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# Nēthrā

A non - specialist journal for lively minds

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INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR ETHNIC STUDIES COLOMBO

**Nēthrā**

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**International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo**

Nēthrā welcomes contributions from scholars and writers. Since the journal's interests are omnivorous, there is no restriction on subject-matter. Ideally, however, Nēthrā 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.

In addition to papers and essays, we shall be glad to receive shorter critical comments and letters in response to any material that has already appeared in the journal.

Nēthrā also invites creative writing — poems or stories — from both Sri Lankan and foreign writers.

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## Quarterly Quarks

### Seehawk

I suppose I should explain that the 'quarks' in the title of this column aren't the subatomic particles dreamt of by the physicists but the seabirds' cries on page 383 of *Finnegans Wake* ('*Three quarks for Muster Mark!*... Overhoved, shrillgleescreaming. That song sang seaswans. Seahawk, seagull, curlew and plover, kestrel and capercallzie'). It was from Joyce that the nuclear physicists borrowed the word.

### *Carry on cheering*

Qadri Ismail (how appropriate that his name should begin with another q) has some interesting and sound ideas in his essay on cricket and nationalism in *Pravada* (Vol. 5 No. 1), but the main motivation of the piece seems questionable. Its purpose is, in his words, 'the identification, if not the construction, of a space for the spectator unmarred by nationalism, for the spectator who would cheer the team but not the nation'. In other words, the theoretical edifice of the essay is intended by Qadri, the political radical, to reassure Qadri, the cricket enthusiast, that he can cheer the Sri Lankan team without being complicit with nationalism.

The whole problem is rather unreal to me since I don't watch cricket: I must be one of the very few Sri Lankans within reach of a TV set who didn't watch either the World Cup or the Asia Cup matches (in my case, if I had wanted to, I needed only to step out of my bedroom into the adjacent sitting-room where the TV was always

on at these times). Nor could I care less which team won — a statement that is likely to be greeted by a lot of people today with the same shocked disapproval that was once reserved for declarations that one had no religion.

But if Qadri enjoys watching cricket, I have no wish to deter him. What I don't buy is his argument that in cheering the Sri Lankan team he is not, at least unawares, part of the nationalist mobilisation of which he disapproves.

Let's put it this way. A person who watches a musical or a dramatic performance is not, under normal conditions, concerned with the national identity of the performer: he will find pleasure in, and applaud, any singer, instrumentalist, actor, actress of talent and skill. If Qadri were watching cricket purely for the pleasure of the game, he would be cheering *both* sides whenever one or the other did well, or applauding any good shot or ball by a cricketer on either side. But if he exclusively cheers the Sri Lankan side, there is no question that he is a nationalist partisan, or at least a closet one.

Since Qadri is so bothered about his radical credentials, I am surprised that he doesn't feel as much unease about cheering eleven players exhibiting their male prowess while women are reduced to the position of adoring fans. But I don't want to add any further burden to his secret guilt. To live in contradiction is only human, and we all do it in one way or another. I suggest that Qadri can murmur to himself some soothing post-modernist formula about the non-unitary character of the self — and carry on cheering.

### Did Django play the quango?

Now that we are on to q-words, I offer you another, *quango*. What do you think it means? An extinct Australasian bird which was flightless and suckled its young? A stringed musical instrument, devised by Django Reinhardt, which was a cross between a guitar and a Brazilian Indian wind-harp? A card-game in which the player who raises this cry claims to have a winning hand, and is subject to a forfeit if he fails? Or what? (Answer at end of column.)

### Scrutinising media

It's hard to know which is the greater evil in Sri Lanka today — servility in the state media or social irresponsibility in the private (often masquerading in a mask of high-minded independence). All the more reason for welcoming *Media Monitor*, brought out by the Centre for Policy Alternatives. Published in three languages within the same covers, it scrutinises the media, again in all three languages and often on a comparative basis, the first issue being focussed on 'the depiction of the war and gender issues in the print media'.

One of the main problems of Sri Lankan media has been the propensity of newspaper establishments to talk with two, or even three, tongues, not just in matters of opinion but even in the reporting of news, slanting the same item in different ways for readers of differing ethnic identities. Whether this is done for commercial reasons or with more sinister political motives, it has seriously contributed to the gap in perceptions between ethnic groups. Thus, *Media Monitor* remarks (documenting its observations):

There are even occasions when the **same** writer provides divergent accounts of the **same** incident on the **same** day in the English and Sinhala publications of the **same** organisation!

The publication of *Media Monitor* is apparently intended by CPA as only a first step in making media 'accountable to the people themselves'. Those who see the question of media freedom as only a matter of resisting incursions by the state should remember that, at least as far as the press is concerned, state ownership has existed only in the last two decades. Yet who with any knowledge of what obtained before 1973 could suppose that that was a golden age of press freedom? What existed then was neither the freedom of the journalist nor the freedom of information of the reader but the freedom of the newspaper proprietor. In the three-cornered relationship between state, people and media, the people need to be protected from abuse of power by the media just as much as the media need to be protected from abuse of power by the state.

### Traumas of another war

Reading Pat Barker's trilogy of the First World War (*Regeneration*, *The Eye in the Door*, *The Ghost Road*, now available in Indian Penguins) will set up many resonances for Sri Lankan readers caught up in a war that has already lasted three and a half times as long as that one. Pat Barker's work is an extraordinary one for a woman novelist to have written: not just because the principal characters are all men, but because they are involved in the quintessentially masculine activity of fighting. But it's not on the battlefield that we initially meet them but in the wards of Craiglockhart War Hospital, where British officers suffering from war traumas are being treated.

A real place, and there are some real people in it. Siegfried Sassoon had originally enlisted enthusiastically in the war, but experiencing its reality at the front, had written fiercely anti-war poems, and ultimately been so convinced that the war could serve no just end that he had issued a declaration of protest — not a pacifist objection to all wars, but a condemnation of this one. He might have been either court-martialled or locked up in a mental hospital, but he had sent a copy of the declaration to his friend Robert Graves, who felt just the same about the war, but was also sure that Sassoon's protest would have no effect except to destroy him. Graves went immediately into action to try to save Sassoon. He couldn't have succeeded but for the upper class, old boy network; but he manipulated that to secure a medical board that decided Sassoon was suffering from shock and sent him to Craiglockhart Hospital.

This was a time when soldiers suffering from shellshock were routinely being treated with electrical shocks (there is a chilling chapter in which Pat Barker recreates these horrors). But at Craiglockhart there was a man, W.H.R. Rivers (also real), who had begun as an anthropologist and worked with Malinowski and Hocart in Melanesia, but under the influence of studying Freud, had turned psychiatrist. Where other psychiatrists tried to make sufferers from war traumas forget the experiences that caused them, Rivers, taking a model from Freud's 'talking cure', induced his patients to recall those experiences so as to cope with them.

Reading Pat Barker's trilogy, we realise how much Rivers's methods must have gone against the grain of the class upbringing of the officers he treated. The dialogue the novelist creates for her characters brings out with marvellous fidelity the quality of a culture that promotes the avoidance and suppression of feelings such as fear or grief through the habit of understatement or deprecatory irony and humour: this is an important part of Pat Barker's novelistic triumph in a trilogy that seems to me one of the most considerable achievements of British fiction in the last half-century.

### Bring on the garlands

We welcome to this issue the short-story writer Ameena Hussein-Uvais, the accredited literary heir of the late lamented Sithy Hamid, whose stories readers of the former *Thatched Patio* will remember.

### Quango

The word is a recent addition to the bureaucratic vocabulary, and means a quasi-NGO, or, as the new edition of the *SOED* defines it: 'a semi-public administrative body outside the Civil Service but with financial support from and senior members appointed by the Government.'



## A Traveller's Collection of Tales

Swarna Rajagopalan

The traveller's first tale is always her own. Thus it is with Scheherezade in a "Thousand and One Nights," with Vikramaditya in the stories of the Vetala, with Gulliver on his journeys, with Valmiki, with Tulsidas, with Ulysses, with every story-teller of renown. They were all travellers and their stories were their journey, physical or spiritual. So it is with this story-teller.

I am Swarna. I was born in Bombay, and so I am a Tamil Brahmin domiciled in Maharashtra. I came to the University of Illinois in 1992 to do a Ph.D. in Political Science. After slaying the demons of coursework and crossing the dark night of comprehensives and wading through the grey marshes of proposal-writing and attempted fund-raising, I arrived finally at the glorious and yet, awe-inspiring, dawn of fieldwork. The tale that follows is about what I did and what people told me on my way to finding that most elusive of treasures: a dissertation I could write and someone would, inshallah, read.

### The Itinerary

While my initial research design involved three countries, my plans to go to Pakistan did not materialise. My research took me to Colombo and Madras primarily, although I did travel to and hence did some work in New Delhi and Mumbai, and spent a morning in Kandy.

### The Tales: The Cue

Serendipity plays a large part in my research. Before I began doing interviews in Sri Lanka, I tried to think of questions that might be appropriate to ask. To get better acquainted with my respondents, I asked them first, how Colombo had changed in their lifetime, and then, what the major landmarks were in the history of their country.

I asked it of a former Sri Lankan diplomat first, and I asked in exactly the manner that I am about to denounce now. It was a simple enough question then: "In your view, what have been landmark events in the history of your community or country?" I wanted the respondent to tell me what events were important so I could hang my history chapter around them. However, to ask for landmarks is to force their narratives into a particular cast, and so I started to rephrase that question. It was however, no more effective to ask for the history of the country because people would, rightly, contest the notion that there is a single history. They would offer me very academic accounts of the "sub-altern." So I started to modify my question. It now read, "If I were ten years old, (meaning, cut the jargon out) and visiting you, and I asked you to tell me the story of your country, what would you tell me?" Or, "If a child asked you, how would you tell the story of your country?" Each time I modified it, the question got more complicated. It was, by the end of the day, quite a task to deliver the question without losing my breath or my respondent.

The question kept getting vaguer. While initially it was attached to another question on the kind of history the respondent studied in school, it seemed subsequently to acquire a life, a purpose and a framework of reference all its own. In the end, in Sri Lanka, it took the form in which I began to ask it in India -- vague and open, and somewhat tricky.

Interestingly, when I rephrased the question often it did not mean exactly the same as the original, and people would take off and answer a question of their choice. Although this question worked very well in Sri Lanka, it really did not work in India, and so I ended up using the word history against my inclination. I asked them what would go into a history book. To this they would say something utterly vague like, "I would start by stressing that it is a multicultural society."



I would then probe, "What events or moments or trends would you discuss?," again pushing them against my preferences towards an "events and personalities" approach to history. Another tack I tried was, "What would you tell the child about this country?" However, that just got me to a strange, "India is my country, all Indians are my brothers and sisters" refrain<sup>1</sup>. In India, I simply could not find a way to get at what I wanted with this question. I have wondered to what extent this is because I am part of the process, inextricably, in India. I have certain "right and wrong" answers in my mind, which I do not in the case of Sri Lanka.

Towards the end of my rounds in Madras, I began to wonder what purpose this question served. Given that my Indian respondents did not seem to be excited about the question, I would try to tease answers out of them by explaining its purpose. I used one of two explanations. One, that I am interested in the teaching and writing of history, and two, that I am interested in having my respondents identify important historical moments for me. By this time, I was not convinced about either. The history part seemed to be fading out of my dissertation, or at any rate did not figure strongly anywhere else in my questionnaire. I did think that the background was not as salient. The history of the Tamils or the Dravida movement is one that is traditionally traced or told in the sub-altern style. So there are no events in it really, unlike the Sri Lankan case which is full of competing narratives.

What still served some purpose was that no matter what else they answered or not, my respondents would answer the question implicit in the non-specific use of "your country." The reason I did not use a proper noun in this construction was that I wanted the questions to be as open as I could manage. In both places, they would

<sup>1</sup> This would be a good short quantitative study. The quotation is the first line of a pledge which is printed in the first few pages of every school text-book in India. Schools use it very differently, since there are no rules about what they should do with it. The use to which schools put the pledge, followed by a qualitative discussion of what the pledge means to students and teachers - past and present, - would make an interesting short study.

decisively pick some specific entity to speak of: Sri Lanka, India, Tamil Nadu, the Tamil people, the Sinhala people.

### Explaining The Strangely Contrary Fates Of The Cue

I think that it is important to ask why this question produced responses as contrasting as it did in India and Sri Lanka. In my notes in Madras, I pondered this question at some length. It was not a difference of degree. A question that made me feel as if it was the key to the secrets of the universe in one country, could surely not fail to evoke any interest in another. In Sri Lanka, this question, posed in any form, would evoke a story of some sort. The story varied in that people would choose different "countries," start at different points and sometimes highlight different events. However, they did not hesitate to launch into some narrative right away. A couple of respondents, who did not tell a story, chose to interrogate the idea and nature of narratives. Nevertheless, they did not once react as if I had asked a strange question. In India, people first stared, then rambled descriptively, then claimed they did not remember any history from school. Sometimes they appended a note of disapproval of the methods and content of school history education. However, they never launched forth the way the Sri Lankan respondents did. Tentatively, these are some explanations for the difference.

In Sri Lanka, there was a tradition of historical writing<sup>2</sup>. At the root of this were the extensive monastic records maintained in the monasteries. These monasteries were largely independent of the secular powers-that-were, although that need not mean they were neither beneficiaries of royal largesse nor partial in their turn. Nevertheless, these are not court records. Spinning off, there are literary works. This category includes the *Mahavamsa* and the *Dipavamsa*. Finally, there is the folk-tradition, the stories that are told at home and celebrated in various forms in the arts. The extent of variation in the last was as finite as the physical lay of the land. There were only so many locales that the story could take place in

<sup>2</sup> The account that follows is based on an interview with a Buddhist monk and scholar, Colombo, February 1996.

and only so many ways you might vary it over time. The fewer the variations possible, the easier it is to tell the story, and to have a broad degree of agreement on the basic plot. When that is so, it is possible to simplify or distil the story into one form that is somewhat standard, and easy to narrate. Further, the finite lay of the land ensures that the number of competing regional legends, heroes and stories, not variants, but independent tales, is finite. So “the story of my country” evokes a smaller set of possible responses. India really loses out on this dimension, because it includes regions that are non-contiguous, and in the course of its history, there have been few periods where a pan-Indian state has brought under its sway the entire country. Therefore, the stories that all Indians have in common owe their origin and proliferation to the mythological tradition rather than any other. And this is not what a question on history evokes.

Indians have often been criticised for their “inability” to record history, for their “un-historical” bent. Whatever the merits or demerits of that critique, sources in Indian history are rare for the early period and abound in the modern period. Of those sources that are available in the early period, some inform us about very local conditions, while some do not seem very reliable. For instance, the pottery that is found in different parts of India tells you about that particular area, while some inscriptions or literary accounts seem too adulatory to be taken as accurate, like the *Harsha-charita*. Furthermore, they are sources of information on one moment in history and not continually updated or reflective of a cumulative tradition. The *Rajatarangini* is exceptional in this, and it too is not a compilation over centuries, but a remembered account of centuries past. Furthermore, when older sources tell us about more than one period, the geographical extent of the polity they describe is limited compared to the extent of the present Indian state, and sometimes it is the history also of regions that are no longer part of the Indian state.

So this raises questions about the relationship between “national” and “local” history. A prior question, however, really is: what is the “national” history of a sub-continent? How do you tell such a story so that: (1) you leave no one out; (2) you gloss over internecine conflict, and certainly downplay internal conflicts, conquests and victories; and (3) you make it all sound seamless?

Several historians I spoke with in Delhi pointed out that they do write a history that is more sophisticated than this. The question is, how many of us read it? The lowest common denominator of history education is school, and this is for most of us the only level at which we formally “learn” history. Given that in this age, that which is “formal” and “printed” carries greater authority than any other form of communication, it seems that the school textbook is the place to look for the way in which this is resolved. Further, in this region, schooling and textbook and curriculum planning are the preserve of state and state-instituted organisations. Finally, when one raises the question of how one might tell the story of a country, the fact is that one might do a fairly comprehensive job at an advanced level, but at the level of school education this is much more difficult. School history cannot capture the complexity or the multiplicity of stories that are available.

The act of writing a syllabus, first, and the exigencies of textbook writing involve choosing out of the smorgasbord of history and simplification on the dimensions of space and time. One selects first the “period” that one will teach. This raises the question of periodisation. What is the basis on which one might demarcate historical periods? Second, if one resolves this issue, one has to select the persons, events or social processes that one will narrate. Indeed, the choice of either persons, events or social processes is dictated by the perspective one holds. Among prominent Indian historians engaged in textbook writing, it is widely believed that a focus on social processes and movements is preferable politically to a focus on persons or events. But as Krishna Kumar points out, that is not necessarily what children grasp most easily. At this point, choice of any of the three involves losses.<sup>3</sup> Finally, you have to choose between the local, the regional, the national and the foreign, that is, where in the world has this period to be located? Is this class going to study the eighteenth century in Europe, India, Tamil Nadu or Thanjavur? Children relate best to that which they can see around them, but what does that mean for the idea of India?

Krishna Kumar, *Learning From Conflict*, Tracts for the Times 10, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1996, Chapter 2, “Children and History.”

When you take into account the intrinsic simplicity or complexity of narratives, the greater or lesser extent of variations within each narrative tradition, the choices made by Indian and Sri Lankan school curriculum authorities are quite different. (The next two sections go into greater detail.) The “standard” Indian story is one that flits from one period of unity and/or greatness to another, where both of these are measured by degree of resemblance to the Indian state. The Sri Lankans no longer teach history, amalgamating it into a “Social Studies” syllabus. Two major research projects on textbooks have suggested that the books lean towards a Mahavamsa orientation<sup>4</sup>.

