Jan. - Mar. 1998

Vol. 2 No. 2
ISSN 1391 - 2380

Nēthrā

A non - specialist journal for lively minds

IN THIS ISSUE

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR ETHNIC STUDIES, COLOMBO

Nēthrā

Journal of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo

Nēthrā will appear quarterly. Subscription rate are:

Sri Lanka: Rs.350 per year

SAARC countries: U.S. $15 per year

Other countries: U.S. $20 per year

All rates are inclusive of mailing costs
(by air in the case of foreign readers).

ISSN 1391 - 2380

All correspondence to:
International Centre for Ethnic Studies
2, Kynsey Terrace, Colombo 8, Sri Lanka

Printed by
Unie Arts (Pvt) Ltd. No.48 B, Bloemendhal Road,
Colombo 13.

Jan. - Mar. 1998 Vol. 2 No. 2

Nēthrā

(Successor to *"The Thatched Patio"*)

Quarterly Journal

Editor
Regi Siriwardena

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.

Editorial correspondence, including submissions to the journal, should be sent to:

The Editor,
Nēthrā
International Centre for Ethnic Studies,
2, Kynsey Terrace,
Colombo 8,
Sri Lanka.

Arjun Appadurai is *Barbara E. and Richard J. Francke* Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago. He is also the Director of the ChicagoHumanities Institute and the editor of *Public Culture.* He is the author of *Worship and Conflict Under Colonial Rule,* and *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization.*

Nirmala S. Salgado teaches religion at Augustana College, Rock Island. She began her researches into Buddhist nuns when she was a senior researcher at ICES in the 'eighties. She followed doctoral studies at Northwestern University, Illinois, combining textual and anthropological approaches to religion.

Jane Russell lived for many years in Sri Lanka as a researcher and writer in the fields of political and social sciences.

Contents

Dead Certainty:
Ethnic Violence In The Era Of Globalization

Arjun Appadurai

This is the text of the Eighth Punitham Tiruchelvam Memorial Lecture delivered on January 31, 1998

Under what conditions is group violence between previous social intimates associated with certain forms of *uncertainty* regarding ethnic identity? In sketching an approach to this question, I build on an argument against primordialism developed in a previous work (Appadurai 1996) and lay the foundations for a larger study of ethnic violence currently in progress. The present essay thus has a preliminary character.

In one widely shared perspective, ethnic violence, as a form of collective violence, is partly a product of propaganda, rumor, prejudice and memory, all forms of knowledge, all usually associated with heightened conviction, conviction capable of producing inhumane degrees of violence. But there is an alternative approach to ethnic violence, with roots traceable to Durkheim's work on anomie (Durkheim 1951) and Simmel's ideas about the stranger (Simmel 1937). This tradition of thinking - which focuses on doubt, uncertainty and indeterminacy - has surfaced recently in many different ways: it animates the on-going work of Zygmunt Bauman (1997), on the roles of the stranger, the consumer, the parvenu and the vagabond as social archetypes of the post-modern world. It appears too in the work of Piotr Hoffman (1986;1989) on doubt, time and violence. Julia Kristeva's work on strangers, a philosophical reflection clearly prompted by the

renewed fear of xenophobia in France, belongs to this tradition (Kristeva 1991). This line of thought has also been invoked - at least implicitly - in several recent anthropological works on ethnic violence (Daniel 1996; Devisch 1995: Desjarlais and Kleinman 1994; Malkki 1995; Nordstrom 1997) and on witchcraft (Geschiere 1997). These otherwise different works have in common the sound intuition that, given the growing multiplicity, contingency and apparent fungibility of the identities available to persons in the contemporary world, there is a growing sense of *radical* social uncertainty about people, situations, events, norms and even cosmologies.

Some of these works discuss the politics of the body in such a world of uncertainty. In others, there is a recognition that what is new about these uncertainties has something to do with the forces of globalization - weakened states, refugees, economic deregulation, systematic new forms of pauperization and criminalization. This latter connection is especially suggestively made in Bauman (1997). Yet no single work has, to my knowledge, sought to explore the precise ways in which the ethnic body can be a theater for the engagement of uncertainty under the special circumstances of globalization. This link is one important preoccupation of the essay that follows.

Although criticisms of the primordialist approach to contemporary ethnic violence have largely won the day among social scientists, no clear-cut alternative explanation of the violence we see in Eastern Europe, Central Africa, Sri Lanka and other such sites has emerged. In part, this is because it remains difficult to relate macro-processes to the micro-events that characterize ethnic violence; in part, the excess violence of ethnic confrontation seems to exceed the linguistic resources of most social scientists; and, in part, the terminologies of anthropologists and other more "meaning-oriented" analysts is insufficiently meshed with the predominantly structural and organizational approaches of political scientists, sociologists and demographers concerned with these problems.

Important steps to engage these challenges are to be found in a growing body of work on ethnic violence by anthropologists (Daniel 1992; Das 1990, 1995; Hayden 1996; Herzfeld 1997; Jeganathan 1997; Malkki 1995; Nordstrom: in press; Tambiah 1996). Part of what

emerges from this work is a consensus that the ethnic labels and categories involved in contemporary ethnic violence are frequently products of recent state policies and techniques, such as censuses, partitions and constitutions. Labels such as "Yugoslav", "Sikh", "Kurd" and "Muslim", which *appear* to be the same as long-standing ethnic names and terms, are frequently transformations of existing names and terms to serve substantially new frameworks of identity, entitlement and spatial sovereignty.

Given the high-level mobilization of such names and terms, three consequences follow. First, given the increasingly porous borders between nation-states in matters of arms, refugees, trade and mass media, these ethnic names and terms become highly susceptible to transnational perturbation. Second, where local identities and identifications often were far more important than higher-order names and terms, modern state-level forces tend to generate large-scale identities (such as "Latino", "Scheduled Caste", and "Serb") which become significant "imagined" (Anderson 1991) affiliations for large numbers of persons, many of whom reside across large social, spatial and political divides. Third, and by extension, the angers, frustrations and quarrels of small (face-to-face) communities and larger mega-ethnic groupings tend to affect each other directly and explosively, so that certain communities, in Hayden's provocative phrase, become "unimaginable" (Hayden 1996: 783).

Since the subject of ethnic violence is large and horrifying in its range and variety, this essay confines itself to violence involving neighbors, friends and kinsmen-to persons and groups who have some degree of prior social familiarity. Thus the organized violence of police, armed hoodlums, professional torturers and investigators or paid ethnic militias is not discussed here, except as it directly informs the problem of violence between socially proximate persons. Also, rather than focus on all forms of violent confrontation, the discussion will concentrate on those that are associated with appalling physical brutality and indignity - involving rape, mutilation, cannibalism, sexual abuse, violence against civilian spaces and populations. Put simply, the focus here is on bodily brutality perpetrated by ordinary persons against other persons with whom they may have - or could have-previously lived in relative amity.

This focus allows an examination of limiting conditions and extreme cases for testing the idea of *uncertainty* as a key factor in severe ethnic violence. Focusing on bodily violence between actors with routine - and generally benign - prior knowledge of one another is also a way to illuminate "threshold" or "tip-over" conditions, where managed or endemic social conflict gives way to runaway violence.

Globalization offers one systematic way of characterizing the conditions under which such conditions for extreme violence may be especially encouraged. This is not the place for a detailed engagement with the existing range of approaches to the social dimensions of globalization, though there are notable convergences between some of its most prominent theorists (Beck 1994; Friedman 1994; Giddens 1991; Hannerz 1992, 1996; Robertson 1990; Sassen 1991; Lash and Urry 1994). Building on this emergent set of approaches and on my previous work on the subject (Appadurai 1996a), suggests the following broad way to think about what distinguishes the "era of globalization".

Although transregional contacts and transnational processes have antecedents and anticipations over centuries (Abu-Lughod 1993; Wallerstein 1974) in the form of what we refer to as "world-systems", there is a widely shared sense that there is something new about these processes and systems in the last few decades. The word "globalization" (both as a socio-economic formation and as a term of folk ideology in journalism and in the corporate world) marks a set of transitions in the global political economy since the 1970's, in which multi-national forms of capitalist organization began to be replaced by transnational (Rouse 1995), flexible (Harvey 1989) and irregular (Lash and Urry 1987, 1994) forms of organization, as labor, finance, technology and technological capital began to be assembled in ways that treated national boundaries as mere constraints or fictions. These changes, with accompanying changes in law, accounting, patenting and other administrative technologies have created "new markets for loyalty" (Price 1994) and called existing models of territorial sovereignty into question (Sassen 1996a).

Many scholars have observed that, in the three decades since this process began, the system of nation-states appears to be under severe pressure and that cultural fundamentalism and economic

liberalization appear to work oddly in tandem (Barber 1996). Yet others have seen in these processes, especially since the world-wide triumph of the ideologies of democracy and marketization after 1989, a paradoxical growth, not of freedom, equity and peace, but of new forms of civilizational "clash" (Huntington 1996) and of global anarchy (Kaplan 1995). These varied analyses sometimes seem like the proverbial blind men touching the elephant, mistaking part for whole.

I have elsewhere stressed the deepening of the crisis surrounding the nation-state as a normative envelope for territory, loyalty and justice (Appadurai 1996b) and the conjunctural importance of mass-mediation, forced and voluntary migration and diasporic public spheres as key elements of *this* era of globalization (Appadurai 1996a). My view converges with Giddens and Bauman, on the growing incapacity of social understandings to encompass social relations as marking this era, and with Sassen (1996b) on the new geography of global cities in which large bodies of disenfranchised labor exist to serve the complicated locational needs of global finance and management. In this new field of global relations, ideas of sovereignty, citizenship and cultural identity seem frequently traumatized and multiculturalism appears in some benign guises (in the form of peaceful demands for what Charles Taylor [1992] calls "cultural recognition") and many less benign ones which appear to require the extermination of ethnic others.

It is not difficult to see that the speed and intensity with which both material and ideological elements now circulate across national boundaries have created a new order of uncertainty in social life. Whatever may characterize this new kind of uncertainty, it does not easily fit the dominant, Weberian prophecy about modernity in which earlier, intimate social forms would dissolve, to be replaced by highly regimented bureaucratic-legal orders, governed by the growth of procedure and predictability. The links between these forms of uncertainty - one diacritic of the era of globalization - and the world-wide growth in ethnocidal violence inform this essay and are explicitly addressed in its conclusion.

The forms of such uncertainty are certainly various. One kind of uncertainty is a direct reflection of census concerns - how

many persons of this or that sort really exist in a given territory, or, in the context, of rapid migration or refugee movement, how many of "them" are there now among "us"[1] ? Another kind of uncertainty is about what some of these mega-identities really mean: what are the normative characteristics of an OBC ("Other Backward Caste") in India? Closer to the ground, a further uncertainty is about whether a particular person *really* is what they claim or appear to be or have historically been. Finally, these various forms of uncertainty create intolerable anxiety about the relationship of many individuals to state-provided goods - ranging from housing and health to safety and sanitation - since these entitlements are frequently directly tied to who "you" are, and thus to who "they" are. Each of these kinds of uncertainty gains increasing force whenever there are large-scale movements of persons (for whatever reason), when new rewards or risks attach to large-scale ethnic identities, or when existing networks of social knowledge are eroded by rumor, terror or social movement. Where one or more of these forms of social uncertainty come into play, violence can create a macabre form of certainty and can become a brutal technique (or folk discovery-procedure) about "them" and, therefore, about "us". This conjecture might have special sense in the era of globalization.

The first step towards such an understanding must be the most obvious and striking feature of such violence, which is its site and target - the body. Even a quick scan of the extensive literature suggests that the human body is the site of the most horrifying acts of ethnic violence. It might seem banal to say that the body is the site of the worst possible infliction of pain, terror, indignity and suffering, in

[1] For a suggestive discussion of the widespread uncertainty concerning the identities of persons, social categories, villages, and even about the link between religion and nationhood *during* the process of Partition in 1947, I am indebted to a draft paper by Gyanendra Pandey, "Can a Muslim be an Indian", delivered at the University of Chicago in April 1997. A similar kind of uncertainty, produced by late colonial and postcolonial politics, is remarked by Ismail (1995) with respect to Sri Lankan Muslim self-understandings of identity.

comparison with property or other resources. Yet it is clear that the violence inflicted on the human body in ethnic contexts is never entirely random or lacking in cultural form. Wherever the testimony is sufficiently graphic (Das 1990; Feldman 1991; Malkki 1995; Sutton 1995), it becomes clear that even the worst acts of degradation - involving faeces, urine, body parts; beheading, raping, impaling, gutting, sawing; raping, burning, hanging and suffocating - have macabre forms of cultural design and violent predictability.

The single most forceful anthropological account of such design is Lisa Malkki's recent account of the memories of Hutu refugees in Tanzania in the 1980's, of the genocidal violence perpetrated against them principally in the early 1970's in Burundi (Malkki 1995). This study, which brings together themes of exile, morality, memory, space and nationalism in its effort to interpret genocidal violence, has many points of convergence with the principal arguments in this paper. But just two issues raised by Malkki directly concern me here: the forms of bodily violence and the relationship of purity to identity.

Built around partially standardized accounts ("mythico-histories") by Hutu refugees in Tanzania of the ethnocidal violence they experienced in Burundi since the 1960's, but especially in the bloodbath of 1972 directed against the Hutu majority, Malkki shows how question of identification and knowledge of the ethnic body lay at the heart of the atrocious violence of this moment. Discussing a detailed response to her question of "how it could be possible to know a person's identity with certainty enough to kill", Malkki shows how earlier colonial efforts to reduce the complex social differences among local ethnic groups to a simple taxonomy of racial-physical signs had come to be elaborated in the 1970's and 1980's. These "necrographic" maps (Malkki 1995:89) were the basis for detailed, technical recollections of the ways in which death was administered to victims in specific, humiliating and drawn-out ways. Malkki (following Feldman 1991) suggests that these maps of bodily difference are themselves delicately poised between acquired knowledge and techniques of detection. These maps "help construct and imagine ethnic difference (Malkki: 88) and "through violence, bodies of individual persons

become metamorphosed into specimens of the ethnic category for which they are supposed to stand (Malkki: ibid). A slightly different approach to the relationship between "bodies", "persons" and "identities" appears later in this essay.

