant, absurdities of the inquest, where the Chief Jailor gave a very tall story to explain why the army personnel stationed at the prison had not come to his assistance, so leaving a huge burden on his shoulders. He said that just about the time he had telephoned the army platoon for assistance from the main gate, he saw smoke, rising from the administrative block of the remand section (east of a dividing wall) of the prison. He claimed that he had been informed (by whom?) that remand prisoners had taken over the administrative points, having overpowered the officers on duty there. He added, "*I was also informed that some of these prisoners in the remand prison had obtained possession of fire arms. I am now aware that in view of that situation some of the army personnel placed outside Welikade Prison had to go to the remand section to combat that situation. I am also aware that there had been an exchange of fire between those remand prisoners and the army personnel so that I had in that situation to make decisions...*"

The army officer in charge at the prison himself was strangely not called upon to testify to this singular incident. No injuries were recorded, nor spent bullets produced. We have verified that the incident above is complete fiction. A former commissioner of prisons confirmed that it is difficult to remove the weapons that are kept secured and that not one weapon was removed by prisoners. A Tamil prisoner in 'H' ward told us however that in that confusion a smoking rag was thrown into the, Tamil (Temple) Ward, which is situated at the back near the remand section.

SW points out that the Commissioner of Prisons (Mr. Delgoda) gave another explanation of the 'riot' in the remand section, in his Administration Report of 1983. He said that the riot in the Remand Prison was caused partly by the prisoners panicking when tear gas used to quell the Welikade Prison riots wafted into the to Remand Prison.

On the basis of this explanation, the 'riot' in the remand section took place after the commandos arrived, and hence cannot provide an alibi for the army platoon at the prison, that did not lift a finger to protect those under attack. Indeed after the commandos arrived, it took a long time before the platoon commander, Lieutenant Seneviratne (initials either N or E), too could be found. The Chief Jailor appears to give the game away with his *'I am now aware [why the local army platoon failed to come]'* - aware a day later at the inquest? Perhaps the AG's department men leading the evidence who kept Lieutenant Seneviratne out and allowed the Chief Jailor's tall story to pass, could tell us something about the origins of the riot in the remand section.

Why did the Chief Jailor who could have defended himself effectively by telling the truth - that Lieutenant Seneviratne did not come to his assistance - trot out a ridiculous story to protect the army personnel and make his whole story implausible. This remains to be explained. Was it that the Lieutenant was acting on orders from above and the AG's men were asked to cover it up? Why is it that armed jail guards with advance warning and preparation made no impact on the riot, while a handful of commandos brought it under control in next to no time? Again, Jansz and the commandos appear to have given priority to protecting life while the Chief Jailor to stopping a seemingly fictitious 'mass jail break.'

The, Magistrate (Chief Magistrate, Colombo), entered a verdict of homicide as a result of a riot, in respect of the death of all 18 prisoners, and directed OIC Borella to conduct further investigations and report facts to the Magistrate, Colombo and produce suspects if any before the Chief Magistrate. He observed that none of the witnesses, including the survivors, are in a position to identify any of the attackers. *'Both the army personnel and the prison officers'*, he contended, *'had been hindered in the full utilization of their forces to protect the victims of the attack by the intended mass jailbreak.'*

The Magistrate went to great pains to give flesh to the attempted 'mass scale jail break'. He said: *"However, prompt and efficient steps taken by the special unit of the Army under witness Major Peiris had effectively prevented the jail break referred to, and helped quell the mob which might otherwise have caused [even greater death]."* Yet Peiris had very clearly told the Inquest, *"I did not notice any prisoners*

attempting to break out... I initially gathered that the mass scale jail break had been contained..." Peiris said recently, *"I noticed a few fellows standing around the main entrance. They were not trying to escape."* The Magistrate was thus eager to give Peiris credit for something, to which he made no claim.

On the subject of the jailbreak, a salient point was not lost on many of those who said very early that the two prison attacks had the connivance of the authorities. They pointed out that on both occasions the attacks took place just after curfew came to force - at 2.00 P.M. on the 25th and 4.00 P.M. on the 27th. In the circumstances curfew may not have been an effective deterrent to escape during anarchy in the prison, but it would have struck planners among the staff as a precaution.

Jansz, whose own conduct was arguably creditable under the circumstances, had done himself a disservice by not placing the whole truth on record. In both inquests, he had been covering up for his subordinates. He did not for example put it down on record in the first inquest that most of the staff around him *'were not doing anything constructive.'* He made it easy for the Magistrate and the AG's men to make the singular omission of not calling up the jailors on duty. Even their names are not on record. There was after all no call on Jansz as Commissioner to enter Welikade prison and use 'physical force'. This he did out of personal concern.

In the second incident Jansz had put himself in a weak position by trying to cover up for the apparent non-availability of Leo de Silva, the SP, and the two ASPs. If they were absent in the normal manner, Leo de Silva would have told Jansz, asking him to keep an eye on things. The fact that the Chief Jailor told Jansz about his apprehensions of trouble, and Jansz himself made inquiries, appears to put Jansz in the position of one who was acting for the Superintendent, Welikade. Then it would have fallen on Jansz to answer why no effective precautions were taken, whether for a jail break or for an attack on Tamil PTA detainees. Why were only the latter locked up in their cells with even the cell keys held by a guard outside? Why were the others, especially the dangerous criminals in Chapel A3, not locked up in their cells, thereby enabling them to escape when food was served? Those upstairs were, it appears, even free to rush down into the lobby, grab the exit key from the overseer and go out.