To return to the problem of why Indians could not relate to the question of how they might tell their history, it seems that in a large country like India, the process of deciding what shall be taught has one consequence: the textbooks are designed so no one learns very much. Perfectly harmless. The NCERT textbooks are good and form the basis of all the others to varying degree. However, it is the degree of variance that is critical. The Tamil Nadu books I looked at were poorly planned, poorly written and I would rate them also as pedagogically pathetic. A committee of experts headed by Bipan Chandra examined the same books and arrived at the same conclusion.<sup>5</sup> Little wonder then that among the people I interviewed in Madras, the only people who were able to remember much history were people who had been to school in the colonial period, and they knew little Indian history. Those who went to school in the post-colonial period were unable to remember much from school, and after looking at the books I am not surprised. So besides there

being no single dominant tradition of Indian history, there is no single effective set of textbooks that is being used.<sup>6</sup>

The other difference is that in India, the traditions of history are not as contentious as they are in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan traditions bear a somewhat dialectical relationship with each other in that they each are something of a response to the other. However, the Indian tradition, if it exists, is diffuse. Having said that, I should mention two exceptions. At present, historians and other observers of Indian society are focused on one issue area where history is called on all the time, that of communal relations. In fact, when I raised the question of linguistic or regional identity, they considered those resolved and passé. The question of the abuse of history to promote communal causes is one that is very close to their hearts, though, and that is what recent writing on historiography has been about. Public debates in India on historical issues are provoked by the inclusion or exclusion, intentionally or inadvertently, of local or group leaders, specific events or actions whose import is either still debated or whose significance is greater for one set of people than another. This kind of controversy is related to controversies over the naming of universities and airports and the re-naming of cities also. In a city like Madras, which regards communal conflicts as far removed and more common in the North, although they have occurred in the recent past in Madras, questions of history have no apparent salience.

Finally, I think this question failed because, while most had not learnt Indian history effectively enough to narrate it, and while they had never really been taught the history of Tamil Nadu, it is harder still, when asked to narrate as one would to a ten - year old, to

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<sup>4</sup> Regi Siriwardene, et al, conducted one study in the early 1980's and the second is by Sasanka Perera.

<sup>5</sup> National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation, *Recommendations and Report II*, NCERT, New Delhi, 1994.

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<sup>6</sup> Textbooks are not the sole source of learning available to most students. The family, the mass media and the peer group are also teachers. In the case of Tamil Nadu, given the really bad textbooks available, and the fact that following NCERT guidelines these books teach a “national” rather than “local” history, most people I spoke with said they learnt about the history of Tamil Nadu from literature and from cinema. Indeed, one respondent said that when he thought of Kattabomman, an early freedom-fighter from this region, it was Shivaji Ganesan's face that he saw before his eyes.

narrate history as the rationalist ideology of the Dravida parties would have one do. This was pointed out by a lawyer who is also an office-bearer of the Dravida Kazhagam<sup>7</sup>. From the perspective of rationalism, history has no bearing. She quoted E.V. Ramasami Naicker and said that there was no point looking back at another time and basking in its glories or in its inequities. What was important was change in our time. Therefore, she refused to answer this question. But there is another aspect to this. The way that the Dravida movement constructs the past is less in terms of specific events and leaders or monarchs and more in terms of class or caste relations. How do you encapsulate and present that to children? I think that given time you could, but faced with an interviewer and tape-recorder, it is hard to do so.

There is a conclusion that it seems possible to arrive at that also constitutes something of an explanation. Whatever the Indian states' other national integration problems at this moment, Tamil Nadu is no longer one of them. Tamil Nadu, and the Dravida parties have come a long way -- one hundred and eighty degrees precisely -- from their secessionist demands of the 1950s and early 1960s. This is not to say either that there are no stresses in the relationship between Tamil Nadu and the central government, or that the Indian state has in any way a perfect record in this area. Merely that in this case, going by the evidence on this question, if history education is a key element of political socialisation, then it does not seem as if anyone is contesting the content of this socialisation. This is not an issue among the Tamils I met in India.

### **Sri Lanka: Once Upon an Island...**

#### **Origins**

There are three stories about Sri Lanka. They overlap and they intersect, they contradict each other and they also give each other life. The first two are more closely linked: the Mahavamsa and its Tamil mirror-image. The third is the modern, westernised, liberal

Sri Lankan version. These three schools are analytical simplifications. In reality, the narratives of individual respondents drew on more than one of these at a time. Further, this distinction is more salient in discussions of Sri Lanka's earliest history rather than of later periods. Finally, what I call the "Tamil mirror-image" or the "Tamil" version is not something that anyone is taught formally, and therefore, neither is it articulated so that one might find a continuous narrative in it, nor is it articulated by every Tamil you meet.

The sharpest differences between the three versions are found in the accounts of the early period. All three stories have positions on who came first. The *Mahavamsa* school says that the Sinhalese did. The Tamils says that they have lived in Sri Lanka a very long time. The liberals say it really does not matter who got here first. Indeed, they usually do not start at this point when they tell the story. They begin with the colonial era because that is the most germane to the present impasse.

Having arrived, the Sinhalese built a magnificent irrigation-based civilisation, but were plagued by the constant irritant of attacks from South India by invaders who were intent on destroying Buddhism in Sri Lanka as they had in their own land. Nevertheless, the civilisation survived, witnessing, from the 12th and 13th centuries, assimilation by the Sinhala Buddhist culture of the styles and gods of the invaders. Polonnaruwa and the four devales that surround every Buddhist temple are cited as examples. Mention is made of Indian queens, but the mixture of races that suggests is never dwelt upon, presuming that paternity is all that matters. Meanwhile the locus of the civilisation was forced to move south, until the famous war between Dutugemunu and Elara. Several people made a point of telling me that Dutugemunu built a memorial for Elara and people would always dismount in that area as a mark of respect. This was a sign of their people's grace in victory.

Tamils tell you that yes, the Cholas invaded the island, but the rest of those who came in were settlers. They talk about how originally all the Sinhalese were Tamils. It is not clear by what process they became Sinhalese. Sinhala is a language that was invented by mixing Tamil with a lot of Pali. Thus, not just the "Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists," but Tamils too seem to identify the language and the

<sup>7</sup> Lawyer, interview, Madras June 1996

religion. On the question of Dutugemunu and Elara, one person asked me if anyone had told me that Elara was a very old man when he was defeated, offering that both as an instance of Sinhalese disregard for the aged and justification for his defeat. Further:

“... now if the Sinhalese here feel that this country is theirs, that this is a Sinhala Buddhist country, and their teachings like the Mahavamsa, the stories of the Mahavamsa, where they indicate that the Tamils were invaders, that the Sinhalese were the original inheritors of this land, these were invaders who came and settled down, but they have no real right to this country. The story in the Mahavamsa where they say that Dutugemunu was sorrow-stricken that he had killed a number of Tamils, he is supposed to have been told by the Sangha, that is the Buddhist clergy, that “No, no, no, no, no, don't worry about it because the people who were killed were infidels who have no right to share in the polity of the country.” So if that type of teaching continues.. and on the other hand the Tamils also, Tamils are taught every day that their language is the most ancient one and there was a time when the kingdom of the Tamils extended up to the Himalayas and various stories like that, you see stories of this type on both sides will certainly not lead to integration. But if the books, if what is taught in the schools, if the history that is taught in the schools, is on the basis that this is a land that belongs to everybody, and therefore all are equal, if on that basis the books and the stories are made up and taught, then maybe in one generation, two generations, then people will start feeling that this is one land, one people and so on.”<sup>8</sup>

The liberal take on this is that it does not matter. The truth is that as wave upon wave of settlers arrived, they mingled and intermarried, producing a culture which is distinct from that of the sub-continental mainland.

“This is a small island set near the continent of India. Certainly, India is not a sub-continent -- and the continent of a mega-culture and then, we have the sub-culture of a mega-culture, a multiple mega-culture, which we get in India. And there are three major continental civilisations in the world. .. each with its own island sub-cultures.. (the sub-cultures) developed a high degree of flexibility as against continental civilisations. And the ability to survive and a somewhat temperamental mental attitude to life than the major continental civilisations. Which tend to be more serious and heavy. And this has resulted in the Indian context of a fairly, I wouldn't say unique, but distinctive formation of our own. And that formation has taken place at least since 500 BC if not earlier.”<sup>9</sup>

The liberals talk about this intermingling, citing the very same Polonnaruwa and four devales as instances of synthesis rather than assimilation.

### Colonial Period

The colonial period excites the least acrimony because the villains lie largely outside today's battleground. There is agreement on one thing, more or less: the colonial powers were more oppressive than the Kandyan kingdom, which is described over and over to me as epitomising national integration, Sri Lankan-style. Several people went to great lengths to describe inter-communal relations in the Kandyan kingdom.

“All peoples of all races and all religions can live peacefully, and that had been achieved in many periods in our country's history and specially in the last pre-colonial kingdom, the Kandyan kingdom. It is often stated, and there is concrete evidence, that people of all nationalities lived together peacefully because we have evidence not only Sri Lankan, the evidence of indigenous people, but evidence of foreigners that there were. The king had in his employ Hindus, Muslims,

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Community activist, interview, Colombo, February 1996

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Academic, interview, Colombo. February 1996

Europeans. Christians, both Protestants and Roman Catholics, lived very peacefully in the Kandyan kingdom. And perhaps you are aware that the Kandyan kingdom arose as a response to the European challenge. The Portuguese were occupying the low country and the Portuguese were persecuting the Muslims, persecuting the Buddhists and persecuting the Hindus. And all these categories of people got refuge in the Kandyan kingdom. The king gave shelter to the Muslims and gave shelter to the Hindus, all of whom were persecuted under the Portuguese rule. Also there is evidence, there is Portuguese evidence, that 2000 Muslims who fled from Portuguese persecution were settled in Kandy, in the Batticaloa district and given lands and they are supposed to be still the best rice cultivators, the best farmers in the country, the Muslims in the Batticaloa district. That is mentioned in Portuguese sources. Even Robert Knox refers to the fact that the kings of Kandy were very impartial and just rulers. So I think national integration had been achieved in our country. It is not something new.”<sup>10</sup>

It is in their assessment of British colonial actions that there begins to be dissension among the respondents. From this point on, the story emerges as a series of themes with variations, and what I am going to do is to try and put them in chronological order.

The first contribution of the colonial period to Sri Lanka's present-day problems, is that missionaries set up shop largely in the north, and therefore, Jaffna had better schools and colleges than every other part of the island. This made it possible for the Jaffna Tamil to work for the colonial government and reap the benefits of colonial employment. Jaffna and Trincomalee developed in the colonial period, even as the South continued to languish. Incidentally, this is the justification offered for the changes in language and educational policies in the 1950s and 1960s. The other side of this story is that while the missionaries first came to Jaffna, the “advancement” of the Jaffna Tamil is not to be attributed to this fact as much as necessity:

the land yielded little and there was willingness to work hard at opportunities being offered.

In the 1820s the British introduced infrastructural and administrative change to bring the island under one rule. Roads were built giving access to every part of the island, and an administrative structure was set up that led to a unitary form of government. While no one actually talks about this, the debate is on whether or not Sri Lanka has been a unitary state all along. Those whom we might classify as the Mahavamsa school maintain that this was not the first instance of the unification of the island. Bhikkhu Dhammavihari dates the idea back to Buddha's time. The Chakravartin was the universal emperor, bringing under his, of course his, “ekat-chatra” or one umbrella, the entire universe. In the Sri Lankan context, that was taken to mean that the entire island came under the sway, more or less, of one political identity. This is, of course, contested by both the other “schools.”

Majoritarian government in the Donoughmore Constitution is the root of the problem according to several of my respondents, and this is the next point in history that people stop to talk about.

“When we got independence in 1948, we had been used to systems before 1931 where representation had been entirely on communal basis. You had so many people in the Council just because they are Sinhalese and even they went to the extent of dividing it between low-country and up-country Sinhalese. Then Tamils, then Indians, then Muslims. like that. Now later on, it was only in 1931 that you got universal adult franchise where indifferent to your community, each one had a vote to elect his representative. And in 1947, we again had a constitution which perpetuated that. And it is that which was later on the Independence Act of Ceylon, gave us independence on the 4th of February. But our thinking has been different. Because we were never integrated, never brought to realise that we are all from the same country. But we felt that we are living in the same country but we are different people. Because to the Britisher we were different.”<sup>11</sup>

This is what led naturally to the creation of separate electorates, and to the “fifty-fifty” controversy. This was a demand by Tamil leaders for equal representation for minorities in the legislature, which is not in proportion to their population. This, of course, is seen as insightful by some and insidious by others. But all are agreed that this marks the beginning of communal parties and politics in Sri Lanka. This was because it made it possible for Tamil politicians to see their role in balance of power terms vis-à-vis the two Sinhalese parties. There is a chicken-and-egg question here: who started it? Which communalism came first, Tamil or Sinhalese? Those who say the Tamils started it say the Tamils never saw themselves as Sri Lankan. Those who say the Sinhalese started it say the Sinhala Mahasabha was the first communal organisation.

“..So initially when the national consciousness was brought in, like India, the National Congress was formed by people like Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan and Arunachalam, along with the Sinhala leaders. So during that phase, the minorities wanted their safeguards. They wanted their rights and they wanted their identities to be maintained. So in that phase, when Arunachalam really started and he came out with discussing various things, even he was looked on not as Sri Lankan, but looked on as a Tamil.. by the Sri Lankan Sinhala leaders. So, he was rather frustrated. He was one of the foremost leaders of our country and he was respected by the Sinhalese a lot. Even his brother, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan was a national leader, he went to London and he had dialogues with them and he built a kind of national understanding, and he actually solved these (Sinhalese-Muslim) problems. So later when his brother Arunachalam with liberal ideas, came up with problems, with these various conflict situations, he was forced to leave the Congress. They (the Sinhalese) formed the Sinhala Mahasabha. And at the same time from National Congress he came out and formed Tamil Mahajanasabha. So Tamil nationalism and Sinhala nationalism and nationalism, these are the three basic facets.”<sup>12</sup>

Mediaperson, interview, Colombo, February 1996

Another common observation that leads to different places is that Sri Lanka got independence handed over on a platter. Even if this were not one case in a comparative study, maybe it was the fact of my being Indian, people were always drawing comparisons between Sri Lanka and India. Here too, one would hear: unlike in India, Sri Lanka did not have a mass nationalist movement. The local leadership came out of an elite that was English-educated and Colombo-based. The members of this elite came from both communities, and had more in common with each other than with their own communities. I have had it said to me by people from different corners of the political arena that perhaps “Sri Lanka” was the reality only of this elite and never indeed existed for anyone else.

This elite, in this period, and ever after, is greatly condemned for having never acted in the interests of the “common people.” The reason why the lack of a nationalist movement is problematic is that transfer of power happened not to a group representative of a mass movement, but to this elite. The leadership of both communities is seen as having failed, but the Tamil leadership, what is now called the moderate Tamil leadership, comes in for the largest share of flak, within and without the community. It is seen within as having sold out to the state, having always looked out for its own narrow class interests, and failed to provide the community with an alternative to the militant leadership. It is seen without as having failed the state in providing resistance within the community to the militants.

### Post-colonial Period

Anyway, independence came in 1948. From this point, it seems that the Tamils are placing the markers in the narrative and the Sinhalese and liberals responding.

“In 1948, they started with the Citizenship Act.. They said: we are not going to deprive the citizenship of anyone, we are going to regulate our citizenship act. We are going to regulate the citizenship provisions. So who is, who should be considered a citizen of Sri Lanka? By doing that, they have excluded almost one million people. Look, first piece of legislation .. communal.



.. So when they decided the Prime Minister has told the Parliament: This is our country, we have to decide who are to be citizens of this country. So when he said so, there were almost eight, eight members from the plantation Tamils community. There were eight members in the Parliament, elected by the plantation Tamil people. But after the enactment of the Citizenship Act, all those eight people were excluded. There was not a single member. They could not elect a single member from the plantations because they have (been) deprived of their citizenship, their voting rights. So it started with that. .. it started from 1948..”<sup>13</sup>

The defence for this law was provided by a Sinhalese lawyer, who said that the laws were, in fact, so lax that even I could register to vote in Sri Lanka.

The next landmark is 1956. In 1956, the government passed the “Sinhala Only” Act. While the earlier commitment had been to “Swabasha” or the policy of educating people in their native tongues, ie., the Sinhalese in Sinhala, the Tamils in Tamil, with English being available as an option for the Burghers, Malays and Moors, the “Sinhala Only” policy had the effect, overnight, of making it difficult for the non-Sinhalese minority to apply for jobs. On the other hand, people outside a microscopic elite in all communities were disadvantaged by not knowing English. Some point out that this policy has kept the lower classes trapped in their socio-economic positions, unable to look for better jobs. Others feel that this argument is weak, as this had always been the case previously. Apart from the elite, everyone studied in their own language, and were both disadvantaged vis-à-vis employment as well as unable to communicate outside their community or locality. The Tamils felt that this policy was designed specifically to exclude them from the corridors of government. They felt (feel) it disadvantaged them in excess of any other community. There are some votaries of English, but it is much more common to

hear the view that “Swabasha” was acceptable with the other language as second language, but “Sinhala Only” was not.<sup>14</sup>

In the early 1970s, the impact of this was compounded by what is commonly called “the District Quota.” This took the form of setting differentiated cut-offs for students in different districts so that a student from a “backward” area would require fewer points to gain admission into the University while a student from a “forward” area would need more. The person who was Education Secretary at this time compares it to grading on a curve. Tamils saw this as designed to marginalise them further, but so do Sinhalese from “forward areas.” Effectively this policy disadvantaged all those districts that had hitherto done “disproportionately” well in academic competition, including Jaffna, Colombo and Kandy. It does not matter even whether the secretary had it right or the disaffected students and their parents, the fact is that this policy is so widely regarded as having been detrimental to the country, that in fact that perception alone seems to make it so.

“Sinhala Only” and “the District Quota” alienated different sections of the population for different reasons. However, their impact was compounded by the liberalisation of the economy in the seventies. Suddenly, youth discontent led to the rise of militancy in North and South. On this, there is hardly any disagreement. From this point onwards, the narrative is thin. There are personal narratives, “This is where I was when..,” or people would get really vague and their eyes would wander off into the distance or they would say, “Then you know the rest,” or just go straight to the present government.