In the actual account that Malkki presents of the mythico-historical presentation of how Tutsi killers used shared maps of physical differences to identify Hutu, it is clear that the process is racked with instability and uncertainty (even the account of survivors referring to the uncertainty faced by their killers), so that multiple physical tests have to be applied. Malkki offers a bold interpretation of the specific ways in which Hutu men and women were killed (often with sharp bamboo sticks, using the grid of vagina, anus and head; often removing fetuses from pregnant women intact and forcing the mother to eat the fetus etc.). Her conclusion that these recollected practices, played out on the necrographic maps of the Hutu ethnic body "seem to have operated through certain routinized symbolic schemes of nightmarish cruelty." (Malkki: 92).

It remains to draw out the link between the mapped body of the ethnic other and the peculiar and specific brutalities associated with ethnic murder. While much of Malkki's analysis strikes me as deeply persuasive, what is vital for the present argument is the link between indeterminacy and brutality in the negotiations over the ethnic body.[2] Although it is difficult to be sure (especially for an analyst

[2] This is the appropriate point at which to acknowledge the pathbreaking contribution of Feldman's study of ethnoreligious violence in Ireland (1991). Most subsequent anthropological studies of violence, including several that I cite here, are in his debt. His brilliant examination of the logic of space, torture, fear and narrative in Northern Ireland brings a radical Foucauldian perspective to bear on a series of searing ethnographic observations of militarized ethnic terror. The ways in which Feldman's arguments set the stage for my own are many: they include his observations about interrogation as a ceremony of verification (Feldman 1991: 115), torture as a technique for the production of power out of the body of the victim (ibid.), the medicalization involved in interrogation (pp. 122-23), and the role of the corpse or "stiff" to mark the transfer of larger spatial maps onto the map of the enemy body (p.73). My effort is to shift the focus away from state-sponsored violence to its "ordinary" forms and agents and to elaborate the links between clarification and purification.

who is one step away from Malkki's first-hand exposure to these narratives), there is enough evidence to suggest that we are looking here at a complex variation of Mary Douglas' classic arguments about "purity and danger" (Douglas 1966) and about the body as a symbolic map of the cosmos (Douglas 1973). In her classic argument about "matter out of place" (which Malkki also discusses), Mary Douglas made a classic symbolic-structural link between categorical mixture, the cognitive anxiety it provokes, and the resultant abhorrence of taxonomic hybridity in all sorts of social and moral worlds. In subsequent work on body symbolism Douglas showed how and why the body works to compress and perform wider cosmological understandings about social categories and classifications. Several recent analysts of ethnic violence have made useful recourse to Mary Douglas' ideas about purity and category-mixture (Hayden 1996; Herzfeld 1992, 1997) in addressing issues of "ethnic cleansing" in Europe.

The argument here owes a direct debt to Douglas but some distinctions are worth making. While Douglas takes a cosmology (a system of categorical distinctions) as culturally given, thus leading to taboos against "matter out of place", ethnic violence introduces contingency into this logic, for the situations discussed here are explicitly about cosmologies in flux, categories under stress, ideas striving for the logic of self-evidence. What is more, the sort of evidence presented by Malkki (and also supported by similar accounts from Ireland, India and Eastern Europe) suggests an inversion of the logic of indeterminacy, category-mixture and danger identified by Douglas. In Malkki's evidence, for example, the body is both a source and a target of violence. The categorical uncertainty about Hutu and Tutsi is played out not in the security of the "body maps" shared by the sides but by the instability of the signs of bodily difference: not all Tutsis are tall; not all Hutu have red gums; not all noses help identify Tutsi nor do all modes of walking help to identify Hutu.

In a word, real bodies in history betray the very cosmologies they are meant to encode. So the ethnic body, both of victim and of killer, is itself potentially *deceptive*. Far from providing the map for a secure cosmology, a compass from which mixture, indeterminacy and

danger may be discovered, the ethnic body turns out to be itself unstable and deceptive. It is this reversal of Douglas' cosmo-logic that might best explain macabre patterns of violence directed *against* the body of the ethnic other. The peculiar formality, the specific preoccupation with particular body parts, are efforts to stabilize the body of the ethnic other, to eliminate the flux introduced by somatic variation, by mixture and intermarriage, to evict the possibility of further somatic change or slippage.

This sort of brutality belongs to the theater of divination, sorcery and witchcraft. It literally turns a body inside out and finds the proof of its betrayal, its deceptions, its definitive otherness in a sort of pre-mortem autopsy (see also Feldman 1991: 110-115), which, rather than achieving death because of prior uncertainty, achieves categorical certainty through death and dismemberment. In Geschiere's recent and magisterial analysis of witchcraft in West Africa, with special reference to regional variation in the Cameroon (Geschiere 1997), we are presented with a powerful reminder that witchcraft and sorcery, far from being static cultural forms, are elastic and highly flexible moral discourses for bringing to "account" new forms of wealth, inequality and power. They both feed and are fed by news of national politics, global flows of commodities and rumors of illegitimate flows of people and goods. Flourishing in an atmosphere of rumor, deception and uncertainty, these discourses place large-scale political and economic uncertainties onto maps of kinship and its local discourses of equity and morality. Among the Maka of Cameroon, witchcraft is focused on the frightening figure of the *djambe*, a small creature that occupies the body of the victim, drives him or her to sacrifice their kin, to participate in nocturnal anthropophagic banquets and thus to "introduce treason into the most reliable space in Maka society" (Geschiere: 40), the space of kinship and the household. We shall return to the themes of treason, cannibalism and morality shortly. For the moment, though this is not Geschiere's principal concern, let us note that the many variations on witchcraft and sorcery studied by anthropologists in sub-Saharan Africa, going back to Evans-Pritchard's classic study (1937) of these matters among the Azande, the sources of witchcraft and sorcery

often involve forces and creatures embedded inside the body of the victim/perpetrator, and the establishment of guilt and accountability often involve techniques of bodily investigation, of other animals or of humans. Finally, Geschiere is able to show that witchcraft links the world of kinship to the world of ethnicity and politics in Cameroon, and is held responsible for the newfound wealth and potential power of large ethnic groups. This extension of an idiom of intimacy gone awry to large scale suspicion of adversarial ethnic groups is a matter which will be re-engaged shortly.

For now, it is sufficient to note that the macabre regularities and predictabilities of ethnocidal violence cannot be taken as simple evidence of "calculation" or as blind reflexes of "culture". Rather, they are brutal forms of bodily discovery, forms of vivisection, emergent techniques for exploring, marking, classifying and storing the bodies of those who *may* be the "ethnic" enemy. Naturally, these brutal actions do not create any real or sustainable sense of secure knowledge. Rather, they exacerbate the frustration of the perpetrators. Worse, they create the condition for pre-emptive violence among those who fear being victims. This cycle of actual violence and the expectation of violence finds its fuel in certain spatial conditions of information-flow, human traffic and state-intervention, to be discussed below.

Anthropology has longknown about the ways in which the body is a theater for social performances and productions (Bourdieu 1977; Comaroff 1985; Douglas 1966; Martin 1992; Mauss 1973; van Gennep 1965). Combining Malkki's material on ethnic violence in Burundi with Geschiere's study of witchcraft in Cameroon, against the backdrop of Douglas' pathbreaking work on category-confusion, power and taboo, allows us to see that the killing, torture and rape associated with ethnocidal violence is not simply a matter of eliminating the ethnic other. It involves the use of the body to establishing the parameters of this otherness, taking the body apart, so to speak, to divine the "enemy within". In this sense, witchcraft logics studied most fruitfully in Africa might have much wider interpretive salience.

The role of the body as a site of violent closure in situations of categorical uncertainty is closely allied with a theme that has already been touched upon, the theme of deception. The literature on ethnocidal violence is shot through with the related tropes of "deception", "treachery", "betrayal", "imposture", and "secrecy". Considerable sustenance for this view of the suspicion, uncertainty and cognitive paranoia about the identity of the ethnic enemy comes from a variety of sources. Benedict Anderson has shown the salience of the Nazi fear about the "secret agency" of Jews in Germany, and the desperate deployment of all sorts of means to smoke out the "real" Jews, many of whom seemed "Aryan" and "German" in every regard (Anderson 1991). The murder of Jews under Hitler constitutes a sufficiently huge area of research and of on-going debate that exceeds the scope of this essay. But the importance of Nazi ideas of racial purity (Aryan-Germanness) for the extraordinary genocidal violence directed against Jews seems beyond debate.

The idea of Jews as "pretenders", as ethnic quislings, as a cancer within the German social body, all draw our attention to a crucial way in which the Nazi handling of the Jewish body far exceeds the logic of scapegoating, stereotyping and the like. What it shows is how those needs, under certain conditions, evolve into policies for mass extermination of the ethnic other. This brutally modern fact, which is the peculiarly horrifying feature of the Holocaust (associated with its totality, its bureaucratization, its "banality", its goal of complete ethno-national purification) is certainly complicated by the special history of European anti-Semitism. But in its drive for purity through ethnocide, and its "medicalization of anti-semitism" (Proctor 1995: 172) it sets the stage for the ethnic cleansing of, at least, Eastern Europe, Rwanda-Burundi and Cambodia in the last two decades, the era of globalization. In the case of Nazi racial ideology, the idea of the Jew as "secret agent" brings together the ambivalence of German-Nazis about race, religion and economy. Jews were the perfect sites for the exploration of Nazi uncertainty both about Christianity and about capitalism. Like the Hutu for the Tutsi, the Jews were "the enemies within", always potential threats to German national-racial purity, secret agents of racial corruption, of international capital (and, paradoxically, of communism).

As Malkki shows, the theme of secrecy and trickery pervaded Hutu ideas about the Tutsi elite that governed Rwanda. Here seen from the vantage point of view of the victims, their oppressors appear as "thieves who stole the country from the indigenous Hutu", as innately skilled in the arts of deception (Malkki:68). The Tutsi were seen as foreigners who hid their origins, as malign tricksters who were "hiding their true identity" (Malkki: 72).

The trope of deception, fake identity and betrayal finds further support in the context of the violence perpetrated in North India since the 1980's in struggles between Hindus and Sikhs, articulated eventually in powerful demands for an autonomous Sikh state (Khalistan). In the discourse of Sikh militants in India, Veena Das (1995) has shown the importance of concern with "counterfeit" claims to Sikh identity, even where such claims pertained to identities that were not the most legitimate forms of Sikhness. In her essay on Sikh militant discourse (Das 1995: Chapter 5) Das shows how, in the key years of the early 1980's, a Sikh militant discourse emerged in the Punjab which identified the State with Hinduism and Hindus with a dangerous effeminacy which threatened the community of Sikhs conceived as male. This discourse selectively identified key events in the Sikh past and present so as to play down the crucial tensions between Sikhs and Muslims in favor of the current opposition between Sikhs and Hindus. Das has much to say about history and memory, speech and violence, gender and the state. But her crucial concern is with the ways in which militant discourse both represents and induces the possibility of violence through its graphic mobilization of sexual, personal and political images and narratives and exhortations. In many ways, Das shows how the public speeches of Sikh militants, such as Sant Bhindranwale, transform the experience of individuals into the shame of the community, and thus all violence committed in the name of the Sikhs is justified as action against injustice, as a step towards martyrdom. The many rich details of this analysis of Sikh militant discourse cannot be engaged here, but two phenomena concerning identity addressed by Das are highly relevant.

Especially in the speeches of Bhindranwale, as cited by Das, a running theme is the question of who the Sikhs really are. One vital

issue in mobilizing the uncertainty surrounding what it means to be Sikh concerns a breakaway group among the Sikhs, called the Nirankaris. Here is what Das has to say about Sikh militant violence against the Nirankaris in the 1970's and 1980's:

There is a huge mistrust of alternative definitions of the Sikh community. This comes to the fore in the relationship between Sikh militants and communities on the peripheries of Sikhism. One such community is the Nirankaris, who may be considered a sectarian development within Sikhism. Since the followers of this sect worship a living guru, this being contrary to orthodox Sikh teaching, they were declared enemies of the *panth* in 1973 by the priests of the Golden Temple. In April 1978 some of Bhindranwale's followers clashed violently with the Nirankaris on both sides ....Though it is acknowledges that they *were* a sect with close connections with the Sikhs, their present forms of worship are considered unacceptable; they are declared 'counterfeit Nirankaris'...the Nirankaris are declared to be agents of the Hindu government, whose only mission is to destroy Sikhs". (Das: 133-134)

So here is a vivid example of having to bring the killing close to home to clarify who real Sikhs are and what the label Sikh really means. Note the idea of "counterfeit Nirankaris" and of "agents" of the hostile group (Hindus) and the terrible fury against the "pure" Sikh. We are back here with the theme of purity, first remarked by Douglas (1966), then elaborated by Malkki (1995), Hayden (1996) and Herzfeld (1997) in various directions. In Malkki's account, this ideology of the pure and the counterfeit explains the paradoxical sense among Hutu living in refugee camps in Tanzania that their very exile was the sign of their purity as "Hutu", and Bauman's (1997) reflections on purity, strangers and otherness. While the German case shows the power of the discourse of purity for the powerful majority (often using the idiom of the minority as a "cancer" within the social body), the Sikh case shows the domino effect of violent efforts to cleanse, as they ripple through the victim group, creating further efforts to cleanse grey areas and seek complete clarity and purity. In ethnocidal situations, the logic of cleansing seems both dialectical and self-perpetuating, as one act of "purification" calls forth its counterpart both from and within the ethnic "other".