If on the other hand Leo de Silva and his two assistants were unavailable because of intimidation, physical threat or obstruction, it would have been better for Jansz if he had said so. It would then have been clear that the prison had been taken over by some staff with active political connivance. In this case, Jansz would have been fairly helpless. He would not have got much help from the Police or the Army and he could only hope that the survivors would be sent out before anything happened. Jansz after all told us that two decent jailors who used their service revolvers to fire at the rioters on the 25th could not come to work for some time. (About five attackers among the prisoners had bullet wounds as a result, but this too is not on record.)

After the second massacre, Major Peiris took considerable initiative and waited at the prison, making arrangements to move the Tamil prisoners out that same night. He also had Nirmala Nithyananthan brought out from the female ward since her husband, a survivor from the upper floor of YOB, was among those to be moved.

Another official who came there and who had known Jansz from their undergraduate days together at the Medical Faculty recalled an incident which amused him. An army officer who had come there and who evidently knew Jansz well remarked, "*Cutty can't say boo to a goose!*" The official thought to himself that it perfectly fitted the Cutty he had known for more than thirty years.

Major Peiris decided against taking the Tamil survivors to any army camp. He first transported them to Galle Face Green late in the night and stayed with them. Two buses were then arranged to take them to Katunayake air base, from where they were dispatched by air to Batticaloa prison. All, but about three of them, escaped from there in September 1983 and reached India. Fr. Singarayar wished to stay behind and face his trial. Dr. Tharmalingam was too old to escape.

At the time of the massacre, a Tamil militant, J, found guilty of a normal criminal offence, had been in H Ward, Welikade. His two cellmates were Sinhalese, who promised to see that nothing happened to him. J was also well known in prison circles as he was a good volleyball player and took part in games. During the first massacre most of his Sinhalese mates were out watching the dead and injured being brought out and many of them expressed disgust. They told him that the injured prisoners were attacked and killed and were clear that prison staff were

behind it. One jailor too was seen attacking the injured. Among the staff named by them as being behind the violence were Jailor Rogers Jayasekere (elderly, tall and on the darker side), and two others including Samitha. Rogers Jayasekere, an influential man with well-known UNP connections has been widely named by others.

Jailor Samitha, one of those named, was connected with another incident concerning J. Following the second massacre, Samitha had done a tour around H Ward later in the evening. Seeing J, he said in surprise, "*Mu thavama innavatha?*" (Is he still here?) When he went downstairs, J heard him asking other prisoners, "*How much has he seen?*" Samitha was then heard saying that nothing could be done that day (it was past lock-up time), and that they would see about it later. J spent a very anxious night.

That same night following the second massacre, Mr. Delgoda, Cammissioner of Prisons, returned from abroad. The following morning, a Sinhalese jail guard gave J a piece of paper and told him, "*It is not safe for you to be here. Many other Tamil prisoners have been transferred to Batticaloa. You write an appeal and give it to Mr. Delgoda.*" Later all the prisoners were called out on parade. Delgoda addressed them, expressing his shock and condemnation of the massacres. When that was over, J handed him his appeal. J too was transferred.

The *Daily News* gave fairly complete accounts of both inquests. But there were obviously political commissars deciding the headlines. The report on the first inquest was titled, "*Prisoners' Vent their Fury - Killing of Terrorists*" (28.7.83). The report on the second was titled, "*Spontaneous Attack on Terrorists*" (30.7.89). In his 'in-depth account' of July 1983 T.D.S.A. Dissanayaka, a man with no excuse for ignorance of legal norms and basic fair-play, constantly refers to the PTA detainees as 'terrorists.' Jansz took objection to such references. He said that most of those killed in the massacres, especially those in Chapel D3, would soon have been released. Father Singarayar who declined to escape from Batticaloa prison, was discharged by the High Court. The State appealed and the Appeal Court hearing reached its final stages in July 1987 - the month of the Indo-Lanka Accord. Bala Tampoe, who fought the case on his behalf was confident that the State's charges had been demolished, and that he was on the verge of acquittal. In August 1987, the state declared a *nolle prosequi* and released Fr. Singarayar along with the other detainees being amnestied.

Postscript

Many years have flown since that eventful month of July 1983. But it would be wrong to say that the dark secrets of Welikade prison lie buried in the sands of time. Their effects are still with us. Those who lived through it remain haunted by the experience. Many of the prisoners who survived went on to become militant leaders, who were dedicated to fighting the State. Some in turn became killers. Mr. and Mrs. Nithyanathan rejoined the LITE in India and left in disillusionment the following year. Fr. Singarayar re-established contact with the LITE, and died in Jaffna in 1993, a lonely and broken man. Fr. Sinnarasa who escaped to India in September 1983 distanced himself from the LITE for several years, but is now in North America campaigning for the LITE in a spirit of blind hatred not different from that which moved the Cyril Mathews of July 1983. Arulanandam David of the Gandhiyam lives in India, a man of gentle pursuits, dabbling in literary and philosophical matters. But in his political opinion he is perhaps even more a blind Eelamist, dreaming of a Tamil Israel, supporting the group which tortured and killed several of his old friends in the PLOTE. Douglas Devananda now leads the EPDP and once again narrowly survived after a second prison attack on him at Kalutara. He was badly mauled by LTTE suspects whom he visited as an MP in 1998.