So, once upon an island, there were many stories, all of them as disjointed and sad as the people who told them to the traveller. She felt a little guilty for making them remember, and a little guilty that their sorrow and grief benefited her. But she wandered around all the same, asking because she had to, and tentatively probing because she could not resist, and finally, daring to touch what was

<sup>14</sup> I should say here that almost everyone I interviewed asked me how many languages I spoke and how many I had to learn in school. There was great interest in the fact that at least in the school board I studied in, we did learn three languages, two of which might be Indian

raw, because she needed to feel that pain. It was not over and no one knew where it would end, but when it was time for her to go, she put down her tape-recorder, and flew off into the sunrise. Those of you who feel, as she did and does, that there was something not-quite-right about the enterprise, will be pleased to know that punishment was not far behind. She now sits imprisoned in a dark room in a prairie, transcribing the interviews because there is no tomorrow.

### **India: Where do I begin..?**

I have already stated and considered why this question did not elicit the response in India that it did in Sri Lanka. That said, it was not as if people flatly refused to attempt an answer of some sort. People usually make some response. And in this case, there were three threads, and answers often began at one point and ended at another.

If one of the tricks in this question lay in my use of “your country” instead of a proper noun, then almost all my respondents assumed we were talking about India. Having done so, they would begin by describing India to me in terms of its diversity. India may not have been politically integrated, but it was culturally integrated, “from Himalayas to Kanyakumari, and there were political kingdoms but they were never conceived that they needed to be united politically.”<sup>15</sup>

“It’s just a feel If you are an Indian, you will know what it is I think because it’s so many different regions, so many different communities, so many different languages.. I mean you just have to go ten, hundred kilometres outside where I live and I don’t know what that man is talking about. It’s an absolutely strange thing and still there is a sense of being a base, of being a part of a whole..”<sup>16</sup>

While describing the “unity in diversity” in India, there was both a tired sense of “not-again” and “why now?” when they would rehearse these well-worn platitudes as well as a little pride and a little wonder as they warmed to the theme. India in these descriptions sounds a little too perfect to be true, and that is what this part of the

answer has in common with tourist literature and Films Division documentaries. The utter lack of originality in the phrases used (“We are a very diverse society,” “Indians come from many different backgrounds,” “India has many linguistic and religious groups” among others) is to me indicative that this is not an issue that people think about on a regular basis.

The answer would move on from here, particularly if I pressed them to some sort of narrative account, more often than I expected, to what I regard as the standard history of India. This is the India of colonial histories, and of the NCERT syllabi. I summarise that story below:

First there was the Indus Valley Civilisation in Mohenjo-daro and Harappa. Then the Aryans invaded/ came to India, and that is when the Vedas were written. I am not sure when but some centuries later, was around the time of Buddha and Mahavira. Then came the Maurya and Gupta empires. And then for a long time there was chaos, and then Mahmud of Ghazni conducted his raids on Somnath. Then there were all those kings in Delhi, Allaudin Khilji and all. Then the Mughals came, Babar, Humayun, Akbar, Aurangzeb.. Then after the Mughals there were some regional kingdoms, and then the British who had originally come as traders, finally gained control over the entire place. They introduced English and used the policy of divide and rule. Finally, under the leadership of Gandhiji, India won independence.

This skeletal account reflects the standard subject-matter of school histories. The stress is on the periods of relative unification, regarding all else as indicative of degeneration. Therefore, the spread of the Vedic culture, the Janapadas, the republics of the Himalayan foothills and western India, the Kushanas, Harsha sometimes, the Rashtrakutas and Chalukyas, the Cholas and Pallavas, Vijayanagara and the Bahamani kingdom, among other things, find no place in the “ready-reckoner” of most memories. From the perspective of many of the regions of India, that simply leaves them out.

<sup>15</sup> Writer, interview, Madras, June 1996

<sup>16</sup> Mediaperson, interview, Madras, June 1996

Although there is no real local focus in the textbooks, people I interviewed in Tamil Nadu did have a strong sense of there being such a thing as their own history. When you ask them what history they learnt in school, several respondents did say immediately that they did not learn about Tamil Nadu in history.

On an average when people choose to narrate the history of the Tamil people, the story usually begins with an assertion of the antiquity of Tamil. "Tamil is older than the stones and the sea," is a saying that is quoted often. The antiquity of Tamil in relation to Sanskrit and to other Dravidian languages is particularly stressed, and the argument made that Tamil, as the only language which is both classical and modern, must be accorded the status that Sanskrit enjoys. Next come two periods that always feature in the local story: Sangam Age and the Chola-Chera-Pandya kingdoms. These two overshadow all other episodes in Tamil history. The former is accorded this place, I think, because it establishes the antiquity and the uniqueness of Tamil, but the place of the latter has as much to do with its prominence in the popular arts as it does to the merits of the kingdoms themselves. The Pallavas do not figure in spite of their architectural prowess, and even obscure Chola princes receive greater attention. From this tenth-eleventh century moment of glory, the narrative is cued to the freedom struggle. One common complaint is that South Indian freedom-fighters are unsung in the annals of Indian history. Everyone stops to mention Subramania Bharati, but the argument was also made that not only did one never hear of Veerapandi Kattabomman and others like him, but that the contribution of non-Brahmin freedom-fighters was under-represented in the stories. This would suggest that India's independence, arguably the biggest common campaign of the sub-continent's people, was won without much assistance from Tamil Nadu. Therefore, if the extent of sacrifice dictates the extent of ownership, as political rhetoric often implies, then the people of Tamil Nadu have less ownership of the Indian state.

If the standard Indian narrative ignores the local, then the local seems to overlook a good deal as well. Why is that? Why does no one mention the Vijayanagara period, the Nayakas, the Marathas, the rise of the Nawab of Arcot? It would appear that if the Indian

story is going about constructing a single unified India, then the Tamil story, if there is one, is going about creating a cultured, imperial race. Periods of servitude are strictly forbidden.

The anti-climactic nature of my research in Tamil Nadu served to drive one point home that history was not relevant to any disputes that continued between Tamil Nadu and the Indian state. The state that witnessed a secessionist movement, that inspired an anti-secessionist constitutional amendment thirty years ago, is now a pillar of mainstream Indian politics, with a couple of ministers in the Union cabinet. How did this happen? What made this transformation possible? Thereby hangs another tale, one that will be told in the rest of my dissertation.

### And so in the End ...

All good stories have endings. The stories that I have told here today do not. They are the stories that make people's lives intelligible to them, and as long as someone tells the tale, it will go on. Will the Tamils and Sinhalese make friends and live happily ever after? Will Indian Tamils rediscover their separateness in fifty years? Will other parts of India secede, nullifying the constitutional amendment that kept Tamil Nadu in check? Has the Dravida movement retained or lost its capacity to mobilise? Will the war in Sri Lanka end? Will archaeologists find out who came there first? I don't know.

As all good stories have endings, so do all good story-tellers extract a moral from any tale. The moral I suggest to you of my tales is that as it seems impossible to tell one story that pleases everyone, perhaps there is a way in which we can tell our children many stories which neutralise the exclusive elements in each other. If indeed states must use schools to teach history as a vision of themselves, then states must write that history so that there are resonances of the familiar for children from all over the territory of the state. If, as most people confessed in the interviews, they could not remember what they had learnt in school, then this is a most ineffective way to socialise people. If it is as ineffective as that, it is not worth the risk of alienating sections of the population in the vain hope of creating loyal citizens. At the end of the day, at least in India, people confessed

to getting their sense of historical developments from Amar Chitra Kathas, from television and from cinema. Perhaps the effectiveness of these media lies precisely in the plurality of voices that sneak through their planning and controls.

The oral traditions of South Asia reinforce this idea. The more a story is told, independently, by more and more people, the stronger the core of its plot gets. The story becomes an epic, and the epic becomes a living tradition, and before you know it, the variations are the strength of the core. The higher the count of yarn, the finer and more enduring the cotton. The greater the multiplicity of pieces, the more spectacular the mosaic. The more components in a collage, the more interesting it is to look at. Why don't states learn from everything else around them that the greater the diversity of perspectives, the more lasting the vision of the state?

### *Sources*

*The stories reconstructed in the above essay are based on interviews conducted in Colombo, Kandy, New Delhi, Mumbai (Bombay) and Chennai (Madras) between January and July 1996.*

## **Migration, Population Transfer and Displacement in South Asia<sup>1</sup>**

**Darini Rajasingham<sup>2</sup>**

### **Introduction**

South Asia's culturally mixed urban and rural communities attest to a long history of population transfers in the region, more as a result of trade and labour migration than state orchestrated population transfers. In recent times conflicts over the movement of people have arisen and faded more as a result of the making and shift of political regimes and state borders and post/colonial nation building rather than as a result of purely ethnic or religious differences. Additionally, development projects undertaken to meet demands for social justice by marginalized groups have often resulted in the displacement and forcible transfer of people and exacerbated local and regional tensions.

Since 1947 the emergence of seven independent central states in the region disrupted mixed communities and economies when borders were demarcated after bloody battles and population transfers.

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper was presented at the expert meeting on "Population Transfer and the Implantation of Settlers" at the Human Rights Center in Geneva in February 1997.

<sup>2</sup> The author is a Social Science Research Council-MacArthur Foundation Post-doctoral Fellow in Peace and Security Studies at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo and the Institute for War and Peace Studies, Columbia University, US.

Development projects, such as the Mahaveli in Sri Lanka or Narmada dam in India, both of which were synonymous with modern nation building have also caused population transfers and displacement. These displacements have resulted in great social suffering to the communities which were displaced and often placed strains on the host communities which received the displaced persons. In turn, displacement has contributed to new forms of regional, ethno-religious conflict<sup>3</sup>. In short, modern nation-state building has entailed the transfer of populations in conditions conducive to conflict.

Recognising that population transfers and displacement caused by nation building and attendant development projects in the region has and might lead to further conflict, in November 1996 the South Asia Forum for Human Rights, a regional NGO, convened a meeting to formulate a charter for the protection of displaced and stateless persons. The document that emerged from the meeting in Kathmandu, Nepal, was titled "Recommendations for a South Asia Charter/Protocol for the Protection of Refugees, Migrants, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons"<sup>4</sup>.

The charter laid out protection for various categories of displaced persons, also recognizing the growing need for protection for labor migrants given the increasing integration of labor markets in the region. Also of concern were stateless persons since in the post/colonial period several states have rendered minority groups stateless in order to effect their expulsion (Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Bhutan) on the pretext that they were descended from labor migrants, and/or had been implanted by the British colonial regime as part of a general practice of divide and rule.

Additionally, the fact that extra-state or non-state ethno-nationalist groups such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka had ethnically cleansed territories which they

<sup>3</sup> The other regional agreement chiefly the OAU declaration and Cartehenga declarations were used as models.

<sup>4</sup> The participants included human rights NGO activists and lawyers from countries belonging to the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). A UNHCR representative was also present.

claim as home lands was of concern<sup>5</sup>. Also of concern was that several post/colonial states in South Asia have claimed that descendants of populations transferred as indentured laborers following the abolition of slavery during European colonial rule are not "original" or indigenous people and hence are not citizens of these nations. These colonial transfers of populations which also affected several East African colonies culminated in the expulsion of Ugandan and Kenyan Asians in the seventies. Many of them were granted asylum in Britain<sup>6</sup>.

This paper will attempt to clarify the dynamics of population transfer in the South Asian region baring in mind that voluntary and involuntary population transfers, settlements, and migrations have a long and complex history in the region, but that history has often been used regressively to marginalize vulnerable populations. Ethnic cleansing or the expulsion of minority ethnic groups has been a post/colonial phenomena justified by the claim that minority ethnic groups are migrants and implanted settlers and not residents. Reference will also be made to relevant situations in East and West Asia and East Africa.

<sup>5</sup> A distinction might be made here between a war undertaken to ethnically cleanse a nation or territory as was the case with the Bosnian Serbs, and ethnic cleansing as a by-product of a protracted armed conflict. In Sri Lanka the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam ordered ethnic Sinhala and Muslim people resident in the Jaffna peninsula to leave in 1990. The LTTE claim that the expulsion of Sinhalas and Muslims was necessary for security reasons rather than because they believe in an ethnically pure Tamil nation. Yet while there has been unofficial acceptance that the expulsion was a mistake, the LTTE never asked the expelled Sinhalas and Muslims of the Jaffna Peninsula to return.

<sup>6</sup> Indentured labor migrations organized during the British Raj dispersed Indian coolie labor in four of the seven South Asian nations which were colonies (India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh) as well as in East Asian Nations such as Malaysia and Fiji after the abolition of the slave trade during the first half of the nineteenth century. The 900,000 Tamils of Indian descent whose citizenship was revoked by the Sri Lanka Government are descended of indentured laborers brought to the island in the 1830s.

### Persons Affected by Population Transfer

During discussions in Kathmandu several categories of “persons of concern” due to voluntary or involuntary displacement from their homes were identified<sup>7</sup>. Some of these “persons of concern” coincide with the populations identified by the Special Rapoteurs on Population Transfer including the implantation of Settlements, Mr. Al-Khasawneh and Mr Hatano, in their preliminary report to the sub-commission.

The Kathmandu meetings recognized as “persons of concern” in the region:

- (1) refugees
- (2) internally displaced persons due to conflict
- (3) development and/or environmental disaster displacees
- (4) labor migrants in the region
- (5) stateless persons
- (6) cross- border populations.
- (7) host or receiving communities.

### Background to present forced migrations in the region

Recent transfers of population have several distinct causes and consequences for the populations who were transferred as well as for the receiving communities.

- (1) The birth of three South Asian nations and the demarcation of borders was accompanied by Hindu-Muslim riots and large-scale transfer of population across the new border in 1947 and 1971. Partition of the sub-continent and the declaration of Indian and Pakistani independence in 1947 resulted in one million deaths, while 15 million were forced to cross borders. Ethnically motivated rape was widespread. Again during Bangladesh’s independence struggle against Pakistan in the

<sup>7</sup> Persons of concern also include populations in refugee-like situations but who are not recognized by the states of South Asia as persons of concern due to displacement.

early seventies approximately 13 million crossed into India’s northern and eastern states to escape Pakistani armed forces. Many have remained in India and the Indian state claims that there are six to seven million Bangladeshi illegal immigrants. Additionally, 300,000 Bihari Muslims are still in the Geneva camp outside Dhaka, Bangladesh, because Pakistan refuses to let them be repatriated and Bangladesh will not grant them citizenship.

- (2) The revocation of citizenship and/or expulsion of ethnic minorities on the grounds that they are implanted populations or illegal migrants has also caused population transfer. The worst cases are Bhutan, Burma and Sri Lanka. 80,000 Nepali-speaking Bhutanese have been expelled and crossed through India to Nepal because of the Bhutan government’s “one nation, one people maxim”. The Bhutan government ignores the fact that southern Bhutanese of Nepali origin migrated and settled in Bhutan over a century ago. Groups without citizenship or those who have been rendered stateless are vulnerable to population transfer. Often the revocation of citizenship is the first stage of expulsion. In Bhutan Lhotshampa children are denied education. These states have confiscated the identity cards as well as property of minorities.
- (3) Development- induced displacement due to the construction of dams, electrification schemes, mines etc. has resulted in the transfer of population of approximately 15 million, largely tribal, populations in India alone. In Sri Lanka ethnicity-blind development schemes have resulted in settlement and colonization schemes in lands claimed as historical homelands by the Tamil minority. Additionally, the demarcation of national sanctuaries and reserves has resulted in the eviction of tribal communities from their homelands. Similar patterns of displacement of tribal groups are evident in Indonesia.
- (4) Ethnic conflicts between armed militant groups and state armies has resulted in large-scale displacement in Sri Lanka and Kashmir. In Sri Lanka approximately six percent of the

population is internally displaced, and internally displaced persons have been used as buffers by the Sri Lankan government and LTTE militants.

- (5) Ethnic cleansing of civilian populations by armed militants.
- (6) Women migrant workers in the region and in the Gulf states as well as those who are drawn into the sex industry are also a problem that needs to be addressed, especially in the context of high levels of extra-judicial killings of South East Asian maids as well as the execution of maid workers.
- (7) Population transfer as result of environmental disaster as occurred in Bhopal, India with the explosion of a Union Carbide Chemical plant.

#### **Analysis: Responsibility for Population Transfer**

Population transfer including the implantation of settlers and its effects may be narrowly or broadly construed, and would thus affect how responsibility for involuntary population transfer and restitution might be determined.

Gross violations which occurred in Bosnia, Palestine, post/Soviet republics, Nazi Germany have placed the issue of population transfers and the implantation of settlers and settlement on the international agenda. Yet in many South Asian countries population transfers are often the outcome of the responsibility of states to develop, industrialize and provide for the "greater good". Ambitious development schemes such as dam building for electrification and agriculture as well as poorly managed industrialization projects have resulted in large population transfers. In the latter instance, large chemical producing multinational corporations working in third world countries where public safety regulations are minimal, share the responsibility for some population transfers as with the Bhopal case, where Union Carbide was responsible for gross negligence and the environmental pollution leading to the death and disease of several thousands.

There are of course the extreme cases where forced population transfers are a strategy of racist states to systematically discriminate against minorities such as, in Bhutan, Burma and Sri Lanka where segments of minority populations have been rendered stateless by racist governments. In some instances population transfer is a by-product of a conflict between a state and armed groups but not deliberately effected in a systematic manner.

With regard to the responsibility of states and non-state actors the distinction between criminal and delictant behavior with regard to forced population transfer of ethnic minorities is necessary. For instance, a distinction might be made between ethnic cleansing resulting from armed conflict where security considerations of the armed regime, be it state or non-state, result in ethnic cleansing, and between a war undertaken with the specific aim of ethnic cleansing as occurred in Bosnia. That is to say, we might distinguish between ethnic cleansing as a by product of conflict and ethnic cleansing as the goal of the conflict, the latter being the more serious violation.