The terror of purification and the vivisectionist tendencies that emerge in situations of mass violence also blur the lines between ethnicity and politics. Indeed, just as ethnocide is the limiting form of political violence, so certain forms of political hysteria lead to a quasi-ethnic preoccupation with somatic strategies. This somatic rendition of political identities offers another angle on the issue of masks, counterfeits and treachery. A powerful example of this dynamic comes from China where Sutton (1995) interprets the significance of widespread reports of cannibalism in Guangxi Province in China in 1968, towards the tail end of the violent phase of the Cultural Revolution. Again, this complex essay takes up a large range of fascinating issues involving cannibalism in the cultural history of this region, its reactivation under the violent conditions of the Cultural Revolution, the complex relations between regional politics and the politics of Beijing, and so on. These complexities cannot detain us here.

What is striking for our purposes in Sutton's analysis is the issue of violence among persons living in considerable social proximity to one another. Consider this chilling description of the general forms of the events of what Sutton calls "political cannibalism": The forces of law and order, not the revolutionary rebels, were the killers and eaters. Moreover, the forms of cannibalistic consumption varied within a narrow range. People agreed on the best body parts and insisted on them being cooked; and the selection, killing, and consuming of victims varied were relatively systematized. (Sutton: 142).

By closely examining what were referred to in Wuxuan as "human flesh banquets" and what were known during this period as "struggles" (ritualized events involving accusation, confession and physical abuse of suspected class enemies), Sutton is able to convincingly show that while these episodes involved ostensible political categories of persons, their logic appears fully compatible with the sorts of violence we would usually call ethnic. In analyzing a related case from Mengshan, Sutton shows how the designation of a man as

a "landlord" made him such a convincing villain that a neighbor did not warn him of his impending murder by a local group of militia.

Sutton also shows how political labels took on immense somatic force, as with an urban youth cited in one of his sources says of the former landlords: "I felt that deep in their hearts they still wanted to overthrow everything and kill all of us. In movies, they had awful faces. And in the village when I saw them I feared them and thought they were repulsive to look at. I guess ugliness is a psychological thing (Sutton 1995). This brief but remarkable quotation is a brief glimpse of how political labels (such as "landlord", "class enemy" and "counter-revolutionary") become powerful bearers of affect, and of how, in at least some cases, verbal propaganda and mass-mediated images can literally turn ordinary faces into abominations that must be destroyed.[3] Sheila Fitzpatrick first pointed out to me the salience of the Stalinist trials of "class traitors" to the general logic of my argument. In her own brief essay on autobiographical narratives and political trials in Stalin's Russia (1995), Fitzpatrick shows that the fear of uncertainty about their class histories affected many Soviet citizens at this time, since everyone had some sort of vulnerability: "Then their Soviet masks would be torn off; they would be exposed as double dealers and hypocrites, enemies who must be cast out of Soviet society. In the blink of an eye, as in a fairy tale, Gaffner the kolkhoz pioneer would become Haffner the Mennonite kulak. A clap of thunder and the face looking back from Ulianova's mirror would be that of Buber the wicked witch, enemy of the Soviet people." (Fitzpatrick 1995: 232; see also Fitzpatrick 1991). In a final, crucial piece of data from

[3] The entire issue of dual identities and split subjectivities has been approached in a highly suggestive manner by Zizek (1989) in his brilliant Lacanian revision of Hegel. As part of this reading, Zizek observes the sense in which anxiety about the resemblance between Jews and German is a key part of anti-semitism. He also notes the peculiar ways in which Stalinist terror demanded that its victims, in political trials, for example, confess their "treason" precisely because they are, in some sense, also "good" Communists who recognize the needs of the Party for purges and exposures. In both cases, the victims endure the suffering of being both "us" and "them" in reference to a totalizing ideology.

Sutton's essay, a former party leader, when expelled from the party in the early 1980's on the grounds of his earlier cannibalism, says with contempt: "Cannibalism...! It was the flesh of a landlord that was eaten, the flesh of a secret agent." (Sutton: 162).

With this example, we are back again with the problem of identification and uncertainty, the transformation of neighbors and friends into monsters, and the idea that social appearances are literally masks (Fitzpatrick 1991, 1995), beneath which truer, deeper, more horrible forms of identity may subsist. "Secret agency" is found in a wide range of sources that deal with ethnic violence, and it is an indicator of the crucial trigger of the sense of betrayal, treachery and deception that seems to underwrite its most dramatic expressions. This essay about political cannibalism from China casts an eerie light on descriptions from Bosnian concentration camps in which men were made to bite off the severed genitals of friends or fellow prisoners, and similar hints of forced cannibalism in other contexts.

Ethnocidal violence evidently mobilizes some sort of ambient rage about the body as a theater of deception, of betrayal and of false solidarity. Whenever the charge of categorical treachery is made to appear plausible, secret agents are unmasked, impure ethnicities are exposed, and horribly cancerous identities are imputed to what we may call the inner body, numerous collective forms of vivisection seem possible, with the most ordinary of people as their perpetrators.

In many of these forms of violence, we can see a horrible range of intimacies. It is of course true that the most extreme forms of ethnic violence involve huge dramas of power, of degradation, of violation and of emotional and physical pain. It is also true that some of this is explicable as part of a cycle of memory and counter-memory, where one remembered atrocity becomes the basis for another. But there is something else which is present in at least some of these situations: it is a horrible effort to expose, penetrate and occupy the material form - the body of the ethnic other. This may well be the key

to the many ways in which sexuality is implicated in recent global forms of ethnic violence. Eating the liver or heart of the exposed "class enemy" is surely a horrible form of intimacy[4] and one does not have to make recourse to deeper structural theories about "friendly" cannibalism to see that eating the enemy is one way of securing a macabre intimacy with the enemy who was so recently a friend. Making one prisoner bite off the genitals of another is an even more grotesque way of simultaneously inflicting deep pain, injury and insult while imposing a brutal sort of intimacy between enemy bodies.

This may be the place to briefly note that rape in such circumstances is not only tied up with special understandings of honor and shame, and a possible effort to abuse the actual organs of sexual (and thus ethnic reproduction), but is additionally the most violent form of penetration, investigation and exploration of the body of the enemy. These factors may account for the renewed salience of rape in ethnic violence. Rape, from this point of view, is the counterpart to the examination of males suspected to be Muslim (in places like Bombay) to check whether they are circumcised. Like the wooden stakes driven through the anus of the ethnic enemy and up into his skull (in the case of Hutu-Tutsi ethnocide reported by Malkki) the penis in ethnocidal rape is simultaneously an instrument of degradation, of purification and of a grotesque form of intimacy with the ethnic other.

In the end, when all the horrible descriptions are read and all the large-scale political, social and economic factors are taken into account, the body remains the site of intimacy, and in the many different

[4] This sort of brutal intimacy could be viewed as a fatal deformation of the sort of "cultural intimacy" which Herzfeld (1997) defines as that sense of familiarity, proximity, trust and inside knowledge that is preserved by local communities in the face of state taxonomies, policies and stereotypes. Given the delicate line between popular essentialisms and state essentialisms that Herzfeld notes in his larger analysis, it may not be farfetched to suggest that some sort of intimacy - gone terrifyingly awry, to be sure - is a feature of the vivisectionist quality of much ethnic violence today.

forms that bodily violence takes in different contexts, there is a common thread of intimacy gone berserk.[5] Looking at the question of uncertainty and vivisection in the context of intimacy returns one to the question of number and abstraction - and thus of globalization - discussed much earlier in this essay.

One of the key features of the new ethnic categories is their large-scale, officialized quality, a point made earlier in this argument. In no case of ethnocide of which we have knowledge can it be shown that these categories are innocent of state practices (usually through the census and often involving crucial forms of welfare or potential punishment).The question is: how can forms of identity and identification of such scope, ethnic labels which are abstract containers for the identities of thousands, often millions, of persons become transformed into instruments of the most brutally intimate forms of violence? One clue to the way in which these large *numerical* abstractions inspire grotesque forms of bodily violence is that these forms of violence - forms that I have called vivisectionist - offer temporary ways to render these abstractions graspable, to make these huge numbers sensuous, to make labels that are potentially overwhelming, for a moment, personal.

To put it in a sanitized manner, the most horrible forms of ethnocidal violence are mechanisms *for producing persons* out of what are otherwise diffuse, large-scale labels that have effects but no locations. This is why the worst kinds of ethnic violence appear to call for the word "ritual" or "ritualized" from their analysts. What is involved here is not just the properties of symbolic specificity, sequence, convention and even tradition in particular forms of violence but something even more deep about rituals of the body: they are always

[5] This point resonates with the provocative analysis of power and obscenity in the postcolony by Achille Mbembe (1992), where he discusses the dynamics of "the intimacy of tyranny"(p.22). Here the body appears as the site of greed, excess and phallocentric power among the ruling elites and thus as the object of scatological intimacy in popular discourse. The relation between this sort of political obscenity and the logic of vivisection which I explore here must await another occasion.

about the production, growth and maintenance of persons. This "life-cycle" aspect of bodily rituals (remarked by Arnold van Gennep and many distinguished successors in anthropology) finds its most monstrous inversion in what we may call the "death-cycle" rituals of mass ethnocide. These horrible counter-performances retain one deep element in common with their life-enhancing counterparts: they are instruments for making persons out of bodies.[6]

It is through this ritualized mode of concretization that we can see how the bodily violence of ethnocide is an instrument for the production of persons in the context of large-scale ethnic identities that have, for whatever reason, turned mutually hostile. It may seem frivolous to suggest that such violence produces persons, in the face of the fact that so much of it is not only degrading and deadly but literally appears to deconstruct bodies (through various forms of mutilation and butchery). But this macabre technique for the production of persons is, of course, special. But nevertheless in the intimacy and intricacy of its preoccupation with body parts and wholes, with penetration and with consumption, with exit and with access, these forms of violence are methods of assuring that some bodies are - without doubt - real persons. The horrible negativity of this technology is that the production of "real" persons out of the bodies of traitors, secret agents and despised group enemies, seems to require vivisectionist forms of bodily deconstruction and destruction. Here, too, is the link between intimacy and uncertainty. Where fear about ethnic "body-snatching" and secret agency becomes plausible, then producing "real" ethnic enemies out of the uncertainty posed by thousands of possible secret agents seems to call forth a special order of rage, brutality and systematicity, all at once. The problem of "fake identities" seems to demand the brutal creation of real persons through violence. This is the modification I propose to the suggestion of

[6] This part of the analysis resonates with many aspects of Feldman's analysis (1991) of the ceremonial, indeed sacrificial overtones of the interrogation and incarceration of political prisoners by state functionaries in Northern Ireland, as well as his account of the transformations of these eschatological procedures by the victims.

Feldman (1991), echoed by Malkki (1995), that ethnic violence produces abstract tokens of ethnicity out of the bodies of real persons.

Such examples can be multiplied. They testify to one important fact: as large populations occupy complex social spaces and as primary cultural features (clothing, speech styles, residential patterns) are recognized to be poor indicators of ethnicity, there tends to be a steady growth in the search for "inner" or "concealed" signs of a person's "real" identity. The maiming and mutilation of ethnicized bodies is a desperate effort to restore the validity of somatic markers of "otherness" in the face of the uncertainties posed by census labels, demographic shifts and linguistic changes which make ethnic affiliations less somatic and bodily, more social and elective. Mixed marriages, of the sort that have long taken place in many cosmopolitan regions and cities, are the biggest obstacles to simple tests of ethnic "otherness" (Hayden 1996). It is such facts that set the stage for the body as a site for resolving uncertainty through brutal forms of violation, investigation, deconstruction and disposal.

This proposal - linking categorical uncertainty to the bodily brutalities of ethnocide - builds on other components of a general theory of ethnic violence, many of which are already in place: the classificatory policies of many colonial states; the large involuntary migrations created by such powerful states as Stalin's U.S.S.R.; the confusions created by policies of affirmative action applied by democratic constitutions to quasi-ethnic classifications, such as the "Scheduled" Castes created by the Indian Constitution; the stimuli of arms, money, and political support involved in diasporic populations, creating what Benedict Anderson (1994) has called "long-distance" nationalism; the velocity of image-circulation created by CNN, faxes, phones and other media in exposing populations in one place to the goriest details of violence in another; the major social upheavals since 1989 in Eastern Europe and elsewhere that have created dramatic fears about winners and losers in the new open market, thus creating new forms of scapegoating, as with Jews and Gypsies in Romania (Verdery 1990).

These larger forces - global mass-mediation, increased migration, both forced and voluntary, sharp transformations in national

economies, severed links between territory, citizenship and ethnic affiliation - return us to the theme of globalization, within which the argument was earlier framed. It is not hard to see the general ways in which transnational forces impinge upon local ethnic instabilities. Hayden's (1996) discussion of national populations, censuses and constitutions in the former Yugoslavia, and the resultant drive to eliminate the "unimaginable" in new national formations is one clear demonstration of the steps that lead from global and European politics (and history) to imperial break-up and ethnic meltdown, especially in those zones characterized by the greatest degree of ethnic mixture through intermarriage. But the road from constitutional mandates to bodily brutality cannot wholly be handled at the level of categorical contradiction. The peculiar and ghastly forms of vivisection that have characterized recent ethnocidal violence (both in Eastern Europe and elsewhere) carry a surplus of rage that calls for an additional interpretive frame, in which uncertainty, purity, treachery and bodily violence can be linked. This surplus or excess makes sense of the hyper - rationalities - noted throughout this essay - that accompany what seems to be the hysteria of these events: the quasi-ritual order, the attention to detail, the specificity of bodily violation, the systematicity of the forms of degradation.