Chief Jailor Karunaratne moved on to the Public Service Commission. Rogers Jayasekere who retired to his home in Kelaniya is still reported as living but deranged in mind. Jansz became Commissioner and later succeeded Justice Soza as Chairman of the Human Rights Task Force in 1994. H.G. Dharmadasa became Commissioner of Prisons and a particular incident is worth recording. Following the LTTE's Pettah bomb blast in April 1987 there was tension in Welikade Prison. The bomb blast, which ended the Government's unilateral cease fire, had killed nearly 120 civilians in Colombo's main bus terminus. Dharmadasa quickly moved the PTA detainees to the female ward. Upon receiving an alarm about an attempt on the Tamil detainees, Dharmadasa went and stood against a hole some Sinhalese prisoners were trying to make, with his hands stretched out. He was bodily carried away, but the attempt to get at the Tamil prisoners stopped.

He then brought the Tamil prisoners temporarily to the Prison HQ, and with the consent of the Principal, Mr. Gunasinghe, housed them in

the Nalanda College boarding and later moved them to Boossa. He was recently on the Disappearance Commission. Those who survived the 1983 jail massacre are quick to acknowledge that there were several decent members of the prison staff around (e.g. the jail guard in C3 who tried hard to protect them). They also have a strong word of appreciation for the commando unit under Major Sunil Peiris. The government of the day chose to blacken the name of the entire prison service and, to this end, suppress the recording of deeds that deserved commendation. This was accomplished through holding an inquest calculated to whitewash its misdeeds and those of its agents.

The Chief Magistrate Keerthi Srilal Wijewardene must have been a most unhappy man. No good professional man likes his services being abused in an unprofessional capacity. This is what the authorities did to him, although he appeared reluctant to undertake the inquest knowing what was expected. He went on to become district judge in his native place, Badulla, and became the first director for Human Rights at the Commission for the Elimination of Discrimination, and the Monitoring of Fundamental Rights, of which H.W. Jayewardene, the president's brother, was chairman. Although Wijewardene's career prospects were looking bright, he died on 13th February 1988, a young man aged 46, as fate would have it.

The two inquest reports convey a poor impression of his merits as a magistrate. However his scholarly attainments marked him out for a bright career as could be seen from the report in the *Sun* (15.2.88): "A brilliant student of St. Thomas' College, Mt Lavinia, where he won several prizes including the Pieris-Siriwardene Memorial, the Warden Buck Memorial and the Arndt Memorial. Mr. Wijewardene also won a string of prizes at the Ceylon Law College, coming first in the final year examination. He was also president of the Alumni Association for the UN, Far East and Asia Institute for the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders." He was another victim of the state culture. Those who knew him at school thought him a fair-minded man, though perhaps not a strong man. Marapone was then his contemporary.

Tilak Marapone went on to become Attorney General, a post which he resigned from when the UNP lost power in 1994. C.R. de Silva was recently Deputy Solicitor General in charge of criminal matters, the same post which Marapone had held in July 1983. He is now Solicitor General.

It is clear that the hand of the State was laid very heavily to cover up wrongdoing and to protect prison officials and the Army. But there remains the question of whether these massacres were planned in advance or whether they arose as a spontaneous response to what was going on outside - those in the prison, as it were, doing their bit for the 'Sinhalese Race'? It would thus seem that the answer to the question, whether spontaneous or pre-planned, would be relevant for establishing a correspondence between events both inside and outside the prison. During a further conversation about the prison massacres, Jansz was in an easier frame of mind. He remarked quite uncharacteristically, "*On looking back it was all well-planned!*"

The court actions of the families assisted by the CRM dragged on for about 5 years. Both sides listed Jansz and Leo de Silva, who had by then retired, as witnesses. Both declined to go for any consultations with either side. Eventually the cases were settled with the State making ex-gratia payments to the families without accepting responsibility.

* This section has been taken from Rajan Hoole, *Sri Lanka, The Arrogance of Power: Myths, Decadence and Murder* (Colombo: University Teachers for Human Rights (J), 2001).

14

The Agony and the Ecstasy of a Pogrom Southern Lanka, July 1983*¹

Michael Roberts

Two Survivors²

Not all 'Tamils' in Sri Lanka are Tamils. A few who have been born and bred in the south western parts of the island have been de-Tamilicised. They know very little spoken or written Tamil. They speak (as distinct from read) colloquial Sinhala with some measure of fluency and without those inflections which indicate to all and sundry that one is Tamil. In the heat of ethnic conflict such a capacity is critical. Language in its phonetic, oral form becomes a matter of life and death — a technique by which assailants identify whom to hit or kill, a line which differentiates those who stay alive from those who die.

Two friends of mine, de-Tamilicised 'Tamils', stayed alive that fateful week in July 1983. One is an old schoolmate born and bred in Galle, my age now, circa 53 years. I shall call him Damian. He is in a professional job of the stratum: lawyer, doctor, accountant, engineer. Unlike others of this stratum, he has never left Sri Lanka and has no desire to do so, even though several siblings live abroad. Damian's wife is not Tamil. Like Damian, she is a Catholic. Their house is in Colombo, off a main thoroughfare, Galle Road, perhaps by 80 yards. Though de-Tamilicised, his patrilineal name is manifestly Tamil. Several of the gangs that roamed the streets of Colombo during the pogrom of 1983, as we all know, had electoral lists which identified Tamil properties and/or householders.³ Whatever Damian's self-perception of his ethnic identity, his name made him a target.