Similarly, while the provisional definition of "forcible" transfer recommended by Mr Al-Khasawneh holds good, as the Special Rapporteur himself notes, force might be multiply constituted, and often includes economic deprivation. Under the circumstances the question may be raised as to how broadly "force" may be constituted, and thus how broadly responsibility for forced transfers of population might be construed particularly in the case of development-induced displacement.

The gray area with regard to determining responsibility for population transfer is also important with regard to settlement of disputed territories, reparation after regime change, and in instances where the principle of the voluntary nature of all population transfers might be derogated. Especially since the culpability of states for effecting population transfer does not automatically entail the culpability of the settlers themselves. In many instances settlers are the poorer and more manipulable members of society and restitution should not entail their further victimization. Often the population which is being used as a colonizing tool are the poorer or weaker segments of the population.



## Transferred Populations

Consent which constitutes the legitimate grounds for population transfer, might be constituted of many coercive elements, such as availability of or lack of lands, water, personal and group security. Transferred populations may be pawns of State development policies and unaware of the larger interests behind their transfer and settlement.

While some states deliberately deprive their populations of basic needs to effect population transfers, as is the case with Burma and Bhutan, where minority children have been denied education facilities, often the transfer of population is a result of scarce resources and settlers are from land and water-starved agricultural communities, and usually the more impoverished segments of the nation-state. In Sri Lanka some of the highest suicide rates in the country are evident among settler families under the controversial Mahaveli development project, which was perceived by many members of the minority Tamil community to have been a deliberate colonization of the historical homelands of the Tamil minority by the ethnic Sinhala majority community.

The fact remains however that post/colonial population transfers in South Asia's impoverished nation states have more often than not been the result of development projects undertaken in a manner which is insensitive to local populations. And it is this insensitivity which has fuelled ethno-religious conflicts. In the context of ethnic conspiracy theories, and the complex demands for social justice being made of the state, it is well to remember that historically voluntary and involuntary population transfers in the region have occurred, due to the exhaustion of already available lands owing to population expansion, as well as for purposes of trade and labor.

## Groups Vulnerable to Population Transfer and the Right to Remain

The burden of injunctions regarding the transfer of populations appears to be on the necessity to return where populations were once implanted or forced into displacement.

Several states and ethno-nationalist groups have however used the human rights discourses on the "right to a homeland" and "right to return" in regressive ways to expel minority populations. Though protection for descendants of persons who were involuntarily transferred during British colonial times can be inferred from the prohibition of discrimination and the operation of restitution and its exceptions, it is important that the rights of descendants of persons who migrated or were involuntarily displaced over hundreds of years ago are affirmed and protected. In South and South East Asia and East Africa the various population shifts effected through the transfer of populations under British colonial rule and the system of indentured labour would constitute one such category of persons.

## Groups Vulnerable to Population Transfer, and a Right to Settle?

In situations where conflict has resulted in the displacement of populations, but population transfer is not a consequence of a deliberate policy of ethnic cleansing, IDPs should have the right to settle permanently in the places where they have found refuge, if they so wish. Of course, formulation of the conditions for remaining or return would have to involve consultation with the local receiving populations.

The connection between relief and development needs policy review with regard to the situation of IDPs where the restrictions on settlement do not apply, as in the case of refugees. Humanitarian relief agencies should attempt to assist involuntarily displaced persons to rebuild sustainable livelihoods if the host community is agreeable. This would also prevent conflict from spreading due to the pressure of local resources. Currently the relief development divide means that people who have been displaced for over ten years in their own country are kept dependent on handouts in the presumption that they will and must return to their former homes, rather than being encouraged to settle in the new locale and build sustainable lives. There is need for IGOs such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to cooperate with relief agencies in situations of long-term armed conflict where displacement has been long-term.

## Recommendations

- (1) Involuntary population transfers often occur in the grey area between civil and political rights and economic and social rights. This is clearly the case with development displacees. The relationship between the fulfillment of economic, social and cultural rights and population transfer should be further analyzed in order that strategies might be devised to **prevent** population transfer which might cause great social suffering and lead to conflict. Development projects should not be ethnicity- blind. On the other hand, clearly, violations of political and civil rights are also key causatives of forced population transfers. A preventive plan of action as well as an early warning system that integrates economic, social and cultural issues with a human rights focus is necessary.
- (2) Humanitarian law is inadequate to redress the issues raised by long-term internal displacement as a result of armed conflict. A rule similar to that of non-refoulement is necessary for IDPs fleeing violence so that they may not be sent back to conflict areas by states, local authorities or other armed groups. All law framed for the protection of IDPs should also apply to non-state actors involved in armed conflict and common article 3 might be broadened.
- (3) The South Asia Protocol highlighted specific concerns regarding the role and capacity of the UNHCR in responding to the needs of IDPs given the nature of its mandate. Either the UNHCR's mandate should be officially extended to that of internally displaced persons or another agency should deal with the matter. The UNHCR would then be less vulnerable to being used by the State.
- (4) Migrant labor and the fact that the integration of markets has given rise to illegal cross-border trade in persons means that there is a growing need for a charter for the rights of migrants and their descendants to be devised.

- (5) An independent trust fund should be set up to ensure that restitution is fair and free of corruption, since bargains between refugee sending and receiving states or other agencies, such as in the Bhopal settlement, have rarely accommodated the wishes of the populations who have been displaced.
- (6) Compensation when made in the name of a family must ensure that women receive what is due to them.
- (7) Given that economic and political conditions vary in different parts of the world, while regions have common patterns of population transfer, a working group for regional standard-setting for protection, relief, rehabilitation and recompense of refugees, IDPs and other involuntarily displaced populations is recommended. The regional mechanism could facilitate cooperation among governments on this matter and could facilitate the search for citizenship of Bihari Muslims in Dhaka, Bangladeshis in India, Indian Tamils in Sri Lankans, Nepali-speaking Bhutanese who have been expelled from Bhutan and the ethnic groups who are being purged by the State Law and Order Commission (SLORC) in Burma.

## Subha and Yasa (American Style)

### Regi Siriwardena

*Yasa (Yasalalaka Tissa) was a first-century king of Sri Lanka, at whose court there was a gatekeeper, Subha, who resembled him closely. The king enjoyed playing practical jokes on his ministers by changing clothes and places with the gatekeeper. One day, according to the legend, when the king was chuckling over the spectacle of the courtiers paying obeisance to the disguised gatekeeper, the latter, from the throne, ordered Yasa seized and executed immediately for his insolence in laughing in the royal presence.*

### 1

None of this would have happened if President Ryan O'Malley hadn't included the Sri Lankan Ambassador among the guests to be invited to a White House dinner shortly before he left on his South Asian tour. During the presidential election campaign of 2004 O'Malley had made great play with the idea that 'Amerasia', as he called it, would be the centre of global development in the new millennium, and after his assumption of office, he had already made two whirlwind tours of East Asia and South-East Asia. Now it was South Asia's turn to be the object of the President's courtship, and the region should feel especially favoured because this was also the year when the President would be seeking party nomination for a second term.

Actually, Sri Lanka wasn't on the President's itinerary: he was stopping over only in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. But the President thought it would be a nice gesture to invite the Ambassadors

of all seven SAARC countries, so he could make them feel that even the countries that wouldn't be fortunate enough to receive him on their soil were still partakers of his friendly interest and concern.

So it was that Ambassador Sunil Pathirana found himself sitting between two ambassadorial wives at the dinner. Throughout the first part of the evening, indeed, he found it much more agreeable to chat to his neighbour on his right, a charming Bengali woman (surely a good twenty years younger than her husband) than to participate in or even listen to the high-level political conversation that was going on at the head of the table. The President was testing his guests' views on a question that was troubling American opinion — the possibility of an upsurge of militant Islamic fundamentalism in the successor states to the Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union. This had led to a rather warm argument between the Pakistani Ambassador, who thought the danger greatly exaggerated by the American media, and the Indian Ambassador, who thought it very real indeed. Such snatches of the argument as drifted past Ambassador Pathirana's ears he found confusing rather than enlightening (who the hell were the Kara-Kalpaks?). The Ambassador wasn't particularly well-informed: he was a political appointee who owed his job to the massive contribution he had made to the governing party on the eve of the last elections; and his wife had lobbied and cajoled and wheedled several Ministers to make sure he would get the Washington embassy because their daughter had recently been admitted to an east-coast campus. In any case, it was much pleasanter to watch Mrs. Das flutter her brilliant eyes as she described the trials of running house in Moscow (her husband's last posting) than to pay attention to the debate whether the Iranians or the Turks or the Afghans were likely to gain most influence in Central Asia. Fortunately, the Ambassador's left-hand neighbour, a stout, middle-aged woman, with an expression rather like that of a melancholy basset hound, showed little inclination to demand conversation from Ambassador Pathirana, and he had been able to get by with tossing an occasional polite triviality in her direction. But when President O'Malley, evidently feeling that the argument between the Indian and the Pakistani had lasted too long, deflected the conversation in another direction, Ambassador Pathirana found his attention riveted.

'Policy-making would be much simpler,' the President remarked in his markedly mid-Western accent, 'if only we had reliable ways of looking into the future. Did any of you read the story in this morning's *Washington Post* about the guy who has become a billionaire by making killing after killing on the stock market?'

'Yes,' said the Nepali Ambassador. 'He had visions from time to time which told him what shares to buy.'

'That's it,' said the President. 'Now if only I could be sure he could see the shape of things to come in international politics as well, I would make him my National Security Adviser.'

'Excuse me, Mr. President,' said Ambassador Pathirana. 'To materialistic Americans that story may seem fantastic. But we Sri Lankans wouldn't find anything unusual in it.'

'Why so?' asked the President.

'Because there are people in my country who make a living out of foreseeing the future. They light an oil lamp in front of a saucer stood upright, with a black patch smeared on it. When you ask them a question about the future, they stare at the black patch, and then they see a picture, which tells them the answer.'

'But does it work?' asked the President.

'Of course, many of them are just charlatans. But there are a few, very few — probably not more than five in the whole country — who have the real gift. But I put my real trust in an old man to whom I have gone for many years. He doesn't use the flame and the black patch; you just have to take him a sheaf of betel.'

'Beetle?' asked the President, puzzled.

'It's a leaf that people chew in our country.'

'What we call *pan*,' said the Indian Ambassador.

'Ah, *pan*,' said the President. 'I've read about that.'

'So when you give my old man the sheaf of betel leaves, he takes one leaf from it and keeps staring into it. Then the pictures appear in it and he finds the answer to your question. Sometimes you don't even have to ask him a question because he sees both question and answer.'

'Why the leaf?' the President asked.

'The old man never explains that,' the Ambassador said. 'But it's my belief that the touching of the leaf by the client and him in

turn sets up a communicating chain of psychic energy. That's what I think starts the whole process going.'

And Ambassador Pathirana proceeded to tell marvellous stories about the old man's powers. From the day he predicted when Mr. Pathirana would recover a dog he had lost ('Don't look for him, it'll be useless, but on the 22nd of March about five o'clock, take your usual evening walk, and the dog will come rushing into your arms') to the day he had foreseen the ambassadorial appointment.

'How did he see that as a picture?' asked the President. 'Were you presenting your credentials to me?'

'No, he wouldn't have understood that if he saw it,' responded the Ambassador. 'You must realise, Mr. President, he's a simple man who has lived all his life in his village, and knows very little about the outside world. But he saw the White House, he described it in great detail, so I understood what it was, and he saw me arriving there in a car and being received ceremoniously. I put two and two together, and I was right.'

The conversation was diverted at this point by an interruption from the Indian Ambassador, who wanted to tell the President about *vakyams*. These were collections of palm leaves on which sages thousands of years ago had written the horoscopes of people for ages to come. There were people in Madras who had collections of them, and if you consulted them, they could predict your life-events for you.

Although the President listened politely, the *vakyams* didn't interest him as much as the old man with the leaf of betel. Sages writing down horoscopes thousands of years ago seemed just so much oriental mumbo-jumbo. But the other story appealed to him because it meshed with one interest he had pursued in his youth. He had been convinced of the reality of ESP, had attended some lectures given by J.B. Rhine on his experiments with it, and, if he hadn't been drawn into a political career, he might even have taken to experimenting with it himself. But now...

Emily, the First Lady, had noticed for some time that her husband had become unusually moody and irritable. However, on the night of the dinner party, after the guests had left, he seemed in buoyant spirits. Emily was grateful for this relief, but couldn't find any explanation for his change of mood.

The fact is that two things had been preying on the President's mind. One was that, a few months earlier, he had been told that a sect of Afghan fundamentalists had passed a death sentence on him, declaring him an 'emissary of Satan'. Unlike Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa* on Salman Rushdie, this judgment hadn't been made public, but American intelligence claimed to have discovered it, and the President had been duly informed. The President's security staff, who had been told of the danger, had raised the question whether it was prudent for him in these circumstances to expose himself to the hazards of a South Asian tour. The President had decided he wouldn't be deterred, but he was, understandably, troubled, though he hadn't confided even to his wife the reasons for his anxiety.

The other cause of the President's disturbed state of mind, however, could have been guessed by any knowledgeable political commentator. At the forthcoming presidential election later that year, his opponent was likely to be the personable and popular Steve Crawford. He would be a formidable contender. An analyst of American elections once said that the most important asset for a presidential candidate was a dazzling set of teeth to smile with, and Crawford had one that would have done credit to a toothpaste ad.

For several months now, the President, who normally considered himself a rational man, had found himself giving way to small superstitions, making little propitiating gestures to whatever unknown devils might harbour malicious designs against him. He strove to correct this weakness in himself, but his irrational doubts and fears were often too strong for him. Now, after the dinner party, he was seized by a superstitious hope that was probably a reaction to and an escape from his superstitious anxieties. Hadn't it been a stroke of luck that he had included the Ambassador for Sri Lanka among his guests that night? And hadn't it been another piece of good fortune

that he had directed the conversation at one point to the subject of foreseeing the future? He had done this, of course, only for the purpose of closing the argument between the Indian and Pakistani diplomats, but the outcome had been the unexpected story told by the Sri Lankan Ambassador. In his beleaguered emotional state the President couldn't help supposing that this was the intervention of a benevolent destiny.

The morning after the dinner party Ambassador Pathirana was surprised to receive a call from the White House, and still more astonished to be connected directly to the President himself. Would it be at all possible for the Ambassador to call on him at the White House that day? It was a matter of some urgency, and, the President added, of the utmost discretion. The Ambassador, of course, was happy to oblige.

Later that morning he arrived at the White House, and was shown immediately into the Oval Office. After a few polite formalities, the President wasted no time in getting down to business.

'Your story last night about your old man has interested me greatly, Mr. Ambassador,' he said. 'As it happens, I have had for many years an interest in such psychic phenomena — what our scientists call ESP, parapsychology, and so on. Do you think it at all possible that I could test your old man's powers myself?'

'How, Mr. President?'

'By flying him out to Washington.'

The Ambassador seemed taken aback by this suggestion. He pondered his response silently for some moments.

'I'm sorry, Mr. President, but I'm afraid that's quite out of the question. In his entire life of sixty-five years Punchirala (that's how he's known) has left his village only once. It was when he was a young man in his early 'twenties, and he made a trip to Colombo to see what was called "the pond that sounds ho."'

'The pond that sounds ho? What's that?'

'That used to be the old name for the sea among peasants who had never seen it. There are very few of them left, but Punchirala is one of them. For the first and last time in his life he travelled to Colombo out of curiosity to see the sea. But as his bus entered the city, the crowds and the noise and the congestion and the dirt horrified him so much that he got off the bus and took the next one back.'

‘And he never saw the sea?’

‘No, he didn’t, Mr. President. And in more than forty years since then, he has never left his village.’

‘But couldn’t he be persuaded, Mr. Ambassador? Offered a very large fee, perhaps?’

‘Punchirala is an obstinate man, Mr. President. If he doesn’t want to leave his village, he won’t do it, even at the request of the President of the United States or the Queen of England. And money won’t tempt him. But those aren’t the only reasons why it won’t be possible to bring him to Washington.’

‘What then, Mr. Ambassador?’

‘Punchirala is deeply convinced that his powers are bound up with his presence in the village and the house in which he lives. He believes that his powers come to him from his ancestors, whose influence is passed on through those places. Even if you were to kidnap him and bring him to Washington, he would refuse to operate here.’

The President was sunk in thought for some time.

‘Then there’s only one alternative, Mr. Ambassador,’ he said at last. ‘Please transmit a message at once to the government of Sri Lanka, asking whether I can stop over there a few days — two, or three, perhaps — during my South Asian tour. Then, when we are there, I will visit this old man of yours myself.’

‘Yes, Mr. President. But have you considered the problems? Think of it. You — if I may say so, the most powerful man in the world — visiting an unknown fortune-teller — that’s what the media will call him — in a Sri Lankan village! Just think of the possible consequences to your image.’

‘I think I have a way of getting round that problem,’ the President said.

### 3

Ryan O’Malley was still a Senator when he discovered John Henderson. He had gone to his hometown, Kansas City, which he had rarely visited since he left it as a young man, for a political meeting; and after it he took one of the city’s big businessmen to

dinner at a fashionable restaurant. He was so absorbed in his discussion with his guest — it turned on the merits of the new tax reductions — that he didn’t even glance at the face of the waiter who was serving them until the end of the meal. It was only then, as he reached into his wallet for an appropriate tip, that he looked up at the waiter’s face, and felt something like an electric shock course through him. O’Malley might have been looking into a mirror: the waiter had the same hawklike features, bushy eyebrows, blue eyes and curly fair hair as himself. O’Malley’s guest had been aware of the resemblance right through the meal, but he had tactfully refrained from referring to it. The uncanny similarity between the successful politician and the waiter at Old Times was in fact well known to the regular patrons of the restaurant, just as it was a subject on which John Henderson’s fellow-waiters often chaffed him. Nor, as far as they were concerned, was there any great mystery about this seemingly improbable resemblance. Kansas City gossip said O’Malley, Sr., who had been a wealthy lawyer, had in his youth sown quite a few wild oats, and it was likely John Henderson was among the crop. He even had a powerful baritone voice like the younger O’Malley’s, but his accent, though also mid-Western, hadn’t the cultivated tones of his half-brother (if that’s what he was).