In an earlier effort to analyze the link between large-scale identities, the abstraction of large numbers and the theater of the body, I suggested that global forces are best seen as "imploding" into localities, deforming their normative climate, recasting their politics, representing their contingent characters and plots as instances of larger narratives of betrayal and loyalty (Appadurai 1996a:149-157). In the present context, the idea of implosion might account for actions at the most local of globalized sites - the ethnicized body, which in already confused and contradictory circumstances, can become the most natural, the most intimate and thus the most horrifying site for tracking the somatic signs of the enemy within. In ethnocidal violence, what is

sought is just that somatic stabilization which globalization-in a variety of ways - inherently makes impossible. In a twisted version of Popperian norms for verification in science, paranoid conjectures produce dismembered refutations.[7]

The view of ethnocidal violence between social intimates advanced here is not only about uncertainty about the "Other". Obviously, these actions indicate a deep and dramatic uncertainty about the ethnic Self. They arise in circumstances where the lived experience of large labels becomes unstable, indeterminate and socially volatile, so that violent action is required to satisfy one's sense of one's categorical self. But of course the violent epistemology of bodily violence, the "theater of the body" on which this violence is performed, is never truly cathartic, satisfying or terminal. It only leads to a deepening of social wounds, an epidemic of shame, a collusion of silence, and a violent need for forgetting. All these effects add fresh underground fuel for new episodes of violence. This is also partly a matter of the pre-emptive quality of such violence: let me kill you before you kill me. Uncertainty about identification and violence can lead to actions, reactions, complicities and anticipations that multiply the pre-existing uncertainty about labels. Together, these forms of uncertainty call for the worst kind of certainty: dead certainty.

Notes

Acknowledgments. A slightly different version of this paper will appear in *Public Culture*, Winter 1998, Vol. 10, No. 2. Earlier versions of this essay were presented before audiences in Amsterdam, Chicago, Cambridge (USA), New Delhi, Paris and Rio de Janeiro. The valuable

[7] The issues alluded to in these concluding remarks will be pursued more fully in the larger work of which this essay is a part. Close attention will be paid to the question of what distinguishes situations which share a large number of features with other situations of globalized stress but do not produce ethnocidal violence. Likewise, the complex epidemiology that relates various forms of knowledge (including propaganda, rumor and memory) to various forms of uncertainty will be explored more fully.

criticisms and suggestions offered to me on these occasions were too numerous to fully engage in this revision. The most recent presentation of parts of this argument was made at the conference on "Alternative Modernities" held at the India International Centre, New Delhi, on December 16-20, 1997. On this last occasion, I recieved valuable comments and suggestions from many participants, and must make special note of Rajiv Bhargava, Geeta Kapur, Mahmood Mamdani and Kumkum Sangaree. Special mention must be made of Veena Das who read the current version and some associated papers with great care and sympathy and whose comments, based on her own on-going work on violence, will be most valuable for my continued work on this project.

Many persons who raised valuable questions at these various fora cannot be named here, for the list would be too long. I must however note the encouragement, queries and suggestions of the following persons: Anthony Appiah, Fredrik Barth, Jean-Francois Bayart, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Sheila Fitzpatrick, Susan Gal, Manu Goswami, Michael Herzfeld, Pradeep Jeganathan, Beatrice Jaguaribe, Rashid Khalidi, David Laitin, Ben Lee, Birgit Mayer, Achille Mbembe, Candido Mendes, Federico Neiburg, Peter Pels, Enrique Rodrigues, Janet Roitman, Roger Rouse, Livio Sansone, Doris Sommer, George Steinmetz, Mary Steedly, Ron Suny, Stanley Tambiah, Peter van der Veer and Unni Wikan. Special thanks are due to Carol Breckenridge and Peter Geschiere, friendly critics and patient creditors, who urged me to pay equal attention to deadlines and to deliberation.

References Cited

Abu-Lughod, Janet L.
1993, *The World System in the Thirteenth Century: Dead-end or Precursor?*, Washington, DC: American Historical Association.

Anderson, Benedict R.
1983, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* London, New York: Verso.

1994, "Exodus", *Critical Inquiry* 20(2):314-327.

Appadurai, Arjun
1996(a), *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization,* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
1996(b), "Sovereignty without Territoriality", *The Geography of Identity,* P. Yaeger, ed. p. 40-58. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Barber, Benjamin R.
1996, *Jihad vs. McWorld,* New York: Ballantine Books.

Bauman, Zygmunt
1997, *Postmodernity and its Discontents,* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Beck, Ulrich
1994, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order,* Stanford,CA: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre
1977, *Outline of a Theory of Practice,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Comaroff, Jean
1985, *Body of Power, Spirit and Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People,* Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press.

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

Das, Veena
1990, *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia,* Delhi, New York: Oxford University Press.
1995, *Critical Events: An Anthropological perspective on contemporary India*, Delhi, New York, Oxford University Press.

Desjarlais, Robert and A. Kleinman
1994, "Violence and Demoralization in the New World Disorder" *Anthropology Today* 10 (5):9-12.

Devisch, Rene
1995, "Frenzy, Violence and Ethical Renewal in Kinshasa", *Public Culture* 7(3):593-629.

Douglas, Mary
1966, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Purity and Taboo,* London, Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
1973, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, London, New York: Routledge.

Durkheim, Emile
1951, *Suicide, a Study in Sociology*, Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
Evans-Pritchard, Edward E.
1937, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande,* Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

Feldman, Allen
1991, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fitzpatrick, Sheila
1991, *The Problem of Class Identity in Nep Society. In Russia in the Era of the Nep: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture.* Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch and Richard Stites, eds. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
1995, "Lives Under Fire: Autobiographical Narratives and their Challenges in Stalin's Russia," *In De Russie et d'ailleurs.* Pp. 225-232. Paris: Institut D'Etudes Slaves

Friedman, Jonathan
1994, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*, Stanford,CA: Stanford University Press.

Geschiere, Peter
1997, *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa,* Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.

Giddens, Anthony
1991, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge, UK.: Polity Press in association with Basil Blackwell.

Hannerz, Ulf
1992, *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning,* New York: Columbia University Press.
1996, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places*, London, New York: Routledge.

Harvey, David
1989, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change.*

Hayden, Robert
1996, "Imagined Communities and Real Victims: Self-determination and Ethnic Cleansing in Yugoslavia", *American Ethnologist* 23(4):783-801.

Herzfeld, Michael
1997, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*, New York: Routledge.
1992, *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hoffman, Piotr
1986, *Doubt, Time, Violence.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
1989, *Violence in Modern Philosophy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Huntington, Samuel P.
1996, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon and Schuster.

Ismail, Quadri
1995, "Unmooring Identity: The Antinomies of Elite Muslim Self-Representation in Modern Sri Lanka", *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*. Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail, eds. Pp. 55-105.Colombo, Sri Lanka: Social Scientists' Association.

Jeganathan, Pradeep
1997, *After a Riot: Anthropological Locations of Violence in an Urban Sri Lankan Community*, Ph.D. dissertation. Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago.

Kaplan, Robert
1995, "Coming Anarchy and the Nation-state under Siege", *Identity and Conflict,* G. M. Tamas, ed. Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace.

Kristeva, Julia
1991, *Strangers to Ourselves,* New York: Columbia University Press.

Lash, Scott and John Urry
1987, *The End of Organized Capitalism*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
1994, *Economies of Signs and Space*, London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Malkki, Liisa H.
1995, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Martin, Emily
1992, "The End of the Body?:", *American Ethnologist* 19(1):121-140.

Mauss, Marcel
1973, "Techniques of the Body", *Economy and Society* 2(1): 70-85.

Mbembe, Achille
1992, "The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarity in the Postcolony", Janet Roitman, trans. *Public Culture* 4(2):1-30.

Nordstrom, Carolyn
1997, *A Different Kind of War Story, Philadelphia*: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Pandey, Gyanendra
1997, Can a Muslim be an Indian, Unpublished mss.

Price, Monroe E.
1994, "The Market for Loyalties: Electronic Media and the Global Competition for Allegiances", The YaleLaw Journal 104(3):667-705.

Proctor, Robert N.
1995, "The Destruction of Lives Not Worth Living", Deviant Bodies. Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla, eds. Pp. 170-196. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Robertson, Roland
1990, "Mapping the Global Condition: Globalization as the Central Concept", *Theory, Culture and Society* 7:19-30.
1992, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, London: Sage.

Rouse, Roger
1995, "Thinking through Transnationalism: Notes on the Cultural Politics of Class Relations in the Contemporary United States", *Public Culture* 7(2):353-402.

Sassen, Saskia
1991, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
1996(a), *Losing Control: Sovereignty in an Age of Globalizatio*, New York: Columbia University Press.
1996(b), "Whose City is It? Globalization and the Formation of New Claims", *Public Culture* (2):205-224.

Simmel, Georg
1950, "The Stranger", *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Kurt H. Wolff, trans. and ed. Pp.402-408. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.

Sutton, Donald S.
1995, "Consuming Counterrevolution: The Ritual and Culture of Cannibalism in Wuxuan, Guangxi", China, May to July 1968. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37(1): 136-172

Tambiah, Stanley. J.
1996, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and*

Collective Violence in South Asia, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Taylor, Charles
1992, *Multiculturalism and "The politics of recognition" An Essay*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

van Gennep, Arnold
1965, *The Rites of Passage*, London: Kegan Paul.

Verdery, Katherine.
1990, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wallerstein, Immanuel
1974, *The Modern World-System*, San Diego: Academic Press.

Zizek, Slavoj.
1989, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London, New York: Verso.

Buddhist Nuns, Nationalistic Ideals and Revivalist Discourse*

Nirmala S. Salgado

This essay discusses the increasing prominence given by the media to Buddhist nuns and their attempts to organize them on a national scale. Buddhist nuns or "Ten-Precept-Mothers" have been present in Sri Lanka for about a century. However, they have only seriously attracted the attention of the national media and the state since the 1980's. This essay seeks to trace the beginning of sustained government interest in nuns as well as media rhetoric on the activities of the nuns, contextualizing these within the framework of Buddhist revivalism and institutional androcentrism.

I. Introduction

Scholars have investigated a wide variety of aspects pertaining to 19th and 20th century Buddhist revivalist movements in Sri Lanka.

* I am grateful for an Augustana Faculty Research Grant which helped me conduct the initial research for this paper in 1995 as well as grants from the American Academy of Religion and the Augustana Faculty Research Foundation which assisted in finalizing research for this paper in 1997. I owe thanks to Steve Collins who conducted an NEH Seminar on *Asceticism in South Asia: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism* held at the University of Chicago in 1996 as well as colleagues in the seminar for comments on an early draft of this paper which was prepared during the seminar. In Sri Lanka, I am indebted to my interviewees and to Indira Salgado as well as Ananda and Rukmini Kulasuriya. I am also thannkful to Sandagomi Coperahewa for his assistance in locating important materials. George Bond and Robert Launay provided me with insightful comments as I revised this eay as did Paul Westman, whose help and encouragementwere indispensable.

However, studies documenting the rise of Buddhist nuns[1] in the last ten to fifteen years have been few.[2] Given the revivalism of Buddhism in the context of a heightened civil war in recent times, and the concomitant networking of some Buddhist nuns, I argue that it is necessary to contextualize Buddhist nuns' activities within the wider framework of Buddhist revivalist discourse in Sri Lanka as a whole. In this paper I will investigate one particular aspect of the revival of the nuns, viz., the representations of the attempts to organize nuns in the 1980's and 1990's. More specifically, I will contextualize these representations and the activities of the nuns in a Sinhalese Buddhist revivalism (or nationalism) developed in the decades since independence.

While the roots of the Buddhist revival have been traced by scholars to as far back as the eighteenth century[3], Buddhist modernism, "characterized by the emphasis laid on rationalist elements" and considered as "a reinterpretation of the objective of the Buddhist religion in terms of social reform and the building of a better world"[4], appears only in the late nineteenth century. At that time, Buddhist revivalist activity primarily involved non-governmental lay organizations[5]. Members of the Sangha became increasingly articulate on matters of public concern after the 1940's[6] and expressions of the public assertion

1 By "nun", I refer not to the fully ordained *bhikkhunī* , but rather to the Ten-Precept-Mother or *Dasa Sil Mata* who has chosen to lead a professionally celibate life observing ten-precepts as part of a lay Buddhist ordination and lives in community with others like herself.

2 These include T. Bartholomeusz, *Women Under the Bo Tree*. Cambridge, Cambridge U P 1994 and R. Gombrich and G. Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*. Delhi, Motilal Barnarsidass, 1988.

3 See for example, K. Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750-1900*, Berkeley, U of California Press, 1976 and A.H. Mirando, *Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the 17th and 18th centuries*, Dehiwala, Tisara Prakasayo, 1985.

4 H. Bechert, "Sangha, State, Society , "Nation": Persistence of Traditions in "Post-Traditional" Buddhist Societies." *Daedalus*, Vol. 102, No. 1, 1973, p.91.

5 Malalgoda, 1976 pp. 237-242 and Bond, 1988, p.63

6 S. J. Tambiah *Buddhism Betrayed*, Chicago, U of Chicago P, 1992, pp. 15-21

of Buddhism as the national religion emerged clearly in the post-independence period.[7] Despite criticisms that monks who engaged in politics were compromising their ascetic vocation, the political activity of the Sangha was accepted "when the survival of Buddhism itself was considered to be at stake"[8], a situation that was to continue into the 1980's and 1990's.

The increasing involvement of the Sangha in social and political affairs might be considered an important feature of "Protestant Buddhism"[9], a Buddhism that arose both in response to Protestant missionary activity and also adopted forms of Protestant Christianity.[10] The monk came to be perceived and respected as a visible symbol of Buddhist nationalism.[11] Bartholomeusz has noted that the emergence of the nuns in Sri Lanka in the late nineteenth century Buddhist revival, was an expression of Protestant Buddhism.[12] Protestant Buddhist leaders hail from the urban educated elite.[13] They were effective in promoting the cause of the nuns in the late nineteenth century, and are still actively involved in doing so. A century ago however, the nuns were not perceived as direct participants in political affairs as they are now. I plan to examine how nuns have begun to emerge in the political arena.