Most Tamils who were targets of this sort moved into safe houses,⁴ that is, where they were not caught unawares during the initial round of attacks.⁵ Damian did not. When mobs were roaming about Galle Road

in the vicinity of his house, he simply joined their fringes as a bystander. He could pass. He is alive today and laughingly 'dismisses' the experience.

So, too, is my friend Veegee alive today. But he had a close-call. Veegee was born and bred in Kandy. We became good friends at Peradeniya University. We have not met for many moons. Veegee is married to a foreigner and has been teaching abroad for several decades. Veegee chose to visit Sri Lanka, after a long lapse, in mid-1983. When the pogrom broke out, he moved into the house of a Sinhala friend.

As the situation quietened, he was picked up by another friend, TW, a Sinhala lawyer. TW and Veegee were driving in the vicinity of Kirulapona and the Colombo South Hospital when they were warned of renewed violence ahead. TW took a detour, only to find that they had driven into a hornet's nest of burning, demolition and killing. TW parked the car in a suburban side-street and went by foot to secure help.

Veegee, now alone beside the car, prepared the ground for his survival by talking to the neighboring householders in his rusty Sinhala and emphasizing the fact of his long residence abroad. A gang of assailants, armed with axes, *katties* and rods, accosted him. Most of them wore sarongs rather than trousers or shorts. They ranged in age from youths to men in their 40s or 50s —if one were to judge age from appearance. They were 'ordinary fellows.' They were not seething with rage or glee. There was a cool matter-of-factness, tinged with an aura of bravado following good work well-done, in their method of discourse. This discourse now had Veegee in sharp focus.

Their spokesman wanted to know his name. Using the first two syllables of his Tamil name, he gave a Sinhala name with the same beginning (how the patrilineal history of the two peoples intertwine!). "What is your ge name?" they demanded. "Lokuge," he lied. "What is your village?" (that is, where were you born). "Welikade" said Veegee. This was calculated testing before the possible kill.

They were only partly satisfied. They moved away pondering. Someone had seen TW disappearing in the distance and linked him to Veegee. TW was portly and dark. As a stereotype, the Tamils are dark —*kalu*. Some of the gang came back to Veegee. They referred to TW as "*eh maha kalu tadi demala*" (that large, black, huge Tamil) and wanted

to know his name. Veegee gave TW's real name, a name known to some of the gang. They showed disbelief. And continued to ponder over Veegee's identity —not being entirely dissuaded by a neighboring Sinhala householder's (this man was a government official) insistence that Veegee was a Sinhalese.

They told Veegee they had killed a few Tamils a few streets away. They displayed the blood on one axe. "Would he come with them and look at the bodies?" This, says Veegee, in retrospect, was "a litmus test." A good Sinhalese was expected to join in this grisly review. Veegee, continuing to struggle with his rusty and incoherent Sinhala, indicated that he was allergic to blood. The suspicions of the gang moved up several notches.

The assailants then decided to burn TW's car, some yards away. As they prepared to do so, Veegee ran forward and insisted that TW was Sinhalese. In scolding style he asked them to consider the enormity of their intention: burning the car of a Sinhalese! Veegee then opened the door, found TW's briefcase and rummaged among its papers. He discovered, and showed, a document with TW's name on it. The gang was not entirely convinced, but was now more doubtful. One assailant reasoned aloud: if this fellow was a Tamil, he would not have run back to the car.

At this point TW turned up in a police jeep. The gang did not run away. They outnumbered the policemen. The policemen treated Veegee as if he were a Sinhalese (though they knew he was not). TW's credentials as a Sinhala were manifest in his speech and demeanor. Veegee was whisked away in the jeep, while TW drove his car to the police station behind them.

It was a close call for Veegee, a chilling moment with many chilling moments. He had matched the bravado of the assailants with his own bravado, an instinct for survival. Demeanor had been a discourse for survival.⁶ This, clearly, secured his life. But it had been touch and go. For young Arumanaiyagam, this was not to be

One killing, One friend no more

Arumanaiyagam was a Jaffna Tamil. With me he was perhaps more acquaintance than friend; he was in the nebulous border zone of

acquaintance/friend. Of a cohort that graduated when I was teaching in Sinhala at Peradeniya, I got to know him as a younger colleague teaching in the Tamil stream at the History Department, University of Peradeniya. His was a temporary appointment, however, and he joined the Income Tax Department as a government executive in the 1970s. As such he lived and worked in Colombo. I had never spoken with him in Sinhala, but one can safely assume that his Sinhala speech was heavily inflected with Tamil diacritica. During a pogrom, diacritica is stigmata.

When the pogrom began, I gather that Arumanaiyagam and his family moved to safe houses and eventually into one of the hastily established refugee camps in the heart of Colombo. As quiet returned, uneasily, Arumanaiyagam and a Tamil friend felt sufficiently secure to venture forth in one of their cars in order to enjoy a sea-bath. An 'everyday' act during a not-so-normal occasion. And then the not-so-normal became quite abnormal. This was the morning of the panic, the 29th July 1983. And as the panic spread, so did the killings begin anew. The day of the panic was also the day of renewed mobs. And more killings.