As he rose to leave the dinner-table, O’Malley had a momentary conversation in an undertone with the waiter. Having asked his name, O’Malley said:

‘I’m at the Brownstone, Room 224. If you’ll see me tomorrow morning at ten, it may be useful to you. The name is O’Malley.’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Henderson, who knew very well who the other was.

When Henderson called the next morning at O’Malley’s hotel room, the latter put to him a proposition. It was possible, he said, that in two years’ time he might be occupying ‘a more powerful political position than at present’. (Henderson didn’t need an elaboration of that hint: O’Malley’s name was already in the news as the favoured contender for his party’s nomination for the presidency.) If he did obtain the office he expected, O’Malley went on, he could make use of Henderson in a capacity pertaining to his security, and Henderson would find it very much worth his while. ‘I mean, of course,

financially.' O'Malley paused, and added: 'Would you like to hear more?'

'Yes, sir,' Henderson said.

The outcome of the interview was that Henderson came away with an informal contract that O'Malley wrote on a sheet of hotel notepaper, but, he assured the other, he would formalise it as soon as he got back to Washington. Henderson walked out into the street with the contract in his pocket and a mix of contending emotions raging in his heart.

John Henderson had grown up from childhood with the knowledge that he was illegitimate although he had been given the surname of his mother's legal husband. His mother had worked as a part-time cleaning woman in the O'Malley household. With a face whose curves and planes looked as if they had been carefully moulded and a complexion of the colour of pale honey, she had an air of refinement that was strangely discrepant with her menial position. It was because her beauty seemed to cross the class barriers that Ryan O'Malley's father, then a young lawyer, became enamoured of it. Marjorie Henderson was already married: her husband was an engineman on the railroad, and his frequent absences from home facilitated the growth of the affair. But soon after Marjorie had her baby, her husband became suspicious, had a violent quarrel with her and deserted her. O'Malley maintained her and the child for a few years, then tired of her as her beauty was ravaged by years of poverty and hard work in a series of squalid apartments in the slummier quarters of the city. He finally told her he couldn't keep up the relationship because it would endanger his own marriage: he settled a not too generous sum of money on her and said goodbye. The money ran out in five years, and Marjorie had to survive and bring up her son by her work. John Henderson left school at fourteen and, after some years of odd jobs, went to work as a dish-washer in the same restaurant where he had later risen to be a waiter.

Until the meeting with Ryan O'Malley in his hotel room, Henderson had hated him with a kind of disembodied hatred, merely as the legitimate son who had had it good all those past years when he and his mother had endured privations and hardships. Henderson also knew that O'Malley, wealthy enough in his own right from what

he had inherited from his father, had made a socially advantageous marriage: Emily was the heiress to the Peabody millions. But Henderson left the Brownstone that morning with more immediately felt reasons for disliking O'Malley. 'What a stuffy, arrogant bastard!' he said to himself. O'Malley had made no allusion to the link between them, nor inquired about his mother, although the offer he was making to Henderson turned upon the resemblance deriving from their common paternity. And yet, Henderson couldn't have turned down the proposal because what O'Malley was offering him straightaway was more than he could ever hope to earn, and there was the prospect of its being greatly increased if O'Malley's political ambitions were fulfilled. At least, Henderson thought bitterly, with part of his income he would be able to give his mother, who lingered on in her seventies, some comfort and care in her last years... No matter that the price he would be paying would be to risk his own life on behalf of that glib stuffed shirt who had said to him, shaking hands at parting: 'I hope you realise that in taking this job, you'll not only be benefiting yourself: you'll be serving your country.'

Over the next few months O'Malley arranged for Henderson to leave Kansas City and move to New York. He also decided that Henderson should take the new name of Peter Warren, and should acquire a moustache and beard, not real ones but fakes that he was always to wear in public. In short, a whole new identity and biography were created for him that were meant to obliterate, as far as possible, any links with the John Henderson who had been born in Kansas City. The newly born Peter Warren also had to take lessons from a teacher of speech, who taught him to speak not in his working-class manner but with the accent and idiom of an educated mid-Westerner.

By the time Ryan O'Malley received the party nomination for the presidential election, he had everything ready for the role Henderson was to play. When O'Malley won the election and moved into the White House, Henderson was enrolled on the staff (of course, under the name of Peter Warren), nominally as a special intelligence agent with direct access to the President, but in reality as a double to be used whenever the President thought it desirable. To begin with, the two of them did a try-out once or twice. Henderson would enter the White House with his beard and moustache on, take them off in



secrecy inside and change his clothes, adjust his hairstyle, give a few touches to his face, and then leave for an engagement where he was to impersonate the President. Meanwhile the President put on a matching beard and moustache and moved into the special office that had been assigned to Henderson. Of course, some people had to be let into the secret: two top men of the President's security personnel, as well as the First Lady, because Henderson would sometimes have to impersonate her husband in her company.

Emily was at first rather taken aback when her husband told her of the plan.

'Your illegitimate half-brother!' she said. 'Isn't that a bit much to ask of him?'

'No,' the President said. 'Why shouldn't I use the gift God has sent me? Other guys in power have to look high and low to find a suitable double. Thanks to Dad's peccadilloes and the O'Malley genes, I have one ready made.'

The results of the first experiments were encouraging: Henderson even succeeded in fooling some habitués of the President. O'Malley had conceived of the impersonation as something to use occasionally, or to keep in reserve for a real necessity. That necessity became a reality once the death-threat had been reported. The President now fell back on it whenever he thought a public appearance might carry a greater risk than usual, and he congratulated himself on his foresight in recruiting his double. When the South Asian tour was planned, the President had intended to take Henderson along anyway. But the plan to meet and consult Punchirala made his presence on the tour absolutely vital.

#### 4

Emily burst into a peal of laughter, so unusual on the presidential plane that the steward, approaching with a trolley of drinks, stopped for a moment, astonished.

'Oh Ryan, you're a scream!' Emily exclaimed. 'I'm sure you've missed your real vocation, you could have made a fortune on Broadway.'

But it wasn't Ryan O'Malley she was addressing, but Henderson, who had just mimicked the self-important tones and vacuous rhetoric of a Senator who had delivered the welcoming address at a commemoration ceremony where Henderson had stood in for the President. Emily had been carefully instructed before the impersonations began that in company she should address Henderson as 'Ryan', or even by such endearments as 'dear' or 'darling'. She had dutifully learned her lesson and followed it. But now, she reflected, (while the steward was pouring out the drinks), she had an uneasy feeling when she called him 'Ryan' that not only he but she was living a double life. It wasn't just that the physical resemblance between the two men was so close as to make illusion and reality confusingly indistinguishable to the sight: Henderson's charm, gallantry and, most of all, his sense of fun, were what she would have hoped for in her youth from a husband. But any traces of these qualities in O'Malley had long been submerged by his public life. Emily had married young, and was still in her forties. But she had resigned herself to accept the seemingly inevitable renunciation of the poetry of life, when, unexpectedly, contact with Henderson shook her into the realisation that she retained youthful desires and feelings that found little fulfilment in her role as First Lady. The moments of companionship with Henderson in the course of the official engagements were refreshing oases in the desert of her routine-bound existence, but they were now also disturbing. The knowledge of Henderson's illegitimate birth, and some hints he had let fall about his early struggles in life, engaged her feelings towards him all the more strongly. Whenever she called him 'Ryan', Emily felt that she was inwardly committing an act of infidelity; and although she had lightly addressed him as 'darling' in the early days of their assignments, she couldn't now bring herself to say the word: it would have been too much like mental adultery.

Henderson wasn't unaware that Emily had grown self-conscious and tense in his presence, and he guessed correctly at the cause of her uneasiness. Emily had saved enough of her natural good looks, and even more of her graces of personality, to make her an attractive woman, and nothing would have given Henderson greater pleasure than to enjoy at the same time the flattering position of the

lover of a First Lady and the sweet revenge of cuckolding the man he hated. But when he considered these temptations, they seemed to open on uncharted and possibly perilous waters, before which he still hesitated. He contented himself for the time being by light-hearted flirtation with Emily, punctuated by occasional caresses, which could always be justified, if necessary, as giving credibility to his role; and he was pleased that at such times she seemed overcome by a troubled joy.

But one morning, only a week before the Asian tour was due to begin, Henderson received a message that his mother had suddenly died of a heart attack, and he flew to his hometown for the funeral. Marjorie Henderson had survived into her eightieth year, and towards the end her mind had begun to wander. She didn't know her son was working for the President (Henderson was under orders not to tell her, and his visits to her were infrequent, also under official instructions). But strangely, on the last occasion he saw her before her death, she had spoken long and resentfully of the wrong O'Malley had done her. 'You must make him pay for it,' she said. 'Promise me, son, you will make him pay.' Henderson promised, though he knew the elder O'Malley had long been laid in his grave.

At the funeral, Henderson was joined only by one other mourner — the old lady in whose house Marjorie had lodged. As the coffin glided down into the cremating chamber, Henderson consoled himself that though there was no way of keeping the promise his mother had extracted from him six months before her death, he had at least kept the promise he had made to himself when O'Malley engaged him: he had made her last years somewhat more tolerable than her life had been for a long time.

He had thanked the old lady who came to the funeral and seen her leave; he had said he would wait to collect the ashes, so he decided to take a stroll along the cemetery paths. But as he turned to go, a man in a long grey overcoat, a derby hat and a pair of rimless glasses stopped him by holding out his hand. 'Mr. John Henderson?' he said.

Henderson took the outstretched hand. As was customary on his infrequent visits to Kansas City, he wasn't wearing his disguise, resuming his Henderson persona, and he assumed the other was an

old acquaintance, of himself or of his mother, who had come to condole with him.

'Or should I call you Peter Warren?' the other said.

Henderson looked at him, startled.

'Don't worry,' the man in the derby said, smiling as if to reassure him. 'Your secret is safe with me. But shall we sit down for a moment,' and he motioned Henderson to a near-by bench, 'so that we can talk more freely?'

Henderson obeyed him mechanically. If the man had penetrated his alias, by whatever means, there was, he thought, nothing to be gained by a denial. It was better to find out what he was after.

'You can call me Stephen,' the man went on after they had sat down. 'I'm a journalist. Here's my card.' He had reached into his pocket and brought out a card which he handed to Henderson. The card said 'Pacific-Asian News Services', with an address in San Francisco, and below, 'Stephen Dreyer, Roving Reporter'.

'How did you know my name?' Henderson asked him.

'Which one?' Stephen replied. 'But I won't embarrass you by asking you questions of that sort. It's our business — that of us investigative journalists — to know things. So let me ask you something much more interesting in that line. What's so hot about Sri Lanka?'

'I'm told it's in the tropics,' Henderson said.

Stephen condescended to give a small chuckle. 'Seriously though. Why does the President summon the Sri Lankan Ambassador to the White House for a private interview? And why does he then change his plans for his South Asian trip to include that insignificant island?'

'Search me,' Henderson said. 'I'm not in on the making of U.S. foreign policy.'

'I didn't imagine you were. I know your talents lie elsewhere. But I thought you might have picked up some gossip about it in the corridors of the White House.'

'I haven't,' Henderson said. 'But supposing I had, is there any reason why I should tell you?'

'Ah!' Stephen smiled, and paused to take a long breath. 'Shall I say, perhaps because we have some interests in common?'

'I don't understand you. What interests?'

'Let's approach the question this way. Why have I disclosed to you so openly that I've discovered the secret of your double identity?'

'Okay. Why?'

'One would suppose that your duty, as a special intelligence agent (Stephen gave a mocking inflection to that phrase and grinned), would be to inform the White House immediately that — well, to use the language of spy stories — that your cover had been blown. But I know you won't do that, Mr. Warren.'

'And why not?'

'Think about it. If the White House learns that your double identity is known, that would be — (Stephen made an expressive gesture, opening out his hand and spreading his fingers) — *finis*. The end of your career.'

Henderson was silent.

'But I won't insult you,' Stephen continued, 'by assuming that your interests are purely, shall we say, materialistic. Of course, I don't mean to question your loyalty to the government of the United States. But you have no great reason for loving the O'Malley family, do you, Mr. Henderson?' And he gestured again, but this time in the direction of the crematorium's chimney from which wisps of grey smoke were curling into the air.

Henderson was still silent. Stephen rose.

'It's possible we may meet again, Mr. Warren. Because I'll be covering the President's South Asian tour for Pacific-Asian. It was nice meeting you. Bye for now.'

Henderson continued to sit on the bench, watching Stephen's figure receding along the path. His mind was shaken by questions to which there were no clear answers. Stephen had surmised rightly that he wouldn't want to report this encounter and incur the almost certain loss of his job. But what was Stephen really after? Was he only a smart investigative reporter looking for a scoop? Or was there a hint of something bigger when he suggested that Henderson had no reason to love the O'Malley family? Had Stephen been suggesting there was some danger to the President from which Henderson wouldn't want to protect him because of his personal animus against

the O'Malleys? Henderson had never been told by White House security, or by the President himself, of any specific menace against which his function as double was to serve as a shield. But when he took the job on, he had assumed that a president's life would always be endangered, and that he was required in some measure to deflect that danger. What if the threat that up to now had seemed to him general and hypothetical were to take on a more immediate and concrete form? Suddenly into Henderson's mind there flashed the image of a possible future in which O'Malley was absent and he was free to court and to win Emily. It would be pleasant if it could be said that contemplating that event, Henderson had only Emily's looks, attractions and charms in view. But honesty requires the admission that the thought of the Peabody millions wasn't entirely out of the picture.

## 5

The government of Sri Lanka had been delighted to know President O'Malley wanted to include the island in his itinerary, and had lost no time in agreeing to and in making arrangements for the visit. Sri Lanka was now to be the first stop on the tour, for good reasons that the President had thought of. A week before his arrival, Ambassador Pathirana arrived in Colombo to co-ordinate arrangements with the officials at home. But he also paid a flying visit to the remote Kandyan village in which Punchirala lived. All he told the old man was that 'an important American official' who would be accompanying the President wanted to consult him. It was important that his visit be kept secret, so the visitor would arrive by night, when no other clients of Punchirala would be on the premises. Punchirala readily agreed to preserve complete confidentiality.

It had been arranged between the President and the Ambassador that the visit to Punchirala should take place on the second day in Sri Lanka, when the President and his party would be in Kandy. The President had specially requested that the evening of that second day be kept free of official engagements. The morning was taken up by a drive round the city, and visits to the Dalada Maligawa, the Peradeniya University and the Botanical Gardens, where the President planted a tree.

On the morning of that second day in Kandy, Henderson was on his own. He had been told his services wouldn't be required till the evening of that day, when he had to be at the official residence known as the King's Pavilion, where the President and First Lady were. In the morning, however, he was free to take in the sights of the city. Henderson had just emerged from the hotel where he was accommodated and was thinking of taking a stroll along the lakeside, when his attention was held by a figure standing on the other side of the street and apparently contemplating the lake. A tall figure in a derby hat — yes, and glasses. Henderson crossed the street, and Stephen turned and hailed him, evidently having no difficulty in recognising him, although he was in his Warren disguise, with beard and moustache.

'What are you doing here?' Henderson asked.

'Just admiring the view,' Stephen answered.

'But if you're covering the President's tour, why aren't you where he is, with the other journalists?'

'And listening to all that crap about "strengthening the ties of friendship between our two countries" and "the democratic traditions which our two peoples are proud to share"? No, thank you. I'm an investigative journalist, I told you. Now this is what I'm really interested in.' Stephen put his hand in his pocket and brought out a Sri Lankan government booklet that had been distributed to all the journalists reporting the tour — a program of events for the President's stay in Sri Lanka. He held it out to Henderson and put his forefinger on the second day's schedule. 'See? Nothing arranged for this afternoon or evening. Why?'

'I have no idea,' Henderson said. 'Perhaps he was tired and wanted a break.'

'On the second day of his visit to the first of four countries? Tell me another.'

'Anyway, it's useless pumping me,' Henderson said. 'I know nothing about the President's program, beyond what that booklet says.'

'So I should suppose. But are you going to be free this evening? Is there anything laid on for you?'

Henderson thought Stephen wanted to invite him to a drink or to dinner, probably to sound him for more information. 'Sorry,' he said. 'I have to be at the King's Pavilion all evening.'

Stephen stared at him, and Henderson felt he almost heard something click into place behind the dome of Stephen's forehead.

'Oh, is that so?' Stephen said slowly. 'Thank you very much. I think I shall take a walk. Goodbye.'

He turned and hurried off down the street, leaving Henderson wondering whether what he had disclosed had been of any importance.

## 6

Twilight was becoming palpable when Henderson arrived at the King's Pavilion, and told the American security officer at the entrance he had an appointment with the President. While waiting on the veranda he felt depressed by the colonial architecture of the King's Pavilion, the heavy furniture, the uniformed servants: although all that was different from the style and atmosphere of the White House, in some ways he was reminded of it. Kandy itself depressed him. He remembered what he had read in the tourist brochure, that it had been 'the seat of the old Sinhala kings'. He didn't know how long ago that was, but it seemed to him there had always been a world of power and wealth on which people like him had been dependent, and he felt a hunger for that state he had never known any time in his life: of being his own master.

He was summoned; he went in and was directed towards an inner room. O'Malley was waiting for him, and after a cursory greeting, gave him his orders for the evening.

'You will take off your disguise, change into casual clothes — they are here ready for you — and act the President, spending a quiet evening with Mrs. O'Malley. She, of course, knows, but nobody else does. Meanwhile, I shall be going out, impersonating you.'