Although the urban elite has been influential in reforming Buddhism since the late nineteenth century, their bourgeois rationality and doctrinal interpretation of Buddhism alienated them from the rural peasantry and urban poor who subscribed to a more emotional form of Buddhist devotionalism[14]. Bechert, discussing this tension in terms of "modernist" and "traditionalist" or "non-modern" ways of thinking indicates "the Buddhist revival could only succeed as a political force

7 G. Obeyesekere, "Religious Symbol and Political Change in Ceylon." *Modern Ceylon Studies*, Vol. 1, 1970, pp. 48-51.
8 Bechert, 1973, p.90.
9 Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988, pp.226-229.
10 Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988, p.7.
11 Obeyesekere, 1970, pp. 51-52.
12 Bartholomeusz, 1994, pp.24-26.
13 Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988, pp.222-224 and p.343
14 Obeyesekere, 1970, pp. 61-62.

if the rural masses were activated" as well as the monks.[15] Differences between the urban-based elite and the rural population have emerged when Protestant Buddhist leaders, recognizing the need to influence Buddhists in rural areas, have attempted to impose reforms on the latter. Protestant Buddhist endeavors to involve Buddhist nuns in social service programs, for example, met with failure.[16] Nevertheless, Protestant Buddhist leaders have continued to include monks and nuns in projects that aim to attract the support of the population at large. The emergence of the nuns in the 1980's and 1990's, coinciding primarily with the governance of the United National Party (UNP), has resulted in the perception of their association with that party.

Nationalist movements express the notion of an imagined community in both space and time[17]. The unity of space as well as the unity of time, both of which are expressed in Buddhist revivalist discourse, are evident in the rhetoric of Buddhist nuns' activities. The demarcation of Buddhist space in Sri Lanka has been legitimated by modern-day nationalists seeking authority in the Pāli chronicles such as the *Dīpavamsa* and the *Mahāvamsa*. Nationalists claim that these chronicles, authored by Buddhist monks, show that Lanka can be identified as the island of Dhamma (Buddhist Truth). The chronicles appear to glorify the reigns of Buddhist kings who are in turn considered exemplary by political and monastic leaders today.[18] Both governmental and non-governmental organizations have implemented programs that concretize and localize the definitions of space and time that have been extrapolated from the chronicles by Buddhist revivalists in Sri Lanka. While redefining dimensions of space and time, religious nationalisms often have a transnational character[19].

15 Bechert, 1973, p. 92.
16 Bond, 1988, p. 67.
17 See B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. London, Verso, 1983, S. Kemper, *The Presence of the Past: Chronicles, Politics and Culture in Sinhala Life*. Ithaca, Cornell U Press, 1991, and P. Van der Veer *Religious Nationalism*. Berkeley, U of California P, 1994.
18 Kemper, 1991, 161-193
19 Van der Veer, 1994, xii.

They are transnational in that they find inspiration as well as funding from abroad. Such nationalisms claim to have relevance for all citizens of the country, but paradoxically reinforce a parochialization of universals in that national identity roots itself in a particular religious tradition.[20] I will demonstrate that this is true of Buddhist revivalist projects. An examination of the development of Buddhist revivalist ideology in the 1950's and specific government and other projects will help shed light on the general characteristics of Buddhist revivalism in Sri Lanka and the extent to which the nuns' activities, as expressed in the media, are perceived to participate in the Buddhist revival.

II The Rhetoric of Unity and the Discourse of Deprivation

(i) Buddha Jayanti

Celebrated in 1956, Buddha Jayanti, (commemorating the 2500th anniversary of the Buddha's demise and realization of final liberation or *parinibbāna*), marked the demarcation of the unity of Buddhist space and time. According to the chronicles, the Buddha realized *parinibbāna* at the moment that Prince Vijaya, founder of the Sinhalese people, landed in the island. A Buddhist commentary states that 2500 years after the Buddha's demise, calculated to coincide with the year 1956 C.E., there would be a renewal and resurgence of Buddhism.[21] Celebrated barely eight years after independence, Buddha Jayanti inspired the Buddhist revivalists of the new nation to express their concerns for reform. A Buddhist Committee of Enquiry, (composed of seven monks and seven laypeople), had been established by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (independently of the government), to investigate the state of Buddhism.[22] The committee's report, *The Betrayal of Buddhism* documented the need to "restore Buddhism to its rightful place"[23] i.e., Buddhism as it was believed to

20 Van der Veer, 1994, p. 23.

21 Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation and Response*. Columbia, U of South Carolina P, 1988, p. 75.

22 Tambiah, 1992, pp. 30-31, and Bond, 1988, p. 80.

23 Bond, 1988, p. 80.

have existed before the colonial disestablishment of the tradition. Bond, writing in the late 80's, indicates that all later governments of Sri Lanka have followed this policy[24]. *The Betrayal of Buddhism* emphasized the need to improve Buddhist schools that had been disadvantaged in the face of competition with Christian schools.[25] The 1950's mark a high point in the Buddhist revival as monastic and lay associations formed and attempted to pressure the government into implementing national policy in an independent Ceylon .[26] The *Betrayal of Buddhism*, in emphasizing the decline of Buddhism since the glorious days of the Buddhist kings celebrated in the chronicles,[27] appeals to a conceptualization of temporal unity according to which

> the historical horizon and the present are not absolutely distinguished from each other. When contemporary Sinhalas speak of the past, they do so as if yesterday's actors were moved by today's motives, as if today's criteria of description and classification were available to them thousands of years ago.[28]

This notion of time would be expressed repeatedly in the years to come.

Notwithstanding the possibility that the chronicles might have been authored by foreign monks[29] and the debatable historicity of the chronicles themselves[30], the perspectives of contemporary nationalists continue to reflect conceptualizations of space and time allegedly found in the chronicles. The predominant nationalist ideology of the 1950's defined Buddhist space and time by also contrasting the unsatisfactory

24 Bond, 1988, p.90

25 Tambiah 1992 pp. 34-35

26 Bond, 1988, pp.75-95.

27 Tambiah, 1992, p. 33

28 Kemper, 1991, p. 12

29 Kemper, 1991, p. 43.

30 Kemper, 1991 pp. 79-116 and Tambiah 1992, pp. 129-187.

present state of affairs to a glorious past, much in the same vein as *The Betrayal of Buddhism.* This "discourse of deprivation" was expressed in the rhetoric of development projects as well as in the mobilization of Buddhist monks and nuns.

In the past few decades, tropes of spatial unity have figured prominently in the discourse of Buddhist organizations which promote the ideological construct of an undivided island as a bastion of Buddhism, a frame of reference in terms of which present day events are interpreted. Visions of temporal unity reinforce those of spatial reality. Conjuring in the present a Buddhist society reminiscent of the hallowed past of the chronicles, nationalists have continued to affirm a temporal unity in different ways. These endeavors have had an impact at a national level. For example, in the 1960's, the government attempted to replace the Saturday/Sunday weekend (considered too Western), with poya days (Buddhist lunar holidays)[31]. More recently, full-moon poya days, associated with sacred events of historical importance to Buddhists, have come to be occasions for the display of power clothed in colorful pageantry and processions.[32] The growing public attention given to large processions centering around Buddhist temples on these poya days, all of which have been declared national public holidays, also attest to an idealized fusion of spatial and temporal unity. The processions, clearly demarcating a sacred Buddhist space within and outside the immediate temple grounds, suggest a heightened level of participation and the creation of "ontic place" which "generates sacred ontic forces that pull the pilgrim toward the conforming-participating center, away from the validating-observing periphery." [33]

(ii) Development Projects: The Sarvodaya Shramadāna Movement and the Gamudāwa

Since independence in 1948, governmental and non-governmental projects have implicitly or explicitly been expressed in terms of Buddhist

31 Bond, 1988, p. 97.

32 Among the most celebrated poya days are Vesak, which honors the birth, enlightenment and demise of the Buddha, and Poson, which commemorates the arrival from India of the Elder monk, Mahinda, and the beginnings of the Buddhist mission in Sri Lanka

33 E. Valentine Daniel, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropology of Violence.* Princeton: Princeton U P, 1996, p.62.

revivalist ideologies. Development projects include village oriented development schemes such as the Sarvodaya Shramadāna Movement launched by A.T. Ariyaratne in 1958 and the more recently inaugurated *Gamudāwa* (Village Awakening) program. Other such projects include the Mahawäli Development Project, a program geared toward irrigating the dry and sparsely populated north-east of the country, creating a new homeland for settlers, as well as the archeological restoration of ancient Buddhist places of worship.[34] The media discourse on these projects appealed to the material and spiritual splendor of Lanka during the time of the ancient kings glorified in the Chronicles.

Ariyaratne's program was originally influenced by Gandhi's Indian Sarvodaya movement[35]. Literally meaning "the uplift of all", Sarvodaya, as translated by Ariyaratne, means "the awakening of all" as a reminder of the sacred event and time of the Buddha's enlightenment or awakening.[36] Sarvodaya has attempted to bring about both material as well as spiritual development to villages in Sri Lanka. While Ariyaratne and others refrain from identifying Sarvodaya as explicitly "Buddhist,"[37] they incorporate explicit Buddhist symbolism. The poverty of the village and the specific program implemented for its alleviation are understood in terms of a specifically Buddhist notion of suffering. Its urban middle-class leadership and emphasis on canonical texts are indicative of features of Protestant Buddhism. Although adherents of other religions are employees of Sarvodaya and the movement has worked in non-Buddhist majority areas, Sarvodaya clearly articulates its goals within a Buddhist frame of reference.

Sarvodaya also expresses a Buddhist nationalist rhetoric. In

34 According to one report, noted by Kemper 1988, p. 170, the government is said to have spent 1,000 million rupees on some of these restoration projects between 1977-1987.

35 Bond, 1988, pp. 243-244.

36 Bond, 1988, 262-266, and J. Macy, *Dharma and Development,* West Hartford, Kumarian Press, 1983, pp.31-40.

37 Bond, 1988, pp. 255-257.

appealing to the notion of the island of Dhamma and attempting to emulate and develop values of a Buddhist past found in the Chronicles,[38] Sarvodaya recreates Buddhist space and time. Sarvodaya's Indian inspiration and foreign funding attest to its transnational character, and within Sri Lanka, its claim to be applicable to individuals of all traditions[39], underscores its apparent universality. Additionally, its goal of awakening villages throughout the country and its suggestion that a well educated Buddhist monk be active in every village in Sri Lanka[40] clearly attest to the spatial affirmation of Buddhism for the present day.[41]

The state-sponsored *Gamudāwa* program, largely inspired by the activities and aims of Sarvodaya, was implemented after 1977 with Ranasinghe Premadasa's election as Prime Minister. It "derived a good deal both of its agenda and its rhetorical style from Sarvodaya."[42] Although the *Gamudāwa* program was fraught with difficulties,[43] the *Gamudāwa* ceremonies that employed obvious Buddhist symbols were performed on a daily basis in the 1980's.[44] An official program description of the ceremonies explains how they began with a formal procession into the new village, followed by the unveiling of plaques and flags, including the Buddhist as well as the national flag. Then therewas the formal opening of the cooperative store, and the community center. Afterthat the prime minister planted a sapling from the sacred bo-tree in Anuradhapura, one of the most venerated places of Buddhist worship in Sri Lanka...[45]

Brow continues to explain that the prime minister's aim of "planting of bo-trees thus aimed to repeat the pattern of planting bo-

38 Bond, 1988, p. 268.
39 Bond, 1988, p. 257.
40 Bond, 1988, p.282.
41 Also see G. Obeyesekere, 1970, pp. 44-45 for a discussion of the particularization of universals symbolically expressed in the form of four concrete maps of Ceylon that advertise recognizably Buddhist values in the middle of a major highway of Colombo.
42 Brow, 1996, p. 88.
43 Brow, 1996, p. 107.
44 Brow, 1996, p. 105.
45 Brow, 1996, p. 102.

trees throughout Sri Lanka that had followed the arrival of the original sapling at the time of the (3rd. BCE king,) King Devanampiyatissa."[46] The reaffirmation of a spatial and temporal Buddhist identity are evident once again.

III The Political Context, Bhikkhus and Ten-Precept-Mothers

The 1983-1995 period in which I am investigating the activities of Buddhist nuns was dominated by the right-wing United National Party (UNP). J.R. Jayewardene and his UNP had been elected by an overwhelming majority in 1977. He was to remain President until 1988 when Ranasinghe Premadasa, (of the UNP) the former prime minister, was elected. Jayewardene modelled himself on the ancient kings of the chronicles by attempting to create a Dharmishtha Society or a Society of Righteousness.[47] For example, he accelerated the Mahawäli project, an irrigation scheme that recalled the great irrigation projects of the past. However, his presidency was marred by some of the most violent years that Sri Lanka has ever witnessed, as was that of his successor. Rioting against Tamil civilians in 1983 was followed by an effective banning from parliament of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), the only representative Tamil voice in parliament. An increased militancy of the Tamil movement in the North of the island and the state's inability to maintain peace led to the invitation in 1987 of an Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF). The troops of the IPKF (estimated to be at least 55-60,000) became a main target of criticism and encouraged the uprising of the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP), a Sinhala youth movement that was predominantly active in the southern regions of the country. According to some reports, there were as many as 30,000 killings of people in southern Sri Lanka in 1988 and 1989. The government attributed 6,157 killings between 1987 and 1990 to the JVP.[48] The IPKF

46 Brow, 1966, p. 106.
45 Kemper, 1991, pp. 169-175.
48 *Sri Lanka: Extrajudicial Executions, 'Disappearances' and Torture, 1987-1990*. Amnesty International USA, New York, 1990. p.13.

eventually left the country in 1989 and in November of 1989 the leadership of the JVP was quashed. However, the civil strife has yet to abate.

According to Amunugama, the 1980's "... see the rapid politicization of the Sinhala Sangha...The ethnic conflict provided an opportunity for monks to openly engage in social and political activity since it was presented as a problem of national concern".[49] Much of this concern was expressed with reference to a spatial metaphor, in terms of which Sri Lanka was alternatively a "Motherland" that had to be preserved against any divisiveness and a stronghold of the *dhamma* in danger of being violated. In July 1986 the Mavbima Surākīma Vyāpāraya or Movement for the Protection of the Motherland was founded.[50] Participants included prominent Buddhist monks and lay people, who were concerned that the "...division of the country and the weakening of its sovereignty would also diminish, even doom, Buddhism and the Sinhala culture that it supports".[51] The late 'eighties witnessed "disappearances" of countless youth, threats that discouraged people from keeping their businesses open as usual and danger that prevented safe travel. Civilian women, particularly mothers whose children had been reported killed or missing, voiced their protest by organizing and demonstrating both in the North and the South of the country. While a state of Emergency had existed since 1983 and during most of the time under the Jayewardene and Premadasa Presidencies, bombings, assassinations, censorship of media, school closures and the imposition of curfews were not uncommon during the eighties and early nineties.