Arumanaiyagam and his friend were accosted by a gang as they drove back. They may have been burnt alive in their car.

The story of his death was related to me by another history graduate of his day, a Sinhalese whom I meet often in the course of my work. I have not attempted to verify the story because I have no reason to doubt it; and I have long ceased to be amazed at the degree of precise detail which oral accounts embrace in their recounting.

When I heard this tale, seated in an ordinary chair in an ordinary office, my response was not dramatic and matched the matter-of-fact narrative. I did not exclaim. I did not hold my head in my hands. That's perhaps my way. But I remembered. I have not forgotten. This is my epitaph to Arumanaiyagam.

Agony —and Defiance within Agony

Prose fails, often, at such moments. And where prose falters, poetry recovers the moment. A Sinhala lawyer, Christian by background. Basil Fernando has attempted to capture facets of the July pogrom in poetry.⁷ His "Just Society" is a stinging indictment of the burners and killers, and

The Agony and the Ecstasy of a Pogrom Southern Lanka, July 1983

of Sri Lankan society, his society, my society.⁸ It has its sequel in another poem, another indictment; which he called "Yet Another Incident in July 1983."⁹

The irony in the phrase "yet another" is powerful in its effect and is surely intended. But one could think of another title: "Defiance within the Agony." For within Basil Fernando's poetic account of a happening that week is an evocation of Arumanaiyagam's agony. And the pain and agony of all the Tamils killed that week. And yet more: within Basil Fernando's indictment lies the indelible defiance expressed by a resolute Tamil person about to suffer a horrible fate. To verse, to verse:

Burying the dead
 being an art well developed in our times
 (our psycho-analysts have helped us much
 to keep balanced minds—whatever
 that may mean—) there is no reason really
 for this matter to remain so vivid
 as if some rare occurrence. I assure you
 I am not sentimental, never having
 had a 'break down' as they say.
 I am as shy of my emotions
 as you are. And I attend to my daily
 tasks in a very matter of fact way.

Being prudent too, when a government says "Forget"
 I act accordingly. My ability to forget
 has never been doubted, never
 having had any adverse comments.

On that score either. Yet I remember the way they stopped that
 car,

the mob. There were four
 in that car, a girl, a boy
 (between four and five it seemed) and their
 parents—I guessed—the man and the woman.
 It was in the same way they stopped other cars.
 I did not notice any marked

Difference. A few questions
in gay mood, not to make a mistake
I suppose, then they proceeded to
action, by then routine. Pouring
petrol and all that stuff.

Then someone noticed something odd
as it were, opened the two left side
doors, took away the two children, crying and
resisting as they were moved away from their parents.

Children's emotions have sometimes
to be ignored for their own good, the guy must have
thought. Someone practical
was quick, lighting a match
efficiently. An instant
fire followed, adding one more
to many around. Around
the fire they chattered
of some new adventure. A few

scattered. What the two inside
felt or thought was no matter.
Peace loving people were hurrying
towards homes as in a procession
Then suddenly the man inside
breaking open the door, was
out, his shirt already on
fire and hair too. Then bending,
took his two children. Not even
looking around as if executing a calculated
decision, he resolutely
re-entered the car.
Once inside, he closed the door
himself . . . I heard the noise
distinctly.

Still the ruined car
is there, by the road-side

with other such things. Maybe
the Municipality will remove it
one of these days to the Capital's
garbage pit. The cleanliness of the Capital
receives Authority's top priority.

When I first read Basil Fernando's poem, around 1985, it reached
through to the bone in the raw. I did not think, then, that the chilling
details within the poem were a case of poetic imagination (justifiable
though such license would be). It was too authentic in its detail to be
anything but a scene witnessed. Safely witnessed as a Sinhalese, a
pained Sinhalese.

This supposition has since been confirmed. It was not something
witnessed by Basil Fernando, but an incident witnessed by one of his
Sinhala lawyer friends —at Narahenpita close to the "labor secretariat."
Having seen some of the mayhem himself, to Fernando the story was
part of "the general pattern of violence those days" —what Fernando
sees bitterly as "the routine," with the parentheses being his emphasis.

I have been an eye witness to that routine many times, and I have
seen how the police looked the other side It was usual in the dates
that followed the July violence to talk details about the incidents all the
time. This was told in the course of such a conversation, when there
were several others. No one was surprised by the story, says Fernando.¹⁰
In his circle of friends there was an "angry and sad mood" about the
happenings of the pogrom and Fernando's poems are explicitly intended
as "a critique of the middle-class" as well as being an attempt to grapple
with his internal turmoil at having outwardly accepted the course of
events.

My interest, here, on the other hand, is in the lucid indictment
expressed by that unknown Tamil father. To me, at first reading, then,
now ever more, always, the action pressed so resolutely by that unknown
Tamil man, a Tamil father, spoke more eloquently than words. His was
the most profound of statements. It was an act of rebellion. It was an
act of condemnation. A double gesture, an indictment of humanity in
general and the Sinhalese in particular. Its courage, its resoluteness, its
incisive clarity of comment has etched its imprint on my soul.