Henderson was bewildered by this news. Whenever in the past he had had to put on his act in the company of Emily, it had always been to keep a public engagement, and then it had been the President who had stayed under cover in the White House. Now it was the latter who was going out in disguise — but where? It was impossible

for him to ask, but Stephen's question recurred to him: *What's so hot about Sri Lanka?* Could there be some meeting that was so hush-hush that O'Malley had to arrive in disguise? His thoughts fumbled with possibilities: Kandy as the venue for secret negotiations... treaties... military pacts... but with whom? Henderson just didn't know enough about international affairs even to guess. But his heart suddenly gave a leap: he would be spending an evening alone with Emily... And there was the possibility that his conversation with Stephen might dramatically change things...

He had been taking off his moustache and beard while his mind had been engaged with these questions, and he turned to O'Malley who was before a mirror, affixing a similar pair on his face.

'How long will you be away, sir?'

'Two hours, two and a half, perhaps.'

Soon after they had both changed their appearances, there was a call from the entrance to say that Ambassador Pathirana had called for Mr. Peter Warren. It was the President who emerged, and was escorted by the Ambassador to his waiting car. The President had brought with him Peter Warren's passport and identification as a member of the presidential staff, in case (as the Ambassador had warned him) they ran into security checks, which were especially tight because of the presidential visit. The President's security staff saw the bearded and moustached figure leaving the King's Pavilion; but none of them (even the one man there who knew of the existence of a double) had reason to suspect that was the President; why should he play tricks with his own security? Meanwhile Henderson was ensconced with the First Lady in the same inner room where O'Malley had received him.

Théré was a long silence after they had sat down on an ornately carved sofa. Emily was less ebullient than usual because she was embarrassed by her own feelings, while Henderson was hesitant about the strategy he should employ in the course of the evening. Finally he broke the silence by his opening gambit. 'We're alone together for the first time,' he remarked.

'Yes, Peter.'

'Do you know a jazz tune called *Alone Together*?'

As Emily shook her head, Henderson whistled the opening melody. 'There was a recording of it by Chet Baker that I loved when I was a boy, I used to play it over and over again till the tape wore out. *Alone Together*. What do you think that means, Emily?'

Emily pondered. 'Doesn't it mean two people being together, by themselves, away from everybody else?'

'Yes, I suppose that's what most people would say. But listen to the tune.' Henderson whistled it again. 'It's sad, right? That's why I used to think it meant two people together, maybe even two lovers, but each feeling alone. Together but alone. That's why I loved it. Because it seemed to say just what I felt.'

'Did you often feel lonesome as a boy, Peter?'

'Oh Emily, I wish you wouldn't call me Peter. I don't know whether you're aware of it or not, but that isn't my real name. I'm John Henderson. Peter Warren is part of my disguise. So call me John, please, Emily, at least when we're alone together.'

'But it'll be so complicated, Peter. Ryan and Peter and John — I'll get all mixed up. I'm mixed up enough already between the two of you — I sometimes have to stop and think: now is that Ryan or is it Peter?'

'I'll teach you how to tell us apart. I'm sure, after all these years you know the feel of your husband's hands. Now feel mine.'

He held out his right hand to Emily.

'Go on, feel it.'

Emily took the proffered hand, and began stroking it.

'See? Behind that hand is a lifetime of hard work. You don't get hands like that by being a lawyer, or a Senator, or even the President of the United States.'

'Or even the President's wife, I suppose.'

'That's true. Your hands are wonderfully soft, Emily.'

Emily withdrew her hands, and looked challengingly into his eyes.

'And do you resent that, too, John?'

'No, Emily. I like them that way. Because I love you. Do you resent *that*, Emily?'

'No, John.' Emily said that almost in a whisper. Then, like a swimmer preparing herself for a dive, she seemed to brace herself, and, to his surprise, burst into song:

*'Oh no John, no John, no John, no!'*

## 7

Meanwhile the Ambassador's car had driven out of Kandy, along the road to Anuradhapura. The Ambassador himself was driving, so that he and the President were the only people in the car. It was an unusual experience for the President, one that he hadn't known for several years, to be on a journey without a posse of security men. Night had fallen when they reached their destination, having turned from the main road on to the bumpy dirtroad that led to the village where Punchirala lived. Punchirala's house was modest, not distinguishable from other middle-size houses in the village. It was lit not by electricity (there was none in the village) but by one kerosene lamp on the veranda and another in Punchirala's consulting room; a few clay lamps, with wicks immersed in coconut oil, flickered feebly in the interior of the house. As the visitors stepped on to the veranda, Punchirala came out of his room and greeted them with folded hands. The President was struck by his appearance. He was short, and his bodily frame was shrunk, but in his piercing eyes there seemed to burn an inner fire.

Punchirala led the way into the consulting room, and with a gesture asked his visitors to seat themselves. The Ambassador, speaking in Sinhala, introduced the President as 'the important American official' he had mentioned. The President offered Punchirala the sheaf of betel leaves he had brought. Punchirala received it, placed it on the table, and lifted the top leaf with his fingers. As he took it into his hand, his expression changed. He stared in silence at the leaf for some time, then spoke:

'You are not just an important person. You are the biggest man, the *lokka*, of your country.'

When the Ambassador translated this, the President made no attempt to deny the old man's discovery, whether reached by shrewd guess or by special insight. The old man continued to peer at the leaf

with eyes whose normal faculties of sight must surely have been affected by age: did this, the President wondered, not extend to his other vision? After a long silence Punchirala spoke again.

'You have come here to ask me two questions.'

'Yes,' said the President after the Ambassador had translated.

'You want to know what will happen in the next election in your country. There is no need to worry: you will not lose that election.'

The President drew an audible sigh of relief when these words were translated.

'Thank you. I'm happy that I'll be able to serve my country again. And the other question? Do you see it in the same way, or shall I speak it?'

Punchirala responded immediately, as soon as the Ambassador had translated.

'Those enemies you fear are no threat to you.'

The President turned to Punchirala after the translation and spoke with feeling.

'I am deeply grateful to you for receiving me. Some day perhaps, after that election, I may come back, if it's possible, or I may send somebody else to meet you. But now, may I know: what is your professional fee?'

Punchirala made a dismissive gesture with his hand, saying at the same time in Sinhala:

'Nothing.'

When the President protested, the old man said gravely:

'It is a great honour to me to have been consulted by the leader of a country. To take money from you, in addition to that honour, would be unworthy.'

After the visitors had left, with much reiteration of gratitude, Punchirala stood on the veranda and watched the car being driven off, then walked into the inner room where his wife was laying the table for dinner.

'You know about that President from America who has come on a visit?'

'Yes,' said his wife.

'That was him.

The old lady looked up, startled.

'What did he want to know?'

'He wanted to know what would happen in the next election in his country. I told him not to worry: there was no question of his losing it. He was happy. How could I tell him he wouldn't lose it because he wouldn't live to contest it, that he wouldn't live out the rest of this night?'

'But why didn't you warn him?'

'You know my way, Menike. If a man asks me when he's going to die, I don't answer. The karmic pattern must work itself out. If a man has to die, he has to die. What would have been the use of telling him there were assassins waiting for him? If he escaped them, he would have died of an accident, or an illness, next week or next month.'

## 8

By now you probably have questions of your own. Okay, shoot...

*Well, Punchirala got away with a quibble on the President's first question, like so many other soothsayers and oracles, but surely he lied on the second?*

No, he didn't, as you will understand in a moment: have patience. Next question? Yes, that lady over there in the corner...

*Wasn't it hard luck on the Ambassador that he should have to die to fulfil the President's karmic pattern? If he did die, that is.*

Yes, madam, he did die, but his death must have been due to his own karma. Next question? Yes, you sir...

*After the President's death, did John Henderson take over, like Subha, and continue to impersonate the President?*

Are you crazy? What a legendary figure supposedly got away with in ancient Sri Lanka couldn't possibly be repeated in 21st century America... Oh, the title? I'm sorry to have misled you. Didn't I say 'American style'? What I meant was that, in one sense, John Henderson did step into Ryan O'Malley's shoes, or shall I say, into his pants.

John and Emily were in bed together when a call came through from the police that a man by the name of Peter Warren, with papers showing he belonged to the President's entourage, and the Sri Lankan Ambassador to the United States had both been shot on a road emerging from a village in the Kandyan backwoods. Enormous complications followed. The real identity of the dead American couldn't, of course, be kept secret. But Ryan O'Malley had confided in Emily that afternoon where he was going and why, and with quick ingenuity she thought up a story that had enough truth in it to stand up. Recalling the conversation at the diplomatic dinner party in Washington, she made out that her husband, as a former student of ESP, had been fascinated by the Sri Lankan Ambassador's story about the old man, and had decided to test his psychic powers. The switching of roles with Peter Warren was explained as a necessity in order to evade the security restrictions on the President's own movements. Peter Warren's role as a double had necessarily to be made public, and was confirmed by the two members of the presidential staff who were in the secret. What Emily left out of the story were the two urgent personal questions to which the President had wanted answers.

Punchirala was grilled by the police, but they could find no basis for suspecting complicity on his part in the murder. The story of an assassination conspiracy hatched by Afghan fundamentalists turned out to be a piece of misinformation. The assassins were actually an extreme Zionist group in the States angered by the President's new policy on Israel. They had been alerted to the possibility of some unusual development by the President's last-minute change of itinerary to include Sri Lanka and by the contacts between the President and the Sri Lankan Ambassador, of which they learned from their own intelligence network. (So, you see, Punchirala didn't lie in answering the President's second question.) John Henderson, though questioned during the investigation, said nothing about Stephen Dreyer, whose name never surfaced, so he was left guessing how deeply the latter was involved in the conspiracy. Nor did he ever disclose to Emily his possible share of complicity (witting? unwitting? — he didn't think about that too much) in her husband's death. But he was troubled by no pangs of conscience, even feeling



that in a strange way he had kept his last promise to his mother, helping to visit the sins of the father on the son.

Punchirala was surrounded by a blaze of international publicity as media people with cameras, tape recorders and notebooks, researchers into parapsychology and tourists descended on the village to interview the man who had excited the interest of an American President. He endured it for three days, then fled to the village temple, where he asked for ordination as a monk and refused to talk to any visitors thereafter.

After a decent interval of time for the widow's mourning, John Henderson, who had shed his beard and moustache, and resumed his old identity, was married to Emily O'Malley. It was a quiet wedding, kept secret until it was concluded, and to those journalists who tracked the couple down later, Emily said she had fallen in love with John because he had been so kind and supportive to her after the great tragedy. 'I wonder what it's like to have a second husband who's a replica of your first. I can imagine it's kind of consoling, but do you lose some possibilities that way?' asked the woman from *Newsweek*. 'Ah, but I have the best of both worlds,' said Emily. 'John looks exactly like Ryan, but he's a very different kind of person.'

Oh yes. Steve Crawford didn't win the presidential election. The Vice-President who took over from O'Malley had an even more dazzling set of teeth.

## A Letter in My Mind

Ameena Hussein-Uvais

I just posted a letter to you. It was two pages of scrawled writing on a slant. In some parts the script was extra large so that the pages would get filled quickly. Then towards the end I would remember something nice and try to make my writing as minute as possible so that I could get it all in.

While writing the letter my mind would wander. I would think about unhappy times past, present, future....always. And I would wake up with a start, a bit like a driver dozing on the highway and veer my mind with astonishing alacrity towards other things. Unimportant things, trivial things. Anything.

When you receive the letter and open it you will read about happy things. What I did. Whom I met. What I ate. Silly things. Careful things. That will not upset your mood or make you withdraw into a sullen silence. I will also say that I miss you. Constantly throughout the letter. But even that I will say gently, cautiously. So that you will read it just like another sentence and then it will pass without conveying the yawning emptiness that I feel within.

I put on a sweater, for it has got chilly now, and walk down the road to the village. I breathe in deeply and let the cold crisp evening air sear into my lungs and make me feel heady. I take brisk steps that march past insulated houses and look inquiringly in through the windows that paint pictures of tranquil domesticity - early dinner, watching TV, cosy chats. A broken leaf snaps and falls in slow motion, twisting and twirling in the still, chill air. It comes to rest together

with the other autumn leaves that lie delicately on the deep green of grass.

I enter the post office and paste picture stamps on the letter. Nice bright ones of flowers and famous people like Amelia Earhart. .95 cents, that's all it cost. A two - page letter filled with nonsense. A cheap way to ensure peace and harmony in my life - for now.

I walk home. Not as perky as before. It has got dark and colder and I huddle into my coat and fold my fists tight, burrowing into the satin - lined pockets. And then the thoughts come by. At first I have control and shove them aside violently. And hum a tune and try to walk faster. As if walking away from them. But they follow, these ghosts of mine. They know where I am going and sometimes they dance tantalizing ahead of me, disappearing round the corner only to greet me at the front door of my apartment.

You are such a wimp, they say scornfully. You know he doesn't care about you. You know he's out there enjoying himself. Enjoying being without you. Enjoying that you are a continent away.

Stop it. I cry. Get away from me. Positive thoughts, positive thoughts. Good thoughts, good thoughts. I gasp to myself. I sternly lecture myself.

Wake up and smell the coffee, they shriek. He doesn't need you. Remember that time when you were going to pieces and you even thought you were going mad. He promised to come. But did he? NO! He stayed behind with HER. He delayed his flight for her and came only when he was good and ready. He didn't care if you even killed yourself during that time. Nothing mattered to him. Only her and most certainly not you. And what about the time that he strung you along for months on end. Giving you hope and then you found out it was a lie. He had no intention of deciding between the two of you. And you lost out. Where are you now? Are you more secure? Do you know if he's true to you? Do you know if he loves you? NO, NO, NO and NO!

I cry. I know they are right. What's the matter with me? I wail. Why can't I take control of my life. Why can't I kick him to the kerb, in the words of my best friend. Why can't I find someone who will be only for me. Someone I don't have to share.

I crawl into bed in my clothes. I need a place to hide. I draw the covers over my head. But they invade my space and start the attack again.

Some independent person you are, they jeer. Look at you, you sorry excuse for a woman. Some feminist you are! Have you no backbone? Have you no self-respect? And I wail even louder because I know they are right. I'm despicable, I think to myself.

It is late at night and I sit at the bay window staring out at the pure white driven snow that is now covering the walkways. The streets are deserted and the scene before me is almost surreal. Fresh snow, I say to myself. Fresh start, I think to myself. A man turns the corner walking his dog. He is walking fast and his face is turned up towards the sky. He seems to be smiling and I, tucked within the safety of the dark room, smile at him. Then for no reason as he comes in front of my window he throws his hat into the air and gives a whoop of exhilaration and his dog gives a yelp of approval. I smile and suddenly everything is filled with symbolism.

It is almost two in the morning and the ring of the phone shakes me taut out of sleep. I am on instant alert for it could only be him at this time of night. I hear the phone ring once, twice, thrice. Then the answering machine picks up. He leaves a message. He is worried, almost suspicious. This is not like me. It is usually not me who is out at this time of night. I burrow down into the covers and give a little giggle. I fall asleep. I think I am smiling.

## Book Reviews

A. Sivanandan, *When Memory Dies*. London: Arcadia Books, 411 pp., 1997.

*When Memory Dies* is a novel about this country by a man who chose to leave it forty years ago. Perhaps 'chose' is the wrong word, for Sivanandan's decision to go into exile wasn't exactly voluntary. He belonged to the first generation of Sri Lankan Tamil émigrés who left after the ethnic riots of 1958. As the blurb on the back cover of his book reminds us, it was his ironic fate to go from the violence in Sri Lanka to the violence of Notting Hill, London. Both experiences fed into his later vocation as Director of the Institute of Race Relations in London, and editor of the journal *Race and Class*. Much of Sivanandan's activism and writing over the last four decades has been involved with the problems of black and brown immigrants and their descendants in Britain. Yet he has never lost his concern with, and, indeed, attachment to, the country of his origin. That is certainly attested by this first novel written in his late years — an engrossing, though flawed, novel which seems to be offered as a summing up of both a life's experience and the contemporary history of a country.

It's a long novel, telling the story of three generations of a middle class Jaffna Tamil family, though the scene of the action shifts between the peninsula, Colombo and other parts of the Sinhala-majority south to which the principal male characters migrate. One could describe the novel in terms of its three parts as the story of Sahadevan, the grandfather, of Rajan, his son, and of Vijay, his grandson. But it's a mark of the essentially political character of the novel that one could also identify the three parts by saying that Part One is set in the time of colonial rule in the 'twenties and the heyday of A.E. Goonesinha; that Part Two sees the rise of the revolutionary left and then its decline as it is submerged by ethnic mobilisations; and that Part Three brings us to the time of guerilla movements in Jaffna.

There's a problem raised by the method of narrative in the three parts of the novel that remained unresolved in my mind when I finished the book. It opens with a page in which Rajan, the son in the second generation, remembers a time in his childhood, in Kandy. The recollected moment is one of sadness, looking out on the rain beating against the walls of the post office building, because his friend, Sanji, who comes from an estate Tamil family, has had to leave school because he can't get a pair of shoes. This page is first-person narrative:

Other seasons I would come to know — spring and autumn and winter — and other countries where shoes abounded. But the things that crowded in on me that day in the rain, and in many rains after, and made me an exile for the better part of my life, were also the things that connected me to my country and made me want to tell its story.

The first-person voice becomes less prominent after the end of that page, as we go into the past, though there are still references in the first few pages to 'my grandfather' and 'my father'. But the rest of Part One is essentially the story of Rajan's father, Sahadevan, his boyhood in the village of Sandilipay, his being sent to St. Benedict's College in Colombo at the insistence of his headmaster, his life in Colombo, his experiences as a public servant, and above all, his contact with the sorking class movement led by Goonesinha. Part One ends dramatically with Goonesinha during the Bousteads tram strike announcing a settlement just after a worker has been shot — a scene which is clearly intended to mark his transition from militant to compromiser. All that — the bulk of Part One — is really third-person narrative, though viewed through the eyes of Sahadevan. But then, with Part Two we return to Rajan in the second generation, and his first-person voice takes up the narrative and sustains it to the end of Part Two. Then oddly, in terms of the form of the novel, we go back into third-person narrative for the story of Vijay in the concluding part. A kind of prologue in the first person, and then third person, first person, third person — that's the structure of the novel.