Premadasa, president until his assassination in 1993, continued to support and develop many of the policies of his predecessor. He showed a special interest in the improvement of Buddhist nunneries and provided them with funding as well as public support. Given the

[49] Amunugama "Buddhaputra or Bhūmiputra? Dilemmas of Modern Sinhala Buddhist Monks in Relation to Ethnic and Political Conflict"*Religion* 21, 1991, p.127

[50] P. Schalk "'Unity and Sovereignty': Key Concepts of a Militant Buddhist Organization in the Present Conflict in Sri Lanka." *Temenos*, 24, 1988, p.5.

[51] Tambiah, 1992, p. 85.

inception of mothers' organizations and protests, the increasing activism of women in the political arena, and the affirmation of Sri Lanka as the "Motherland,"[52] it is perhaps not surprising that the Ten-Precept-*Mothers*, symbolizing a nurturing and professionally celibate religious motherhood, also became more prominent. While Hema Premadasa, the wife of President Premadasa, began to portray herself as a charitable donor to the needy and as the caring "Mother of the Nation,"[53] her husband was instrumental in incorporating nuns in processions and ceremonies that were associated with the *Gamudāwa* ceremonies.[54] After President Premadasa's demise and the subsequent election of a left-wing coalition government, some state support of the nuns continued, albeit less explicitly.

In fact, the 1983-1995 period has proven to be a landmark one for Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka. This time has seen the beginnings of serious government interest and patronage of the nuns at the district and national levels, the establishment of state-supported educational institutions for nuns, the inception of organizations such as the National Sil Mātā Organization or Sil Mātā Jātika Mandalaya (henceforth, SMJM), and a local branch of the well-known international organization, Sakyadhita (Daughters of the Buddha Sakya). These activities and institutions bear witness to increasing government interest in organizing Sri Lankan nuns during this period. Yet, nuns who lack the state benefits and social and religious standing of the monks, enjoy

[52] See K. Jayawardene, *Feminism in Sri Lanka: 1975-1985*, New York, Women's International Resource Exchange, n.d., p.6 and S. Thiruchelvam, *The Dilemma of Theories: A Feminist Perspective,* Women's Education and Research Center, No.36/E15, Oct. 1991, p.45.

[53] M. de Alwis, "Gender, Politics and the Respectable Lady," in P. Jeganathan and Q. Ismail (eds), *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka,* Colombo, Social Scientists Association, 1995, p.147.

[54] Indeed, the representations of the Ten-Precept-Mothers in the public arena seems to counter the claim that "the idealization of motherhood... would seem to entail the exclusion of all non-reproductively-oriented sexualities from the discourse of the nation." A. Parker et. al. (eds), *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, New York, Routledge, 1992, p.6.

significantly less autonomy than the latter via-a-vis the state. Since the state itself is unwilling to antagonize the monks, the state relationship to the nuns is necessarily contextualized within a framework of "institutional androcentrism" i.e. "the view that women indeed may pursue a full-time religious career, but only within a carefully regulated institutional structure that preserves and reinforces the conventionally accepted social standards of male authority and female subordination."[55] The representation of the activities of the nuns and the state relationship to the latter clearly came to subscribe to a Buddhist revivalist (or nationalist) frame of reference that was also institutionally androcentric.

Consonant with Buddhist revivalist ideology, the government and media have expressed the nuns' situation in terms of a discourse of deprivation and a rhetoric of unity. For example, perceptions of the plight of the nuns with respect to their failure to obtain adequate housing, education, etc., have often been contextualized with reference to a pre-established ideological construct of a "golden age" when Buddhism flourished in Lanka and fully ordained nuns enjoyed access to these amenities. Nuns' activities also attest to a unity that is both spatial and temporal, like that expressed since the 1950's.

What warrants examination for my purposes is the increasing governmental promotion of Buddhist revivalism, as it is reflected in its dealings with the community of Buddhist nuns during the 1983-1995 period. Basing my study of this aspect of Buddhist revivalism on interviews and print media, I shall discuss events that illustrate how the nuns' activities can be understood within the political climate of Buddhist revivalism and nationalism. My investigation will focus on the contextualization of: (i) the structuring of organizations of nuns at the district and national levels;(ii) the consolidation by nuns of a national Buddhist identity in space and time as evidenced by their explicit politicization in "peace-walks" etc.; and (iii) transnational aspects of the revival of Buddhist nuns as seen in the establishment of a branch of the international Buddhist women's organization in Colombo etc.

55 A. Sponberg "Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism" p. 13 in *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*, ed. J.I. Cabezon, SUNY 1992.

IV Early Initiatives: The Department of Buddhist Affairs and the Sil Mātā 1983-1995; creating "map" and "census."

The state, through the Department of Buddhist Affairs (henceforth Department), a department that was established within the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in 1981, began to directly oversee Buddhist matters. The Department was established to attend to the welfare of Buddhist monks in particular. This included the registration of Buddhist monks and the establishment of an ecclesiastical court system for monks.[56] Not surprisingly, the Department soon began to oversee the welfare of Buddhist nuns. Preliminary contacts initiated with nuns in January 1983 were to continue during a time of increasing unrest and violence during and after July of 1983.

Early communications undertaken by Eardley Ratwatte, the first Commissioner for Buddhist Affairs, to map locations of their hermitages, instilled among the nuns a sense of "awakening" *unanduwa*[57]. Regional offices of the central government (kaccheris) contacted hermitages throughout the island. The Department sent questionnaires to nuns' dwellings throughout the country, and made arrangements to register[58] them, and issue them identity cards.[59] By July 1986, approximately 1030 (out of an estimated 2500-3000) nuns

56 Kemper, 1991, p. 180.

57 Letter from Soma Māniyo, November 1995. Soma Māniyo (not her actual name) is a nun who was officially elected to one of the committees of the SMJM. Interestingly, the trope of awakening, previously used in reference to the enlightenment of the Buddha and later to Sarvodaya, is used once again.

58 The registration of the nuns was to prove useful later e.g., when the government attempted to organize the nuns for social work, they did so by contacting only those who were already registered See *Budusarana*, 17 October 1984.

59 The value of these identity cards has been a matter of dispute. The nuns I have spoken with maintain that these cards have no use whatsoever as they are not given the recognition that is given to the national identity cards (which most of them already have).

throughout the country had been officially registered by the government and become recipients of identity cards.[60] Although many nuns did not respond to the questionnaires, census data on the nuns, nationwide in scope, had been collected for the first time ever in Sri Lanka and the mapping of hermitages of nuns had begun.

Efforts to unite the nuns on a small scale first occurred in December 1983 with the convocation of monthly meetings in the Colombo area. Anderson has indicated that the construction of map and census have played an essential role in the nationalist imaginaire.[61] The state's first endeavors to locate *sil mātās* geographically and numerically on the national map in the 'eighties were not unlike attempts to organize the monks in the fifties. Tambiah, describing the formation of monks' organizations or *sangha sabhā*s states that "...the importance of these efforts is that central government officials and local government servants used their positions and their networks to organize associations of monks at the local level."[62] J. R. Jayewardene had explicitly stated as an objective his support of Buddhism and Buddhist interests.[63] The early state contact with the nuns appears to have coincided with these objectives.

The Department, in keeping with Protestant Buddhist objectives to form Buddhist associations and promote the education of Buddhists, followed through on its initial contact with the nuns by attempting to organize monthly meetings, raise funds, educate nuns and engage them in social services.[64] Weekly classes in Pali and

60 This data was obtained from interviews I conducted in 1984-1986 with Padma Dinapala, Cultural Officer at the Department of Buddhist Affairs.

61 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. London, Verso, 1993 pp.163-185.

62 Tambiah, 1992, p.43.

63 D. Little, *Sri Lanka: The Invention of Enmity*, Washington, 1994, pp. 78-82.

64 The government attempt to engage nuns in social services indicated to me by a government official I interviewed in 1996. This is also corroborated in a newspaper article, *Budusarana*, 17 October 1984, which suggests that nuns should be trained in social service work. Many nuns were critical of attempts to involve them in social service maintaining that they had chosen a life of renunciation rather than involvement in society.

Buddhism inaugurated in Colombo in 1984[65] expanded and were followed by the establishment of daily classes at a girls' school in the Colombo area.[66] Echoing earlier Buddhist attempts to create a fund for the education of needy Buddhists,[67] the government established a Trust Fund for nuns with an initial grant of 50,000 rupees.

The discourse of deprivation can be seen in Ratwatte's 1984 appeal to "all Buddhists" as potential contributors to this fund to "improve the living conditions and knowledge of the Dhamma of the *Dasasil Mātā was*....some of whom are provided with basic facilities, and some of whom do not have any".[68] Within a few years, public donations to the fund increased it to the desired goal of 100,000 rupees. A nun, reflecting on the activities of *sil mātās* at the time, affirms their dire predicament:

> Throughout the country there are scattered *sil mātās* who are helped financially by devoted villagers and their own relatives. They live in tiny aramas and in order to worship they erect buildings in sacred places and follow the Dhamma while undergoing great hardships. While running Sunday schools and meditation classes, saying pirit and giving talks on the Dhamma, they live their lives quietly, homeless (*anagārika*) and going on the Brahma path (*brahamācharinī*) according to *sīla*. These people have only liberation (*vimukti*) as their goal. Many *sil mātās* have no education apart from their religious education. It is no secret that among these there are

65 Daily News, 28 May 1984 and Daily News, 7 June 1984.

66 For more information on the education of the nuns see N. S. Salgado, "Ways of Knowing and Transmitting Religious Knowledge: Case Studies of Therav da Buddhist Nuns," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, Vol, 19, No.1. 1996.

67 Malalgoda, 1976, p. 249.

68 *Island*, 11 April 84.

> some who have studied in schools up to grade five or six while others have had no education.[69]

The nun's statement clearly resonates with Ratwatte's appeal.

It is likely that the nuns, barred from the privileges given to the community of fully ordained Buddhist monks, have always been in need of assistance. However, it is only in the 1980's and 1990's that the government and concerned lay people have begun to address it consistently and publicly. Moreover, these needs are clearly expressed in terms of a Buddhist frame of reference that ties in with earlier expressions of revivalist discourse. In these early stages the expressions of the trope of unity might be seen primarily in organizational and spatial terms such as (i) in the attempts to create a monthly forum at a local level, (ii) the inception of a uniform education for nuns, also at a local level and (iii) the attempt to put nuns on the map by contacting hermitages nation-wide and establishing a common fund for them. But at this stage, the "unity" that was forged was incipient at best. A convergence of the discourse of spatial and temporal unity was to be a later development.

V. Structuring district and national level organizations: 1985-1988: towards the creation of Sacred Space

(i) District Organizations.[70]

In January 1985, Abhaya Weerakoon replaced Ratwatte as the Commissioner for Buddhist Affairs.[71] Monthly meetings that had

[69] Letter from Soma Sil *Mātā*, November 1 1995. Soma Sil *Mātā* (not her actual name) was an elected official of the SMJM at the time that she wrote this letter. Although she writes and speaks as an individual, I have found that her views are held by other nuns, both within and outside the elected body of the SMJM.

[70] Much of the information in this section derives from interviews with Weerakoon conducted in November 1995.

[71] Prior to his appointment in Colombo, Weerakoon had attempted to begin organizing Buddhist nuns in his locality, the Kurunegala area. However, his plans did not materialize because of his transfer to Colombo.

only been accessible to nuns in the Colombo area, had spread to five other districts within two years of his tenure (i.e. to Anuradhapura, Gampaha, Kandy, Kalutara and Kurunegala). The Department then encouraged nuns in these districts to form district organizations. Hermitages which were receptive to the suggestion, invited officials from the Department to participate in the procedure. The first district committees represented the five areas where the monthly meetings had first been held.

Between 1986-1988, district organizations throughout most of the country were established with the election of a president and a secretary for each organization which met monthly.[72] The organizations which allowed nuns to participate as district representatives worked within an institutionally androcentric frame of reference. The Department considered it essential that the nuns win the favor of the monks. At the monthly meetings, a monk would administer the ten precepts to the nuns and then deliver a sermon. The meetings themselves were held with the consent of senior monks and often at a well-known Buddhist temple. Moreover, the entire program for the day was organized under the auspices of the government. One nun describing the program stated:

> Cultural officers and government agents went to these organizations and established a monthly program of religious activities for the day. On that day there were reflections on *sīl* (ethical behavior), meditation, discussions on the *Dhamma* and *Buddhapujā* , a sermon given by an important reverend monk ... The *sīl mātā* organizations were addressed, publications were distributed, and competitions on the knowledge of the Dhamma took place etc. It was thanks to the help given by the Department of Buddhist Affairs that the entire day's program could take place.[73]

[72] The meetings of the national body of nuns were to follow a similar program later.

[73] Letter from Soma Sil mātā, November 1 1995.

The Department suggested procedures for electing district and national bodies, later adopted by the nuns. It was decided that at the initial meeting of the nuns in a district, senior nuns of a district were to elect three or four nuns to a "Nomination Committee" that would in turn choose the district representatives who would hold office for three years. The elected officials totalling ten to fifteen nuns of the district bodies would generally include a president, a secretary, three vice-presidents and a few junior representatives. The district organizations were to eventually spread to a total of seventeen districts and led to the establishment of a fully fledged national organization of nuns which later evoked the trope of spatial unity.

(ii) The establishment of a National Organization and National Meetings

After the District Organizations had met for about six months, the Department encouraged the formation of a national organization of nuns. Election procedures for the election of district bodies were used to elect a national organization. Members from district committees in the island met in Colombo and chose from among themselves an electoral committee that, in turn, appointed the first ever national organization of nuns in Sri Lanka. Thus the SMJM or the National Sil *Mātā* Organization[74] was founded in 1986.