Others may draw different meanings. Or like ones. Every text is
amenable to several meanings, and thus to several audiences. I could

translate what I think that unknown Tamil victim was saying into earthy Australian slang. But such words would offend, not only because of their earthiness, but because everyday slang, being so common (in both its senses), would traduce the profundity of that Tamilian's 'words.'

Ecstasy I

Survivors, victims, those grieving the bereaved, those grieving the loss of their worldly possessions, these are, as one knows, the flotsam and jetsam of war and pogrom. Yet, intimately entwined within these moments are those who perpetrate these fates.

In any pogrom there are inciters and stirrers, killers and maimers, arsonists and looters. These individuals are not merely "rabble," "miscreants," "savages," "drunken criminals," and "paranoids." They are not just "bloodthirsty hoodlums"¹¹ though some criminal hoodlums would indeed be involved. Such epithets are part of the lexicon by which the intelligentsia and the middle-class distance themselves from the hellfire of a pogrom. It is, I reiterate, a casting of responsibility unto those beyond the margins of normality. Yet, to repeat, pogroms are a potential within normality, a capacity within the human, "peace and politics by other means."

The fierce actions of assailants during a pogrom, in my surmise, could be as agents of state doing a job. They could be cool, calculated Machiavellian operations. Or they could be acts of rage, in a frenzy — perhaps even a frenzy that had been crystallized through a transitional moment of chilled horror as a group of tense people digested an atrocity story circulating like a wildfire.¹² "Frenzy" is the typical mint coined by the intelligentsia and the respectable bourgeoisie to depict the assailant whenever they review an ethnic riot or a pogrom.

This, as we have seen, is not false coin. Alongside the sort of cool bravado displayed by those who interrogated Veegee, anger and rage, retributory acts of vengeful killing and arson, are there aplenty in the twentieth century pogroms and riots of Sri Lanka. But rage is not the only form of embodied emotion in the moment of the striking. Euphoria, ecstasy and glee also prevail.

A local photographer happened to capture just such a moment in July 1983. His photograph depicted a few youths and men dancing

round a young victim, deemed Tamil, stripped naked, laid bare, forlorn and terrified. This was, I have little doubt, a few moments before he was killed. This occurred in the suburb of Borella, near the main bus stand, at 1.30 a.m. on the 24th July 1983, Black Monday as it is sometimes referred. It would have been among the earliest killings during the pogrom. (See next page)

The work of retributory vengeance, was gleeful work, a time to dance. Joy is writ clear on the bodies and faces of those involved. It is almost as if such a moment was akin to the moment of victory after a game of *buhukeliya*¹³ or a rite of *ankeliya*.¹⁴ The practices of ritualized humiliation heaped on the losing sides after these contests have been described by observers over the centuries as shameless, beastlike or vindictive, and marked by "unbounded license" and "filthy obscenity."¹⁵

Ecstasy II

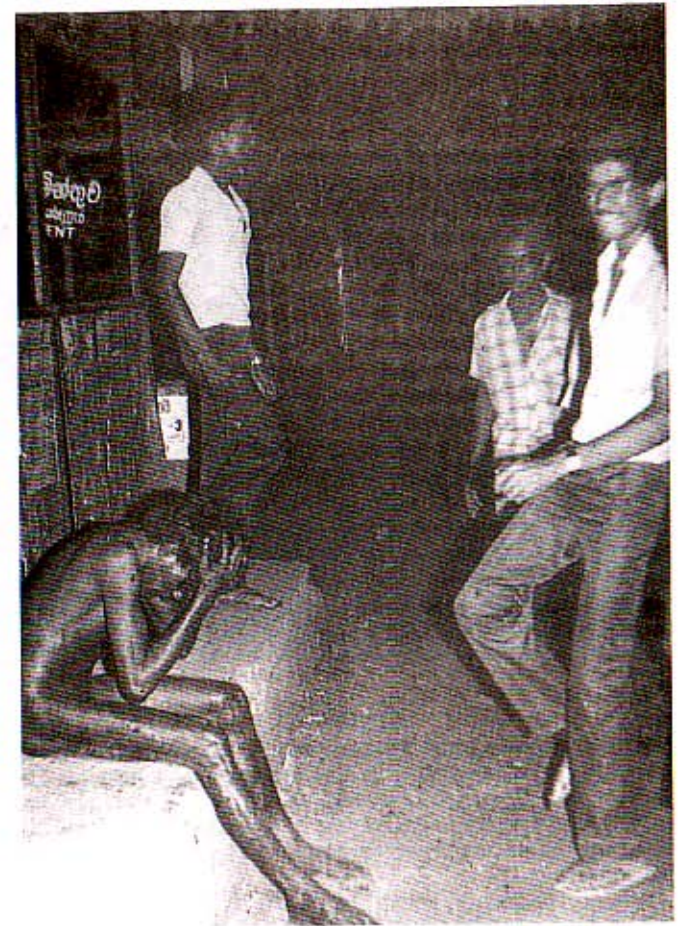
Such exhilaration during a pogrom, in my further surmise, was not entirely idiosyncratic. A Sinhala friend of mine related another tale which suggests this extension. He happens to live in Kandy, in a 'respectable' street off Peradeniya road. In the locality of Kandy, too, the pogrom of July 1983 was quite widespread and quite severe. At the height of the troubles, a gang of youths entered this street looking for specific Tamil houses. One of these was occupied by an old Tamil lady. She was not there, having gone into hiding beforehand in the house of a Sinhala neighbor. So these youths set to work smashing up the house, while bystanders, my friend among them, watched. The assailants found the owner's Alsatian in the course of their 'work'. The dog was cut to pieces. They enjoyed all this. It was high-fun.