I may be wrong, but I can see no explanation for this structure except to suppose that the novelist originally conceived the novel as

the story of two and not three generations. In that case the novel would have been framed by the first-person narrative of Rajan, and ended soon after 1958 with the death of his wife (raped and murdered because, as his wife, she is taken to be a Tamil although she is in fact Sinhalese). Her violent death precipitates his going into exile, already foreshadowed in the opening page, as the passage I quoted from it will show. The novel in this hypothetical original conception may have ended with an epilogue, with Rajan as exile in England looking back on his past. It would then have had some parallels with the author's own life-experience, and this may explain the emotional resonances of the voice of the exile in the opening page. That opening, in the quality of its writing, is never quite equalled in the rest of the book. There are isolated moments of imaginative intensity later, but the greater part of the writing is flatter.

If my hypothesis is correct, then Part Three would have been an afterthought, perhaps written out of the desire to bring the novel more nearly abreast of contemporary events. Perhaps the author felt that after all the shattering events of the last decade and a half, a novel that was strongly political in its orientation would be incomplete if it stopped in the late 'fifties. But since my account is conjectural, let me make the point in another way. In the novel as it stands, there's no reason inherent in the narrative why Rajan alone should be privileged with a first-person voice, and all the more awkwardly when it's in the middle of the book. And it's a pity that Sivanandan didn't end the book with the first two parts because those are the best portions of the novel. That's not only because they come directly from a period and a social environment personally experienced, but also because Sivanandan's heart is in the easy friendships of another time between middle class Sinhalese and Tamils and in the beliefs and solidarities of the militant and revolutionary left, even though its shortcomings and failures and the disillusion it left behind are voiced through the person of the critical Doctor Lal. Sivanandan is recapturing the memory and imagination of the time when it was less rare than it would be today for a young Tamil government servant to find lodgings with the uncle and aunt of his Sinhala office friend. It was also a time when, as he brings out, radicals and Marxists stood shoulder to

shoulder across the ethnic barriers. In fact, in this aspect the novel can even be thought of as an effort to preserve the memory of that time from threatened oblivion — the fate hinted at by the title.

'When memory dies, a people die.' Uncle Para broke into his reverie, and Vijay had the eerie feeling that the old man was privy to his thoughts before he was. But, remembering his experiences of the past few days, he asked, 'What if we make up false memories?'

'That is worse,' replied the old man, 'that is murder.'

And perhaps, whatever the imperfections of the novel, Sivanandan has rendered a service to a new generation in reviving the memory of another time.

Before I come to the problems raised by Part Three, I want to pose a general question that often arises in this particular genre of the novel, straddling the frontiers between the fictional and the documentary. It must be remembered that Sivanandan hasn't written, like Rajiva Wijesinha among Sri Lankan novelists, a political novel that belongs to the form of fantastic or magical realism; his book is solidly in a tradition of straight social realism, and was even praised by one British reviewer for returning to that tradition. I don't think that even in this kind of novel we are entitled to demand the same accuracy or fidelity to factual truth that we would in a work of history or biography. I don't really know whether or not Goonesinha appeared together with the Colonial Secretary to announce a settlement in the tramway strike the moment after a police shooting, but even if he didn't, the scene seems to convey an imaginative truth that condenses in dramatic form an essentially real process. And when, in Part Two, Sivanandan makes the Prime Minister resign the day after some people are killed in the 1953 hartal, it would be pedantic to object that, in reality, Dudley Senanayake hesitated and dithered for some weeks.

In general, readers are more tolerant about departures from factuality, the further away the events are in time and place. Who, except historians, cares any longer about Shakespeare's or Tolstoy's manipulations of history? But when the subject-matter of a novel is drawn from contemporary political history that readers have lived

through, they are naturally more exacting in their demands for 'truth'. The aesthetic theorist may object that an imaginative writer should have the same freedom in dealing with the present as with the past, but the difference is a reality of the reader's response and can't be ignored.

When a novelist departs from historical fact, we are entitled to ask not 'Does he have the right to do so?' but 'What is the purpose of his deviations?' and 'Do they strengthen or weaken his historical picture?' It is in these terms that some of the liberties that Sivanandan takes in Part Three with the historical record are open to question. I think, in particular, of three sets of events in this part of the novel.

On pp. 358-360 the President announces simultaneously, and fights successively, a presidential election and a referendum to postpone parliamentary elections. Vijay and his political friends oppose him in both. The President is named, transparently, Dickie Perera, and is represented as a machiavellian and authoritarian figure. But how much less machiavellian he looks than the real figure of whom he is a shadow when, before he fights a presidential election, he indicates that he is going to follow it with a referendum! J.R. would have faced a much stiffer fight in the 1982 presidential election if he had given forewarning that there would be a referendum to follow: as it was, he sprang the referendum on the country only after his presidential office was secure.

Secondly, Vijay is arrested because of his activity during the referendum, and is detained in Welikade jail. During his incarceration there, he becomes a witness of the jail riot where Tamil political prisoners are massacred. It is evident that the author has arranged for Vijay's presence in Welikade so that the jail killings can be observed through his eyes. Later, after he has been set free, he describes to his friends, Sarath and Dhana, what he had witnessed, and they are astonished to learn that these were deliberate killings because they had believed that the prisoners died in an attempted break-out. Now these friends are oppositional political activists. Can we believe that they would have been so naive? Actually, in 1983, even people who approved of the killing of those who were believed to be 'terrorists' didn't doubt that they had been killed in the course of the general

attack on Tamils in Colombo; nobody thought it was the result of a failed escape. Once again, Sivanandan has deviated from history in such a way that his own political meaning is weakened.

Thirdly, the event of the thirteen soldiers killed in Jaffna. I quote the relevant passage of dialogue from the novel:

'What's happened in Colombo then, Mother Know-all?' inquired Vijay.

'I don't quite know. But somebody high-up put out the rumour that Buddhist priests had been killed in Jaffna, and Sinhalese mobs went on the rampage, killing Tamils.'

'And was it true, the story about the priests?'

'Oh no. It turns out they were soldiers, young recruits, volunteers probably, some thirteen of them, killed in a guerilla ambush. But the government is bringing their bodies home for a state funeral.'

In the historical actuality of July 1983 there was no rumour of Buddhist priests being killed in Jaffna; the public knew that thirteen soldiers had been ambushed and killed, and the fact was so reported and headlined prominently in the papers. And the rioting followed, not preceded, the aborted arrangements for the bodies to be given a funeral under state sponsorship. Of course, it could have happened the way the novel describes it in some imaginary fictional world. But why use the detail about thirteen soldiers (a figure that is etched indelibly in our contemporary memory) if you are going to play about with the facts in this way? And why construct a version that unintentionally, no doubt, softens the reality? A slaughter resulting from a mass misconception that Buddhist monks had been killed would have been, though not defensible, mitigated by being an outburst of outraged religious emotion. The reality, with its planned pogrom and state connivance, was much more horrible. Isn't Sivanandan guilty, in his own way, of 'making up false memories', since some foreign readers, if not Sri Lankans, will assume: 'Ah, so that's what happened in Sri Lanka in 1983'? It's pertinent to observe that a few years later there was a large-scale killing of Buddhist monks in Aranthalawa, and there was no counterviolence in the Sinhala south because by then the state had every reason for not promoting it.

The most obvious departure from history is in the ambiguous and evasive character of the novel's conclusion. But before I discuss this, it's first necessary to characterise Vijay, through whose eyes, as the central figure in Part Three, the new political developments of the 'seventies and 'eighties are viewed. In one aspect Vijay is an appropriate character through whom the fissured history of contemporary Sri Lanka can be focussed because he contains within himself these ambivalent divisions. His putative father is Rajan who is Tamil, and his mother is Lali, who is Sinhala. But his real biological father was Sinhala, because Vijay was actually the son of Sena, Lali's lover who was killed in the hartal. Rajan married Lali after her lover's death, and brought up Vijay when he was born as his own son. Then Rajan emigrates after the murder of Lali, and Vijay is brought up among Sinhalese, but still preserving the sense of his half-Tamil identity.

Vijay, during one visit to Jaffna, is repelled by the intellectuals he meets at the Jaffna university, who spout the obverse of the racist myths Vijay has heard from their counterparts in the south. He is more favourably struck by some of the young militants he meets. Meanwhile his marriage to Manel gradually disintegrates; she is both bent on worldly success and hardening in her anti-Tamil attitudes. In the last sections of the novel, set in some unspecified time in the mid-eighties, Vijay moves to Jaffna together with Meena, the estate Tamil young woman he has loved for a long time and who comes finally to accept him. But since Vijay was last in Jaffna the internecine struggles between the militant groups have begun; the euphoria and pride which even older people felt in the 'boys' has faded. Uncle Para, the old man who has lived through all three parts of the book, and is in some ways a choric commentator, articulates the despair of the elders:

They have all grown old before their time, our boys, all grown old. They trust only the gun and the cynaide capsule they carry round their necks. Isn't that terrible, that they cannot trust even themselves? What hope for Eelam now?

Vijay has an argument with Yogi, the young militant whom he had found so sympathetic on his previous visit to Jaffna. Vijay is sceptical of the militants' professions of socialism, and asks what evidence there is of their moving towards it in practice. Yogi's answer is that all that must wait for 'liberation'. Then, in the last episode of the book, the guerilla commander, Ravi, who is adored and unquestioningly obeyed by his followers appears. He is described as 'a portly figure in battle fatigues and side-arms, flanked by two armed men'. He orders the immediate hanging from a lamp-post of a young man, Kugan, as an informer — on grounds that Vijay has reason to believe are mistaken.

By the time Vijay got to Kugan, he was already hanging from the lamp-post. Sobbing uncontrollably, Vijay shinned up the lamp-post to untie the rope.

'Leave him,' thundered the Commander, pulling out his pistol. Yogi jumped to intervene, shouting, 'No, don't, Ravi, don't. He's Vijay. Your cousin, Vijay. Don't.'

Ravi lifted his pistol and shot Vijay down. Meena ran to where Vijay lay and cradled him in her arms. There was not a tear in her eye. The crowd fell silent. She looked up at Ravi.

'You have killed the only decent thing left in the land,' she said. 'We'll never be whole again.'

Ravi reached for his pistol. Yogi knocked it out of his hand.

'That's enough,' he said. 'I am taking over.'

What does this conclusion mean? How are we to take Yogi's 'I am taking over' — the last words of the book? Even if we don't identify Commander Ravi with a particular known individual, it's clear that he stands for a ruthlessness that believes in solving everything by the gun. Then does Yogi knocking the gun out of his hand mark the end of that ruthlessness? Is this another alternative history we are expected to credit, though we already know the bloody and appalling record of the next twelve years? Or is the conclusion just an escape from the author's own uncertainties and dilemmas: does the novel stop where it does because he can't resolve them?

**Regi Siriwardena**

E. Valentine Daniel, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996

How does one speak of the unspeakable? This question is usually asked by theologians and not by anthropologists, yet this query is at the heart of E. Valentine Daniel's latest book, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence*. The unspeakable in this case is not in the realm of the divine, but something all too human, violence and its enduring presence in the lives of its victims. Daniel speaks of violence with great difficulty. The difficulty lies not only in the subject matter of violence - displacement, refugees, torture and the loss of nation among Sri Lankans, especially Estate Tamils - but also in Daniel's theoretical approach, which relies heavily on the works of Charles Sanders Peirce and Martin Heidegger. Although Daniel acknowledges that he has admitted theory "with a vengeance," it forms an integral part of the book, allowing him to come to terms with the burdens that violence entails.

Six of the seven chapters of *Charred Lullabies* have previously appeared elsewhere over the past eight years, although they have been significantly altered for this publication. The processes of time that have distanced Daniel from his original research and his subjects from the initial outbreaks of violence form a critical backbone to the book. The chapters register movement from 1983 on, marking and reflecting the changes and violent upheavals that have become all too common in Sri Lankan society.

Daniel admits that the book is about writing about violence as much as, if not more than, it is about violence in itself. His humbly reflexive voice does not dominate the work, however, but forms a crucial part of his narrative, allowing for him to write about violence without overly dwelling on its prurience. He thus toes a fine line in his writing, avoiding the extremes of glorifying violence and of demeaning its victims while also safeguarding his informants and himself. The chaos of his subject matter necessitates taking a chaotic approach. Therefore the chapters "do not march towards a single point" but are "juxtaposed in mutual discordance so as to echo the discordance of... violence and its effects".

He titles the book an anthropography, a term he borrows from Jean-Paul Dupont, and not an ethnography, so as to not limit or attribute violence to a specific people, be they Tamils, Sinhalas or Sri Lankans in general. The book is an anthropography, reflecting Daniel's emphasis on the difficulties of writing on violence, and not simply an anthropology of violence. He attacks the conceit in the West and among the Westernized elite of Sri Lankans that they are civilized peoples who are somehow above violence. Daniel does not offer the reader causes or solutions for ethnic violence in Sri Lanka, for *Charred Lullabies* is truly an anthropography that wrestles with the violence that simmers underneath every culture, in the West and in Asia, among Sinhalas and among Tamils.

The book's ethnographic focus is on Sri Lankan Estate Tamils as tea plantation workers, refugees, repatriates, torture victims and immigrants in Sri Lanka, India, the U.K. and North America. Daniel is admittedly biased towards Estate Tamils, with whom he shares his history and heritage. Despite the disproportionately large amount of anthropological work on Sri Lanka, very little of it concerns Sri Lankan Tamils, let alone Estate Tamils. This is partially understandable due to the civil war, but it also reflects the hegemonic thinking that the Sri Lankan nation is a Sinhala nation. Estate Tamils have been historically slighted both in Sri Lanka and in the academy. Sri Lankan Tamils are beginning to get their due in the field of anthropology, if not on the fields of battle and politics, and Daniel is clearly leading the way.

Daniel's book provides considerable information seemingly unavailable elsewhere about Estate Tamils, from social and political histories to description of life on tea estates and in refugee and repatriate camps to gripping accounts of victims of violence whose lives and very being have been torn asunder. However, *Charred Lullabies* is clearly a scholarly work written for an academic audience. While Daniel does focus on alternatives to master narratives, this is not an activist work intending to give voice to otherwise voiceless Estate Tamils. Work of such sort is desperately needed, but this is not Daniel's project, although his writing complements others' advocacy work among Estate Tamils. In writing an anthropography

and not an ethnography or anthropology of violence, Daniel has made certain sacrifices in order to generalize to all humanity, chief among them being the unavailability of his ideas and conclusions to Estate Tamils whose lives and deaths lie at the core of this book.

Throughout the book Daniel also discusses Sinhala and non-Estate Sri Lankan Tamils, whom he refers to as Jaffna Tamils, following Estate Tamil practices. By focusing on Estate Tamils, a minority among a minority, he complicates the hegemonic Sinhala vs. Tamil party line held by governments, militants, academics and the press. Any scholarly work on Sri Lankan Tamils, and especially research on otherwise forgotten Estate Tamils, is a welcome and needed addition to the academic literature on Sri Lanka. However, Daniel's excellent ethnographic accounts of Estate Tamils and other Sri Lankans make up only part of the book. For example, Daniel practically gives the reader Tea Talk in his chapter entitled "Violent Measures, Measured Violence" concerning Estate Tamils' fashioning of counter-hegemonic meanings of terms of measurement. In the process he also gives summary definitions of key terms of Peircean semeiotic, which he in turn transforms for his own aims. Daniel interweaves theory with his ethnographic writing, and more importantly with his writing on writing. In his meta-narrative Daniel brings us out of the particulars of Sri Lanka and into universal realms of violence, culture, signs and being human.

In the first two chapters Daniel proposes three dispositions to the past, history, heritage and hybridity, held by Sinhala, Jaffna Tamils and Estate Tamils, respectively. He warns that these are general tendencies and are not mutually exclusive positions, and also that these differences have been blurred since 1983, when he began his fieldwork. History stresses a past of events and dates, as found in the Pali Chronicles for example, the verity of which is not of concern to Daniel, just that they are believed to be verifiably true events. Heritage, on the other hand, stresses cultural aspects of identity, such as dance, literature, art and religion, which are embodied in the present. Estate Tamils, however, tend to have a hybrid of heritage and history, combining the events of their relatively recent arrival in Sri Lanka with a strong cultural consciousness as Tamils from India.

Daniel does not go into how and why Estate Tamils have developed this hybrid while their Tamil cousins in Jaffna and Tamil Nadu have not. However, he concludes that this hybridity indicates that Estate Tamils are "beings in the making," whose national consciousness is being formed "in the meeting of history and heritage"

Daniel further expands on the interplay of history and heritage and its relation to ontology and epistemology by looking at the transformation of six pilgrimage sites in Sri Lanka from sacred places to tourist places. In delineating these trends, he reveals the manner and the deepness of the construction of identity and difference in Sri Lanka, which point to "one of the structural conditions for collective violence". With these dispositions Daniel also provides a new approach to a traditional problem in South Asian historiography, namely the lack of "historic" material in the Indian subcontinent except on its periphery, such as Sri Lanka. It is not that Tamils, or Indians in general, are not concerned with their past, Daniel contends; it is just that they tend to approach it as heritage, a collective cultural consciousness with a strongly salient presence in the present.

Daniel's endeavour is not only to examine the tumultuous effects of violence, but to look at what it means to be human. As much as he is a symbolic anthropologist in his use (and some would say overuse) of Peircean semeiotic, he is also a philosophical anthropologist. Daniel's view of what it means to be human is the Peircean concept of anthroposemeiosis, humans' knowledge and awareness of the processes of signification. While obscure, obtuse and full of neologisms, Peirce was a brilliant thinker, the last of the great system theorists. His triadic semeiotic provides for a more nuanced approach to communication and being than the more well-known Saussurean dualist semiotics.