VI Spatial and Temporal Unity: Consolidation of "Ontic Place" and Time[75]

(i) National Conventions of Nuns

According to Daniel, the difference between "epistemic space" and "ontic place" is that the former provides "the outsider a way of seeing

[74] There was some debate as to whether the national body should be one of "*sil mātās*" (Precept-Mothers) or "*dasa sil mātās*" (Ten-Precept-Mothers). The decision to name the body a *sil mātā* Mandalaya was made with the intention of including female renunciants who did not necessarily observe all ten precepts.

[75] Daniel makes a distinction between "space" as epistemic and "place" as ontic, p. 57. While I find his definition of ontic and epistemic useful, in this essay, I do not distinguish "space" and "place."

a part of the world," whereas the latter is a place in which a people "found a way of being in the world."[76] The creation of ontic place and time becomes evident in the representation of the participation of nuns in public national events. The first state-supported[77] national convention of nuns was held in December 1986 in the sacred city of Anuradhapura, associated with the introduction of Buddhism in the 3rd century BCE and the establishment of the Bhikkhunī Order in Lanka. The date for the meeting was chosen to coincide with the full moon (poya) commemorating the arrival of Bhikkhunī Sanghamittā with a branch from the Bo or Bodhi tree[78] and the first ordination of *Bhikkhunīs* in Sri Lanka. Buddhist rituals including the ordination of several nuns[79]and a procession in honor of Sanghamittā marked the celebration of this event.[80] Here there is evidence of a "meaningful ontic experience."[81] with the entrance of the nuns into a performative mode of being.

The national convention of the nuns at Anuradhapura needs to be contextualized in the political and social climate of the mid-eighties. In 1985, Tamil militants had shot and killed Buddhist pilgrims around the Bodhi tree in Anuradhapura. This symbolic attack on sacred space provoked Buddhist monks to stage a protest. In 1986, Anuradhapura, still considered an important place of Buddhist pilgrimage and remembered as the ancient Buddhist capital of the

[76] Daniel, 1996, p.56.

[77] The meeting was also supported by wealthy lay donors who donated vehicles etc., that would enable the nuns to make the journey to the convention.

[78] The "Tree of Enlightenment," respected as being the original tree under which the Buddha was enlightened. This variety of tree is also known in Sri Lanka by the same name as the original Tree of Enlightenment.

[79] The original intention had been to ordain 100 nuns. However, I learned from a reliable source that only 30 nuns were actually ordained at that first convention. The name "Anurādha", echoing the name of the ancient city Anuradhapura, was selected as a common name that was given to all the nuns who were ordained that day.

[80] Letter from Soma Māniyo, November 1 1995

[81] Daniel p.60

country from the 3rd century B.C.E. to the 10th century C.E., was still a potential target of the Northern militants, and was generally unsafe. The celebration of Uduwap Poya or Sanghamittā day on a national level contributed towards the state affirmation and institutionalization of temporal and spatial unity described earlier. This motif of temporal unity that was forged in connection with the nuns was to become increasingly important in the context of the events that were to transpire in the following years. The consolidation of Uduwap poya as a specially sacred day was to be reaffirmed twice within the next seven years in the presence of nuns gathering in Anuradhapura for their annual convention.

The activities of the nuns in the mid and late 1980's clearly attest to the reaffirmation of Buddhist concerns of the times. The first annual national convention of nuns publicly valorized Buddhism both spatially and temporally. A front page newspaper report depicted a picture of nuns offering flowers at the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy and described how about a thousand nuns commemorated Sanghamittā at Anuradhapura. The written narrative related how nuns met in Anuradhapura and engaged in religious activities. The Minister for National Security who is reported to have participated in this event after the "inhuman terrorist slaughter" *amānuśika trastavādigha - tanayen pasu*, (by the Anuradhapura Bodhi Tree) of the previous year.[82] Claiming universal appeal for Buddhism, another article which mentions the celebration of the "historical event" at which hundreds of nuns congregate simultaneously at one place[83] and the necessity for the "all-island organization" *dīpa vyāpti sanvidānayak*" of *sil Mātās* for the purpose of the spiritual upliftment of the people also discusses the "false propaganda" of the "terrorists." These reports also attest to how the organizational unity of the nuns at the national level was perceived in the reaffirmation of a Buddhist presence that was considered intrinsic to the spatial unity of the island. Temporal unity was clearly expressed in the commemoration of Sanghamittā's arrival.

[82] *Dinamina*, December 16, 1986.

[83] *Divayina*, December 19, 1986.

Since the initial meeting in 1986, several annual meetings commemorating Sanghamittā's arrival in Lanka have convened. These have always taken place in December, usually in different areas of the country, and for the most part, at Buddhist places of pilgrimage, thus reaffirming a sacred geography.[84] The locales for these meetings have included : Kelaniya (1987); Colombo (1988) (this meeting was to have been held elsewhere but eventually it was held in Colombo because of disturbances in the country); Anuradhapura (1989 and 1993); Kataragama (1990); Polonnaruwa (1991); Kandy (1992); Maharagama (1994) and Kurunegala (1995).[85] The meetings reaffirmed a sacred geography insofar as they were held at sites important to Buddhists, both historically and in the present as places of pilgrimage. This was not the first time that the state, by supporting religious activities, affirmed a sacred geography. A similar sacred geography was mapped out under state auspices in processions that were held in 1985, celebrating the completion of a development project.[86] Ironically, though the rhetoric affirmed the "island-wide" nature of the nuns' organization, the actual representation of the nuns' annual meetings themselves tell a different story. The limited geographical locales represented attest to what Tennekoon in discussing the Accelerated Mahawäli Project has indicated are "the parameters of a shrinking Sinhala Buddhist State, a state that no longer appears to control the entire island of Sri Lanka."[87] Boundaries of the Buddhist *imaginaire* were island boundaries, but the reality was that of a smaller Buddhist state.

[84] The restoration and development of areas that were considered to be sacred to Buddhists was initiated as a policy of the Jayewardene government when it came to power in 1977. Not without significance, the different venues for the annual convention of the nuns were generally held at places that had been recently restored and renovated.

[85] Letter from Soma Māniyo, November 1 1995.

[86] S. Tennekoon "Rituals of Development: the Accelerated Mahaväli Development Program of Sri Lanka." *American Ethnologist*, No. 15, 1988, p.298.

[87] Tennekoon, 1988, p.299.

The unity forged by the *sil Mātās* in the decade 1985-1995 has been symbolized by the creation of a *sil Mātā* flag. In consultation with her father, Mandara Weerakoon, Abhaya Weerakoon's daughter, and an artist in her own right, designed a *sil Mātā* flag.[88] The official flag was first used at the 1986 convention in Anuradhapura. Copies were printed and sent to nuns throughout the country and have since been used at the annual conventions, and at nuns' hermitages. Like the traditional Buddhist flag designed about a century ago, this flag today functions as a rallying point and a symbol of and for Buddhist unity. Anderson suggests that "logoization" is an intrinsic expression of nationalism [89]. This logoization of the national unity of the nuns, first represented in the creation of the flag, was expressed once again a few years later in 1996 when the government issued a first-day cover with four new stamps each of which depicted an event related to the life of a well-known *bhikkhunī* hailing from the time of the Buddha.

(ii) Uduwap Poya/Sanghamittā Day: The Naming of National Women's Day

Uduwap Poya gained in stature in the 1985-1995 period. It was celebrated for its importance not just for Buddhists, but for "everyone living in Sri Lanka"[90] Processions commemorating Sanghamittā on

88 The symbolism of the flag was explained to me by Weerakoon. The flag represents the Buddha, the Dhamma and the *sil mātās*. Prominently displayed at the center of the flag is a bird's eye view of a stylized lotus flower i.e. (a symbol of purity and wisdom). Circumscribed in the flower is a green Bodhi leaf, reminiscent of the Bodhi branch that Sanghamitta brought to the island. An ola leaf manuscript, representing the text of the Dhamma lies adjacent to the Bo leaf. Symbolizing the ambiguous status of the *sil mātās* are two sections filling the lotus flower, the upper half of which is white (denoting laity), and the lower half of which is saffron (denoting fully-ordained clergy). Representing the Buddha are the colors of his aura that radiate outward and fill up the remaining background.

89 Anderson, 1983, pp. 182-185.

90 *Dinamina*, December 1 1990. 97 Anderson, 1983, pp. 182-185.

the December full moon day had been held at individual nunneries prior to the formation of the SMJM.[91] However, it was after the formation of the SMJM that the media began portraying the state's celebration and support of the nuns' Uduwap Poya day activities on a national scale. The symbolism of this event effectively fused spatial and temporal dimensions within a Buddhist frame of reference. The anniversary was celebrated in places sacred to Buddhists in defiance of the political turmoil at the time. Moreover, the celebration, in centering upon events commemorating Sanghamittā, valorized present reality in terms of identity with a sacred Buddhist past, or *in illo tempore*.

In December 1989, during the annual celebration of Sanghamittā day and at the convention of nuns in Anuradhapura, Hema Premadasa, whose picture was depicted on the front page of two national newspapers, was portrayed by the sacred Bo tree, publicly promising to ensure that Uduwap Poya be recognized as National Women's Day in honor of the Bhikkhunī Sanghamittā.[92] The following year, Uduwap poya was declared National Women's Day.[93] Uduwap poya was also endorsed as National Women's Day by prominent politicians as well as by monks.[94] In underscoring associations of temporal unity, the halcyon days of Sanghamittā were compared to the poor living conditions of the nuns in the present.[95] Spatial and temporal unity had been reaffirmed in Anuradhapura for the second time within a space of a few years.

(iii) Peace Walks

Nuns' participation in peace walks took place in the early 90's, and during President Premadasa's period of tenure. Nuns who participated

91 *Dinamina*, December 1 1990.

92 Such processions were scattered and did not attract national media attention. I recall attending one organized by a small nunnery with the help of local lay people and school children in the early 80's. For information on a Sanghamittā procession held as early as 1923, see Bartholomeusz, 1994, p.110.

93 *Dinamina*, December 13 1989 and *Divayina*, December 14 1989.

94 *Dinamina*, December 4 1990.

95 *Dinamina*, December 1 1990.

in these processions represented a small number culled from a few related hermitages, mainly in the Colombo area. Encouraging nuns to participate in these processions might be seen as part of an attempt to Buddhicize the *Gamudāwa* movement that had begun in the early 80's. Two nuns I interviewed in 1995 shared with me their reflections on these peace walks. The older nun had not participated in these activities. The younger nun had done so when she was aged sixteen.

Older nun:

> " At that time many people spoke ill (*dos kivuva*) of the mehenis.

Younger nuns:

> (In those days, after the march), doctors would refuse to give medicine to the nuns...The bus drivers would not stop...they would say... 'well if you can walk from Colombo to Pallikaelaey..why can't you walk (now instead of taking the bus?).' In those days it was a great embarrassment for the nuns. (*Ae davas vala maha läjjā vak tamayi tibunä mehenīnvarunta.*). All Māniyos, those who participated in the walk and those who did not, all would be blamed *(dos ahanavā)*. It was because of the procession *(perahära)*. When there was a *gamudāwa*, it would finish with a *Bodhi pūja* and there would be a *perehära* (of nuns) A stupa *(caitya)* is always made during a *gamudāwa*.. So the *Bodhi puja* would take place, blessings *(set)* would be given...

Older nun:

> In one area the Honorable President was busy doing religious rituals and blessings *(set padanavā)* with the nuns (*mehenis*) while over in Jaffna they (i.e. the government) were killing human beings by the thousands. (She laughs at the irony.)

Younger nun:

> About 15 days go on this activity. We would stop overnight at the preaching halls of temples or at schools. Every year this (type of activity) would take place in June. The teachers did not like us missing a month of school. That's a month when teaching normally takes place, after all, it is not a holiday month. So this would hurt our studies annually, and the teachers did not like it.

In a national state-owned newspaper, the *Dinamina*, this activity was referred to as a "peace walk" *(sama pāgamana)* or a meditation walk" *(samādhi pāgamana)* and was perceived by the national newspapers as being a "blessing for the entire country" *(muluratatama āsirvādayak)* [96] that brought about "a great spiritual change"*(ādhyātmika vasayen visāla parivartanayak)* and "communal/group bonding" *(sāmuhika sambandatāvak)*[97]. They were publicized as "journeys of Truth" *(Dharmāyātrā)* that were held for the purpose of the spreading of the Teaching/Righteousness *(Dharma pracārak)* in "a time like this" *(meväni yugayak)*[98] and were given much publicity in the newspapers and television. The newspapers showed photographs of large numbers of nuns in procession together. They were depicted accompanied by police and state officials while monks are described as welcoming them and giving supportive speeches en route.[99] These walks made an explicit public statement, associating an apparently ascetic Buddhism with party (i.e. UNP) politics. In fact they have brought upon the nuns the same opprobrium that has been directed against politicized monks, since overt political involvement *per se* was believed to compromise their ascetic vocation. The peace walks which took place annually for about three years and covered several miles could be interpreted as an attempt to reassert the unity of Buddhism symbolically and spatially and at a time of crisis within the country.

---

96 *Dinamina*, June 11, 1991.

97 *Dinamina*, June 24, 1991.

98 *Dinamina*, June 11, 1991.

99 *Dinamina*, June 11, 1991, *Dinamina*, June 21, 1991 and *Dinamina*, June 24, 1991.