Ambiguity

One sunny day in 1991 I gave an old Muslim (Moor) gentleman a lift from Kandy to Matale. I shall give him the pseudonym, Mr. Kiwi, with the Mr. signaling my hierarchical respect for his age and sagacity. Mr. Kiwi, I discovered, had a shop in Matale town. So, as we motored along,

I casually inquired after the happenings in Matale in July 1983. Some Sinhalese, he said, had smashed up the Tamil shops in the bazaar. He had come out and watched. And as he reached the nearest junction, he heard a few of the Sinhala youth, who were gleefully wrecking havoc, shout the *jatika sevaya*, "in the service of the nation" (or "national welfare" if one wishes to be literal).

This account loses something in the telling, a loss that is compounded by my failure to probe further —through critical questions seeking greater precision in meaning. Thus hamstrung, we do not know whether there was an ironic twist of phonetic inflection attached to these shouts. Were the youths amused that there would be a nationalist goal in the sort of destructive work they were carrying out? Was there, then, a cynical sagacity in their comprehension of the pogrom? Or, was theirs a serious claim? Was there a nationalist fervor, the zealousness of bigotry, underpinning their happy work? I cannot be sure.



Captions

GLEEFUL KICK before THE KILLING: scene at Borella Junction on the night 24-25th July 1983. Picture by Chandragupta Amarasinghe, then attached to the *Atta* newspaper. My original speculation in *Exploring Confrontation* that the terrified Tamil man who was killed has been confirmed by Amarasinghe. The principal assailant has been captured on camera as he swiveled round to deliver a karate kick. During an extended taped interview Amarasinghe also confirmed the fact that the assailants enjoyed their work.



Captions

BYSTANDERS after the BURNING & ASSAULTING: also at Borella Junction area, 24-25th July 1983, picture by Chandragupta Amarasinghe. There is a suggestion here that popular participation in attacks were also initiated and/or facilitated by state functionaries. It is also likely that some of those described as "bystanders" were perpetrators of some of the destruction, burning and killing.

I had not discovered whom the photographer was when *Exploring Confrontation* went to press in 1993. It was only later that the late Charles Abeysekera gave me his name and indicated that I could reach him through Ravaya for whom he was now working. Let me use this occasion to record my greatest respect for the bravery and ingenuity revealed by Chandragupta Amarasinghe in extremely dangerous and trying circumstances.

* This article first appeared in Michael Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation: Sri Lanka- Politics, Culture and History* (Switzerland: Harwood Publishers, 1994)

¹ With the exception of the segment arising from correspondence with Basil Fernando, this chapter was written in October 1991 while at the Commonwealth Center for Literary and Cultural Change, University of Virginia. I thank Kathleen McGrory, Rick Livingstone, John Blair, Richard Handler and Chuck Vandersee for their detailed comments on this and related pieces. Reluctant to tinker with the essay as written and attached to my "Ceylonese English," I have not followed much of this advice. Perhaps the spirit in which I was moving at that time is embodied in a comment which I found most uplifting: "I found your project both urgent and compelling in ways that I had not understood before" (Rick Livingstone's written response, 17 November 1991). I am also grateful for the following for their suggestions or appreciative comments, both unsolicited and otherwise: Toril Moi, Libby Cohen, Ian John, Kageaki Kajiwara, Deborah Pellow, Front in 1976 and made Eelam their goal. Such goals were deemed a threat by the Sinhala-dominated state—in a context in which the Sri Lankan Tamils were well over 90% of the population in the Northern Province. As the underground Tamil organizations carried out bank robberies and select assassinations, the repressive apparatus of the state extended its operations in the north of the island. While the police personnel included Tamils, the army units which were deployed in this work had virtually no Tamils. They only succeeded in alienating the Sri Lankan Tamil population yet further.

By the early 1980s the militant Tamil groups had the capacity to mount hit-and-run attacks on police stations and army patrols. These activities seem to have made the Sinhala population in the central and southern portions of the island alive to the threat posed to their order. See Elizabeth Nissan, "Some Thoughts on Sinhalese Justifications for the Violence," ed. J. Manor, *Sri Lanka in Change and Crisis*. (London: Croom Helm, 1984). See Also Bruce Kapferer, *Legends of People, Myths of State* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988) The shock of this realization may have been all the greater because a number of middle-class Sinhalese had tended to dismiss the Tamil program as one of little account. See Michael Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation: Sri Lanka- Politics, Culture and History* (Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994): 23. By May-June 1983 tensions were mounting in the south and several incidents of racially-motivated assaults on Tamils occurred at Anuradhapura, Trincomalee and the university campus at Peradeniya.