The three consistent parts in Peirce's semeiotic are the representation, the object and the interpretant. Briefly put, the representation represents an object to an interpretant, whose interpretation becomes a representation to another interpretant, and semeiosis, the processes of signification, continues. Inherent in semeiosis is a slippage of meaning, since the interpretant cannot fully "get" what is being represented to it. This excess and indeterminacy



of meaning is the beauty and not the bane of Peircean semeiotic, since it allows for the continuation of semeiosis, which is fundamental to human being. Furthermore, Peirce wrote of three main types of signs, the iconic, the indexical and the symbolic, which differ in their relationships between sign and object. Iconic signs bear a resemblance to the object for which they stand, such as a statue or a map. Indexical signs have a contiguous connection to their objects, as with smoke and fire or a weather vane and the wind. Thirdly, symbolic signs are conventionally related to their objects, with words and units of measurement being two examples.

The third and most basic Peircean triad is also his most general, that of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness. These categories map unto the semeiotic triad, the three types of signs and, as Peirce would have it, most everything in the world. Firstness entails potentiality, Secondness actuality and Thirdness generality. Put differently, Firstness is a state of envelopment which can only be realized in hindsight, such as being lost in a piece of music or in the blue of the sky. Secondness is interruption, a jolt to one's being, whether it be torture and displacement, or something more mundane, like a phone call interrupting your sleep. Thirdness is a condition of law and habit, the state in which we usually live. *Charred Lullabies* is about the vast Firstness and inexpressibility of violence, which is a brute Second in our lives, forcing us away from our everyday habits of Thirdness. This is only a brief sketch of Peircean semeiotic, but suffice it to say that Daniel represents what may be the most accessible way to approach the oddly complex brilliance of Peirce.

Charles Sanders Peirce is a somewhat marginal figure in philosophy and especially in anthropology, where theoretical francophilia still dominates. Contrary to most contemporary anthropologists, Daniel cites Hegel and Kant as well as Peirce and Heidegger more than he does Foucault or Lacan. The philosophical theories that underlie *Charred Lullabies* provide an interface so that the vivid stories of violence can be accessed and understood. The onslaught of violence, torture and displacement has caused great silences among many of the Sri Lankans that Daniel has interviewed. In writing on violence, Daniel, like a judge forcing a reluctant witness,

demands words from stunned silence. He sees this silence as a withdrawal from anthroposemeiosis, a rejection of being human. His use of Peircean semeiotic and Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world provide a way to approach these silences, write about them and bring his subjects back to the human world of signs. By forcing the reader to examine what is taken for granted in daily life, these theories allow one to dislodge the obvious and have a glimpse of a feeling of the wrenching effects of violence. In his chapter on torture, "Embodied Terror," Daniel employs Kantian aesthetics and Peircean semeiotic to compare the differing inexpressibilities caused by pleasure and by pain. While beauty's profound inexhaustibility makes language unavailable, pain's excruciating particularity "puts language on trial". More than any other type of violence, torture, whether by Tamil militants or by the Sinhala state, weighs down on its victims, leading to an "overwhelming sense of the sheer worthlessness of all attempts to communicate". While seemingly paradoxical, it is through the philosophy of pleasure that Daniel is able to initiate writing on torture and speak of the unspeakable, breaking the silences which violence has wrought.

Relying upon Heideggerean notions of equipmentality, availability and occurrentness, Daniel analyses the differing attitudes towards the nation, whether Sri Lanka or Tamil Eelam, among Tamil immigrants to the U.K. from independence to the present. He discusses a litany of intra-Tamil differences that complicate Tamil identity and the availability of the nation. Daniel delineates three different phases of Tamil immigration, the elite in the 1950s and 1960s, students in the 1960s and 1970s and refugees from the late 1970s to the present. These three phases differ greatly in terms of class, caste, degree of assimilation, feelings towards the nation that they left and also towards other immigrants in Britain.

Daniel vividly describes the difficulties that Tamil immigrants, as well as Tamils in Sri Lanka, face in trying to come to terms with ideas of nation that are becoming further and further removed from them. A national past and a national consciousness have become increasingly unavailable to Tamils in the U.K., passing from their underlying equipment into the realm of occurrentness, where it cannot

be taken for granted as a part of their being in the world. These Heideggerean concepts provide a means to get underneath the everyday and examine the unquestioned, transparent assumptions that form the basis of our very being, revealing the unfortunate universality undercurrent in the violence of modern Sri Lanka. As with Daniel's use of Peirce, however, it would be foolhardy of me to give more than just this brief sketch of these richly complex applications of even richer and more complex theories in a short review.

One final, original contribution to anthropological discourse and practice that Daniel offers in *Charred Lullabies* is his concept of the agentive moment. Rather than looking for the traditional "agent," the active participant who makes conscious decisions concerning one's life, he finds agency in particular moments of time, when one is faced with critical situations that force habit-change. These moments can occur for a group of people, such as with the Gandhian Self-Rule movement, or be captured in documents, such as the U.S. constitution. In Peircean terms, these are moments of such intense Secondness, shock and confusion that they lead to the formation of new Thirds, habits and rules.

Agency is therefore not some either/or quality to be found among people, but is instead a matter of degree. Only in retrospect, when one's habits have been changed, can one realize the full impact of the agentive moment and the scope of change that it has entailed. Every act of interpretation, the third part of Peirce's semeiotic triad, is fundamentally agentive in its manipulation of indeterminate and excess meanings for further signification. Since Daniel, following Peirce, sees humans as creatures of habit whose fundamental activity is being, representing and interpreting signs, agency is thus a basic attribute of our humanity that is being constantly expressed to varying degrees.

This view of agency is no mere academic exercise, though. It underpins Daniel's views of violence, its effects and the ways it shatters our very being.

Throughout *Charred Lullabies*, particularly in the final chapter, Daniel tries to come to terms with what it means to be human and especially what it means to be human in an increasingly violent world.

While the anti-Tamil riots of 1983 provide the shock that begins the book, it ends with Daniel's philosophical writings concerning claims to culture and their relationships with violence, forcing a need to rethink anthropology and our everyday notions of human being. Violence is an event with a certain excess, of passion, of evil, of meaning, that resists incorporation and narration, rendering Daniel, his subjects and his readers "speechless". It is through his writing on violence and his writing on writing on violence that Daniel tries to break these silences, providing an agentive moment for habit-change among his subjects and readers alike. It is in this very excess, in these silences and slippages, and in the indeterminacy of signs that a counterpoint to culture can be found, and from there a possible counterpoint to violence.

**Daniel Bass**

P. Jeganathan & Q. Ismail (eds.), 1995. *Unmaking the Nation*. SSA. Colombo.

What forms of cultural identity are available in the contemporary world? Is it possible to rethink identity outside of the peremptory authority of claims of nation and people? These questions take on a particular urgency in Sri Lanka in the context of an ongoing “ethnic conflict”. The contributors to *Unmaking the Nation* share a “deep suspicion” of the claims and consequences of nationalism and push the argument that “identity is about hegemony not community”. This shifts the debate about identity in Sri Lanka away from essentialised categories like “ethnicity” to the broader terrain of social relations and questions of power.

In the first chapter, David Scott invites us to rethink the classic text by R.A. L.H Gunawardena, “*The People of the Lion*”. Published in 1979, Gunawardena’s text was the first attempt to critically formulate the relationship between history and community in Sri Lanka. Highlighting the problematic use of the past in the present, Gunawardena claimed that the “Sinhala Buddhist reality” articulated by nationalists was a fiction built upon specific interpretations of myths, historic texts and events. Gunawardena recognised that the popular discursive apparatus of Sinhala ideology was constructed through foundational narratives, lending “the Sinhala past” an immortality which is clearly an imagined past. “*The People of the Lion*” created controversy amongst various scholars – particularly those who support *Jathika Chintanaya* ideology - and K.N.O Dharmadasa responded to Gunawardena’s revelations with fresh evidence to legitimate claims of a Sinhala golden past.

Scott commends Gunawardena’s intellectual intervention since it highlighted the way in which political debates are structured and what kinds of history are made available to people. Nonetheless, Scott finds Gunawardena’s intellectual strategy problematic. By speaking to Sinhala nationalists through the logic of their discourse – in other words by taking the notion of history seriously, for example returning to legends such as Vijaya’s landing, Scott feels that Gunawardena is simply preparing the battleground for a fresh round of nationalist discourse in which new claims are made, myth revived. A more

strategic intervention would emphasise the “colonial modernity” of Sinhala nationalism and explore the ways in which representations of identity become tools for political projects. Scott refrains from elaborating these ideas with case studies and instead stresses the need “to make visible the productive space of (Gunawardena’s) text’s questions”. What Scott underestimates is the seminal importance of Gunawardena’s work in initiating a project of deconstructing the nation and nationalism. True, a critique of myths does not in itself end enmity, nor propel people who accept myths to defend their acceptance. However, it remains important to understand the potency of myths in Sri Lanka as a political resource.

From a theoretical viewpoint it may seem possible to transcend essentialising categories. Maybe we **are** all hybrids. However, to many ordinary Sri Lankans – whether Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim or Burgher – the appeal of culture and religion as a social bond is strong. It does not seem useful to abandon the categories of “history” and “community”. What is important to build on theoretically, is an understanding of how “Sinhala” came to be a signifying category and how certain representations of community became hegemonic. Is there a direct relationship between the advent of ‘modernity’ and the ossifying of previously more fluid relationships? What are the implications of this for a conception of citizenship untainted by particularised identities? Scott would like us to move away from these questions. He wants to provoke us into refusing the nationalist’s bait and reject all language that speaks of nationalism. The appeal of his “so what” is very strong. Yet what this underestimates is the power of discourse to structure debate in such a way that most participants in Sri Lanka are compelled to use identitarian language.

Scott’s idea that identitarian discourse has to shift from a discourse of “us” and “them” to one that looks for a notion of “being-in-common” is a worthwhile goal, particularly at a historical conjuncture when the issue of devolution is being debated. It remains important however to examine how Sinhala Buddhist nationalism is constructed and explore the discursive strategies deployed to maintain hegemony. Otherwise, the rhetoric which says “so what” will be a fading cadence in a small intellectual space. The politics of the present

remains imbricated with stories of the past. It is important to keep open a theoretical space for understanding what motivates people to hold on to that connection.

Quadri Ismail takes up some of these questions in his essay *“Unmooring Identity”*. His focus is on how a particular Muslim identity became dominant. This requires an understanding that the Muslim social formation is a construct whose unity is problematic. What are the stakes, antagonisms and exclusions involved in maintaining that unity? Ismail’s focus is on identity construction within the Muslim elite from the early years of this century to the late 1980s. The Muslim social formation has come to consist of two distinct groups – “Southern” and “Eastern” Muslims. Ismail reveals how the elite managed to ‘represent’ “Muslim-ness” through the signifier “the peaceful trader”. This construction elides differences of class and gender and has the political consequence of Muslims participating in an identitarian discourse in which Sinhala hegemony is sustained. If scholars were more committed to deconstructing the categories of ‘race’, ‘nation’ and ‘community’, then the processes of maintaining domination and subordination would become clearer. Once the historic specificity of an assumed identity like “Muslim” becomes apparent, then we can start to analyse the power struggles involved in presenting identity as ‘natural’ and incontestable.

Ismail’s essay is useful since he contextualises his ideas with key moments in Muslim identity-creation. One important moment being 1883, the year that the British colonial power exiled Arabi Pasha, an Egyptian nationalist, to Ceylon. This is also a period of Sinhala Buddhist revivalism and a nascent religious revivalism within the Muslim elite. Pasha catalysed Islamic revivalism into a more public, visual phase. After his arrival male members of the elite began to publicly sport the fez – to symbolise their Arab/Muslimness. Then, in 1888, the “Muslim community” made its first public political demands on the basis of a specific identity. This claim coincided with colonial debates about increasing “native” representation in the legislature. The colonial administration colluded in hardening a Muslim identity – creating a seat for a “Mohammedan” – and appointed M.C Abdul Rahman, an upper class trader. Ismail notes

that the inclusion of a mercantile capitalist into the legislature reveals that the state was incorporating safe allies rather than more politically active Muslims. This reminds readers of the colonial practice of divide and rule. By highlighting colonial collusion with the promotion of certain kinds of Muslim-ness at key historical moments, Ismail also confirms Scott’s claims about the colonial modernity of identities in Sri Lanka.

The ossification of Muslim political identity came to be problematic. In 1915 the Southern Muslim elite was the target of the first big “riots” in modern Sri Lanka. What is interesting is that in the wake of the “riots”, Sinhala nationalists like Anagarika Dharmapala insisted on the alien-ness of the Muslims: “the Muhammadan is alien to the Sinhalese by religion, race and language. He traces his origins to Arabia, whilst the Sinhalese traces his to India and to Aryan sources” (UN: 83). In other words, the logic of political discourse fuelled “ethnic” enmity since the process of constructing identity based on difference had been set in motion. Nonetheless, Ismail notes that the Southern Muslim definition of identity has come to overshadow that of Eastern Muslims. However, in the current context where conditions for eastern Muslims have deteriorated – people have been displaced and terrorised – there may now be a shift in politicisation over issues connected with Eastern Muslims.

Ismail’s essay fills an important gap in Muslim history and draws attention to the construction of identity. However, more discussion on the rise of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC) would have fleshed out his argument and helped readers to understand how representation functions in the contemporary political scene. This is critical at a moment when issues concerning devolution have impacted on Eastern Muslims and their sense of security. More analysis of the gendered nature of identity would also have been useful. What impact has the increased migration of Muslim women workers to the Middle East had on people’s conceptions of community? Are there any hints that this trend has implications for religious revivalism as a means of coping with class/status differences between the eastern provinces and the South?

Malathi de Alwis and Sitaralega Maunaguru take up the gendered nature of national identity in their articles. In “*Gender, Politics and the Respectable Lady*” de Alwis recognises that women politicians who succeed in Sri Lanka have to locate themselves as “respectable ladies”. In other words, there is a shift from patriarchy in the private sphere into the public sphere. This observation reworks Partha Chatterjee’s formulation of the bourgeois woman in post-independence India who was de-sexualised and spiritualised by the nationalists. In the Sri Lankan context, public female figures police their behaviour to conform to expectations about “respectability”. This is why the image of Hema Premadasa proposing a vote of thanks at a state funeral caused such an uproar. Hema Premadasa was transgressing the category of “respectable lady”. Female politicians only seem able to successfully cross from familial to public roles if they articulate the nurturing, familial qualities they will bring to the public sphere. As de Alwis notes, this new national role for women was best articulated in the words of Srimavo Bandaranaike, the world’s first woman Prime Minister: “I feel most strongly that the home is a woman’s foremost place of work and influence and looking after her children and husband are duties of the highest importance for her to perform”. (UN: 144) The onus of this legacy of “respectability” is still apparent if one looks at the debates and gossip surrounding Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge’s 1994 election campaign.

In “*Gendering Tamil Nationalism*” Sitaralega Maunaguru asserts that a “central feature of the project of nationalism is the construction of feminised and masculinised practices and ideologies in the imagined community of the nation”. Despite the fact that women were active in the early phase of agitation for Tamil rights, their political role was marginalised. Women seem to gain empowerment only if they are useful for wider political projects. For example, public LTTE rhetoric promotes an image of the emancipated Tamil woman, yet the focus of their training is on developing militarism rather than tackling specific feminist issues. “Woman warrior” displaces “brave mother”, but we might question what gains in agency have been made. Beyond their appropriation for the nationalist project, women’s bodies still remain a contested zone of culture and community.

Contested cultural zones in their material and metaphorical sense form the basis of Pradeep Jeganathan’s essay: “*Authorizing History, Ordering Land: The Conquest of Anuradhapura*”. Jeganathan focuses on the production of knowledge and meaning through discourse. He takes as his study the “making” of Anuradhapura in the nineteenth century. Any research which uses the concept of discourse is concerned with where meaning comes from. Jeganathan aims to unravel the power dynamics which informed knowledge about Anuradhapura and demonstrates how hegemonic ideology can remake material reality. By historicizing the process which ‘produced’ Anuradhapura as an ancient site in the nineteenth century, Jeganathan exposes the interests at work in the colonial setting in “restoring” Anuradhapura. Jeganathan reminds us that knowledge is always inextricably enmeshed in relations of power. As Foucault has argued:

“Truth isn’t outside power... Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth; that is the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned... the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.”

What gets to count as true ‘ethnicity’ and true ‘nationalism’ in Sri Lanka? The authors of *Unmaking the Nation* claim that “identity is about hegemony not community”. But how are we to understand hegemony? Do we try to answer the traditional Marxist question: “in whose class interests does class, representation and power operate?” Or do we develop the more nuanced Gramscian perspective and analyse how different social groups struggle in different ways to win the consent of other groups? Or do we resign ourselves to the Foucauldian position that power is a net that nation-builders and nation-destroyers, oppressors and oppressed, identity makers and identity believers are all caught up “in a productive network which runs through the whole social body”?

*Unmaking the Nation* travels some way in developing these questions and is a useful intervention in debates about identity and ethnicity. The collection as a whole problematises preconceived ideas

of nationalism and identity. It highlights the social construction of identity and invites new political dialogue based on “being-in-common” rather than difference. A weakness of the collection is that the project of dismantling categories intellectually does not in itself reveal much about the structuring principles at work which sustain them. There is no doubt that people in Sri Lanka continue to relate to identity in terms of different versions of community. If we accept that knowledge is engendered and embedded in the material context of place and space, it is important to understand why people relate to place and space – whether this becomes defined as the body of the nation or some other construct - in specific ways. “Who”, after all, needs identity? This requires more research into people’s relationship to the discourses of nationalism and ethnicity. How does nationalism and ethnicity command loyalty and solicit desire? The politics of identity is not a politics of interest in a strictly material sense. The production of “nationalism as a relationship of consent”, to use Gramsci’s terminology, reveals the multi-layered nature of subjectivity and requires that we re-open debate on the messy terms “culture”, “community”, and “history” rather than wishing them away.

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