On the night of the 23rd July, 1983 an army patrol was ambushed on the Kopay Urumpirai road in the peninsula of Jaffna and thirteen soldiers were killed. See Sinha Ratnatunga, *Politics of Terrorism: The Sri Lanka Experience* (Melbourne: Glose Press for the International Development for Social and Eco. Dev., 1988): 4-5. The state funeral for these soldiers at Kanatte in Colombo the next day provided the catalyst for an attack on the person and the property of Tamils, whether Sri Lankan or Indian Tamil, in the towns and by-ways of the south. 116 factories, mostly in the Greater Colombo area, which were owned by Tamils or by persons deemed Indian, were destroyed or damaged. Shops, boutiques and houses belonging to individual

Tamils were firebombed or smashed up. In a few instances the furniture of Tamil tenants in Sinhala owned houses was destroyed. Electoral lists were used by several of the gangs to identify Tamil properties and householders. Nur Yalman, Andrew Lattas, Jeremy Beckett, Diane Austin-Broos, Neil Maclean, David Scott, Tom Ernst, Basil Sansom and Chris Eipper.

2 From around 1971 small cadres of Sri Lanka Tamil youth began preparations to secure a separate state of Eelam for the Tamil peoples in Sri Lanka. Their militancy of purpose was both a fillip and a threat to the moderate Tamil politicians of the Federal Party, who transformed their organization into the Tamil United Liberation. It is widely believed that personnel from state agencies, as well as specific *mudalalis* (businessmen) and *bhikkhus* linked to government ministers, were among those who initiated and sustained these systematic attacks, especially those in Colombo on Monday the 25th July, Black Monday as it is known. See L. Piyadasa, *Sri Lanka, the Holocaust and After* (London: Marram Books, 1984): 78-116. There is little doubt that some policemen and members of the armed services turned a blind eye to the assaults, and even encouraged civilian assailants and looters. See Ratnatunga (1988): 20, 22. Oral anecdotes indicate that personnel from the police and armed forces even participated in assaults; while army personnel in the Jaffna Peninsula and navy men in Trincomalee carried out reprisals immediately after the ambush. See Patricia Hyndman, *The Communal Violence in Sri Lanka, July 1983* (Sydney: Law Asia, 1988): 8-9. Likewise, the complicity of some prison guards and army personnel is manifest in the two incidents which saw Sinhala prisoners massacring a total of 53 Tamil political detainees and criminals at Welikade jail on the 25th and 27th July. See Ratnatunga (1988) 49-54; and Hyndman (1988): 17-26.

In highlighting the sins of commission and omission by the state or its personnel, some accounts of the pogrom (e.g. Piyadasa 1984) have glossed over the degree of populist participation in the assaults and mayhem. One index of the widespread Sinhala hostility to the Tamils was the fact that the property and person of isolated, individual Tamils with deep local roots in such rural localities as Pilima Talauwa, Kamburupitiya and Matara were not safe from indignities or the destruction of their property (personal communications from Jayadeva Uyangoda and Carolyn Nordstrom).

3 This was vividly confirmed by a Sinhala gentleman who visited Adelaide recently. He described how the attacks on the Tamil shops along the High Level Road (in Colombo) near his house on the Black Monday morning were initiated by trousered individuals who arrived in a Volkswagen car. This little contingent had a list in their possession.

4 It should be emphasized, quite emphatically, that a significant number of Sinhalese from across the class spectrum protected and/or provided safe hiding places for Tamil friends or colleagues —sometimes at risk to themselves. In the polemical propaganda disseminated in the written word after the pogrom this has not always been emphasized. In this connection an anecdote which I recently picked up from Lasath Wijesinghe, a Sinhala friend who is the opposite of a chauvinist and moves among Tamils of his generation, is worth recording: a cousin of his had hidden a colleague for several days and then driven him to Ratmalana to take a plane (as a refugee)

to Jaffna. At the airport this Tamil had thanked his Sinhala friend profusely for his help. And then remarked: "If you come to Jaffna, I would have to kill you."

5 Note that Tamils caught in their houses were (often? sometimes?) allowed to leave, though their property was demolished or burnt or looted. The initial attacks seem to have been directed towards destruction; after the riot captains moved on, others from the locality indulged in plunder.

6 I wrote this account immediately after a long telephone conversation with Veegee. He has not been able to take up my earnest request that he should pen an account himself. In retrospect, he finds the experience extremely troublesome. He has not visited Sri Lanka since and fears to do so.

7 For biographical information on Basil Fernando, see Le Roy Robinson, "Basil Fernando: Six Short Stories of Sri Lanka", *Keiei to Keizai* 70 (1990): 90-108, 139-67. I take this opportunity to thank Basil Fernando for his response to my inquiries.

8 Basil Fernando, *Contemporary Sri Lankan Poetry in English*, ed. Rajiva Wijesinghe (Colombo: British Council, 1988): 21-22.

9 Ibid.: 23. The poem was initially published in *New Ceylon Writing*, Vol. 5.

10 This was through a letter tome written 19 Jan, 1992.

11 See T.D.S.A. Dissanayake, *The Agony of Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Swastika Press, 1983). Also Tarzie Vittachi, *Emergency '58* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1958).

12 See A. P. Kannangara, "The Riots of 1915 in Sri Lanka: A Study of the Roots of Communal Violence," in *Past and Present* (1984) 155-57, 163. See also Roberts 188.

13 A children's game usually (in the past) popular during the time of the Sinhala New Year.

14 Pulling the antler's horns, a ritual game to ward off evil from the community involved in the rite.

15 See Roberts: 237-38.

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