(iv) Sanghamittā Yayanti

The celebration of Sanghamittā Jayanti conjures memories of Buddha Jayanti celebrated in 1956. Like the latter, it too commemorated an event of central importance to Buddhists, associated with a revitalized Buddhism. In June 1993, the 2300th anniversary of Mahinda's arrival and his introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka was celebrated as Mahinda Jayanti. It attracted much publicity. The transnational character of Sanghamittā Jayanti is expressed in the arrival of the Indian princess, Sanghamittā, the daughter of King Asoka to Sri Lanka. The 2300th anniversary of Sanghamittā's arrival, her bringing of a branch from the sacred Bodhi Tree from India to Anuradhapura, in Lanka, and her subsequent ordination of the first *bhikkhunīs* in the island was celebrated in December 1993 in Anuradhapura. Here, nuns attended the annual state-supported convention. This event marked the culmination and coincidence of the symbolism of spatial and temporal unity in the past decade. Hence, for the third time since the inception of the national annual convention of nuns, Anuradhapura was the chosen venue of the celebration. The celebration of Uduwap Poya which had begun some years ago as part of an attempt to network Sri Lankan Buddhist nuns had come to be seen as a full- fledged event of national importance. This day had also become prominent because of the symbolic importance attributed to it as National Women's Day and the growing significance attached to the celebration of the arrival of Sanghamittā with the Bodhi tree at Anuradhapura.

The commemoration of the 2300th anniversary of Sanghamittā 's arrival to Lanka was publicly endorsed by representatives in parliament as well as by Buddhist monks.[100] A government-sponsored publication, *Sanghamittā Jayanti Sangrahaya*, was distributed to commemorate the event. The volume includes black and white prints of nuns gathered at some of the annual conventions as well as pictures of sites sacred to Buddhists. Many of the essays in this book celebrate Sanghamittā's arrival with the Bodhi branch to the country. The notion of the *sil mātās* today as inheritors of a seamless past that goes back

[100] *Dinamina*, December 28 1993.

to the time of Sanghamittā is expressed in many of the essays. The contextualization of the past in the present clearly shows how images of the contemporary nuns contribute towards perceptions of their participation in the Buddhist revival.

VII Transnationalism and the Nuns:Sakyadhītā, the International Association of Buddhist Women

1993 was an important year for nuns in Sri Lanka. In October 1993, Sri Lanka hosted the international Sakyadhita Buddhist women's conference for the first time ever. Later, in December 1993, Sri Lanka celebrated Sanghamittā Jayanti, marking the 2300th anniversary of the arrival of Sanghamittā in the island. The international event as well as the national commemoration were both occasions which contributed to the portrayal of the convergence of temporal and spatial unity within a Sri Lankan and Buddhist frame of reference. These two events, in keeping with the expression of Buddhist revivalism, both underscored the national and transnational character of the Sri Lankan nuns' activities, and also laid claim to a Buddhist universality within the country.

The first international Buddhist Women's Conference was held in Bodh Gaya, India in 1987. The international Sakyadhītā organization was founded at the conclusion of this conference. The name for the international Buddhist women's organization, Sakyadhītā was selected at that conference. Among the aims of this organization were the attempt to "unite Buddhist women of the various countries and traditions, to promote their welfare, and to facilitate their work for the benefit of humanity" and also to "create networks of communication among Buddhist women."[101] These were ideals that the Sri Lankan nuns had been seeking to implement within the country, since the early '80's. Weerakoon was elected the National Representative of Sri Lanka at the 1987 conference. When he returned to Sri Lanka he convened a meeting of the Sri Lankan participants at

[101] *Sakyadhītā, International Association of Buddhist Women*, Vol. 1. No. 1. Summer 1990. p.1

that conference as well as others in Sri Lanka who were involved with the nuns' work. This was the inaugural meeting of the Sakyadhītā branch of Sri Lanka. The members of this branch were to become especially active in the organization of the third Sakyadhītā conference that was eventually held in Sri Lanka.

The decision to hold the international conference in Sri Lanka was made at the second international Sakyadhītā conference in Bangkok and amidst some dispute. A Sri Lankan participant at Bangkok described the plans and difficulties associated with the conference. Appealing to the reforming power of motherhood to bring change amidst violence, she said:

> I am a Sri Lankan from a Theravada country. And (there was) terrorism.. [that was the JVP time and one could not go by bus, people were put on tyres and burned] ... and mothers are going for meditation. Women only can make a change in this...as mothers. For this, we have to take the Dhamma to the family and that is the way to do this..... May be we can have the next conference in Sri Lanka.
>
> ...I offered to organize the next conference...I went and told (a State official) in Sri Lanka. He said 'Oh dear! ... we cannot do that with these monks. Aiyoo... ova karanna bae me hamduruwot ekka...'
>
> ... we were told to go and meet the four Mahanayakas. Then... the (very) thought of going to Kandy and to Malwatta..by bus!..Then we went...three or four of us went to him (a Mahanayaka).... We said that we want to have this conference in Sri Lanka...the international conference.. He said 'very good, very good...but leave out one thing .. the *bhikkhunī sāsana*.' (i.e the ordination of nuns.)

In May 1992, a meeting of 30-40 laity (predominantly women) was held in preparation for the organization of the international conference.[102] About 1500 invitations for the international conference were sent, many of them destined for hermitages and local girls' schools. On the first day of the conference about 300 Sri Lankan nuns attended, and after that about 40 nuns attended daily.[103]

There were some obvious difficulties that the organizers had to overcome before permission for hosting the conference in Sri Lanka could be granted. In keeping with the institutionally androcentric frame of reference within which the conference organizers and the nuns worked, Government officials insisted that the conference be held only after prior consent from monks. Consent from the monks was granted reluctantly and on the condition that the *Bhikkhunī* order not be discussed. Eventually, when the state permitted the conference to be held, it did so without forbidding discussion of the *Bhikkhunī* order.[104] The newspaper publicization of the conference continues to provide evidence of the institutionally androcentric framework within which it was held. The Sakyadhītā conference was also contextualized in reference to the past glory of Buddhism in Lanka, the deprivation of the nuns and an appeal to national unity in a time of trouble. At the opening ceremony of the conference, President D.B. Wijetunga stated that

> We, the inhabitants of Sri Lanka, are proud of the honorable position this land has attained in the past as the *Dharmadvīpa* or "the land that followed the path of the Buddha *Dharma* (Teachings of the Buddha)." If we are to preserve the pride of our

---

102 Some years later, a committee of eight was formed and by April 1994, Sakyadhītā became an officially "incorporated" government-recognized organization. This meant that charitable donations of land, houses etc., could be made legally to the local Sakyadhī tā branch.

103 Interview with Sakyadhī tā officials in Sri Lanka, November 1995.

104 For more information on this see G. Kuesterman, "Buddhist Women in Modern Society" *Sakyadhītā, International Association of Buddhist Women* Vol 5. No.1. pp.3-5.

> great past, we must live in accordance with the *Dharma* which offers a realization of the Truth. Our history shows that whenever we failed to live accordingly, the country had to face serious problems. Now, more than ever before, we need the strength of Buddhism and the awakening that it provides for our own security and existence.[105]

Leading monks and state representatives publicly endorsed the conference.[106] Spatial affirmation of Buddhism was publicized in reports of participants worshipping at Buddhist centers of pilgrimage such as the Anuradhapura Bodhi tree, Mihintale and Kandy,[107] just as the *sil mātās* themselves had done in previous years. Continuing to echo the deprivation of nuns in global terms, were appeals for raising the public awareness of the "helpless status" (*asarana tattvaya*) and the difficulties of the nuns in Sri Lanka.[108] The aims of Sakyadhītā included among other things the objectives of "providing education to needy *dasasil mātās*" and assessing "...the needs of disadvantaged *dasasil mātās*.")[109] Hence the international Sakyadhītā conference provided yet another occasion for voicing the discourse of deprivation in tandem with a rhetoric of unity. The Sakyadhītā organization, in keeping with the characteristics of Buddhist revivalism, had underlined a transnational component of the Buddhist nuns' activities in Sri Lanka.

VIII An Afterword

Although the peace walks did not continue after Premadasa's death, the district and national organizations have continued to function and

105 For more information on this see G. Kuesterman, "Buddhist Women in Modern Society" *Sakyadhītā, International Association of Buddhist Women* Vol 5. No.1. pp.3-5.

106 *Dinamina*, October 26 1993. This is also reported in several other papers, eg. *Budusarana,* November 7 1993.

107 *Dinamina*, October 26 1993, *Budusarana*, November 13 1993, and *Budusarana*, October 22 1993.

108 *Budusarana*, November 13 1993.

109 *Tharuni* , November 10 1993. Also see *Sakyadhītā* , *International Association of Buddhist Women* Vol 5. No.1. p.1.

the annual conventions are still held. The annual state contribution of one million rupees given to the nuns since Weerakoon's time was cut by fifty percent in the 1994-5 and 1995-6 years. After Weerakoon's tenure in the Department in 1989-1993, the token representation of nuns in the Uttaritara Anushāsaka Mandalaya or Supreme Advisory Council was abolished when the only seat for a nun on the Supreme Advisory Council was eliminated.[110] Nevertheless, the SMJM continues to make requests of the state in an attempt to more carefully define the place of the nuns at a national level.

IX Concluding Remarks

In this paper I have demonstrated the following aspects of relevance to the representation of the activities of the nuns in the mid-'eighties and the early 'nineties.

(1) Buddhist revivalist ideology since independence has reinforced Buddhist notions of space and time, sense of deprivation as well as transnational influences.
(2) Urban-based Protestant Buddhism has encouraged the entrance of Buddhist nuns into the public arena within an institutionally androcentric frame of reference.
(3) The public activities of the nuns are expressed in terms of a nationalistic or revivalistic rhetoric of space and time, and a discourse of deprivation that appear to support Buddhism in a time of crisis.
(4) Transnationalist ideals appear to support the nationalist ideology that has encouraged the activities of the nuns in the public arena.

110 The Supreme Advisory Council was established in 1989 to advise the government on matters of specific concern to monks and nuns. It originally consisted of about twenty-five representatives: sixteen places reserved for monks and nine places for lay people. For a brief time one lay person's position was given to a nun. However, this place was lost and currently there is no place for a nun on this council. Officials (nuns) of the SMJM whom I interviewed in November 1995 expressed dissatisfaction at this situation.

Overall, the representation of the public and state-related activities of the nuns in the 1983-1995 period must be contextualized within the broader framework of events taking place in Sri Lanka in that period. The next few decades may help determine the extent to which the nuns speak for themselves in defining and redefining their identities as female Buddhist renunciants within a broader framework of Buddhist revivalism, which produced a mode of discourse that helped place them in the public image to begin with. This in turn will help us better understand developments in Buddhist revivalism in the years to come.

****

QUARTERLY QUARKS

Seehawk

A decade ago a painting of the nineteenth-century master, Vincent Van Gogh, one of his *Sunflowers* still lifes, was sold at an auction to the Yasuda Fire and Marine Insurance Company of Japan for 24.75 million pounds sterling — at that time, the highest figure that any painting had ever commanded in the art market. I remember a reader writing to the *Times Literary Supplement* at the time to say that in painting that picture, Van Gogh had used a chrome yellow pigment that had recently come into the market, but unfortunately, in a few years' time, that paint had proved to be unusually unstable. Consequently, the writer of that letter argued, the picture had altered so much in its look in the intervening decades that a good color print made soon after the painting was executed (assuming such a thing existed) would be truer to Van Gogh's purposes than the original in its present state for which the buyers had paid so many millions of pounds.

I doubt whether the executives of the Yasuda Insurance Company would have spent a single sleepless night over this letter. Like many other rich collectors, they would have bought the painting as an investment, so what would have mattered to them was that this object was universally accepted as a Van Gogh original. At the time of writing, however, the Western art world has been thrown into convulsions by the claim made by a knowledgeable scholar of art that the *Sunflowers* in question isn't an authentic Van Gogh at all but a copy of his style by another hand. But it isn't only the genuineness of this particular Van Gogh that is being challenged but also that of several

other pictures attributed to him which have been given an honoured place in several art galleries and museums. And the situation is all the more troubling because the experts don't agree. Of one of the impugned paintings (one of the self-portraits of Van Gogh with a bandaged ear) one authority has said that he thinks it's genuine on Mondays and a fake on Tuesdays.

I find this situation immensely satisfying because it appeals to the irritation I have long felt against the fetish of the original in the visual arts — painting and sculpture. The technology of reproduction continues to improve, and it is conceivable that, if not today, then at some time in the near future, it may reach a level where the print or copy may be indistinguishable from the original to a viewer not equipped with instruments or special expertise. But that won't make a difference to what I have called the fetish of the original: to the connoisseur, the collector, the art expert, there is one and only one original of a particular Van Gogh or Picasso, or even George Keyt, and its price will be measured by that uniqueness.

This isn't a situation which is paralleled in some of the other arts, such as literature or music. As literature, one copy of a particular text of a Shakespeare play is just as good as another. It's true that book-collectors have created the cult of the first edition, where scarcity (though only rarely uniqueness) inflates the value set on the object. But book-collecting (a hobby, like the collection of paintings, of rich men) need have no necessary relationship with literary intelligence. There is a story about an American book-collector who had an immense collection of first editions: when he was asked whether he had read all of them, he replied that book-collecting was a serious business and left no time for trivialities like reading.

I can guess that the Yasuda Company must be deeply disturbed by the questioning of the authenticity of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*: such a doubt must inevitably affect the market value of the picture. But supposing you were a private individual, genuinely fond of painting, who was rich enough to buy such a picture, and bought it for the pleasure you got out of contemplating it. Now you are told that the picture is a fake, in the sense that it wasn't painted by the great painter whose work it was claimed to be. Nevertheless, the

painting hasn't changed in the visual qualities for which you admired it and acquired it, so one would suppose that you would continue to get the same pleasure out of it that you did before the revelation. Yet I am sure that a collector who bought a Van Gogh under the impression that it was a genuine work by the master's hand would find that not just the monetary value of the picture but the visual satisfaction he got from looking at it would be seriously affected for the worse if it was proved that it wasn't executed by the master's hand. What is the aesthetic that can justify this phenomenon?

It's not only because I am deeply suspicious of the fetish of the original that I am gratified by the trauma caused by the Van Gogh 'fakes' but also because I enjoy seeing expert opinion confounded. One of my heroes is the Dutchman Van Meegeren who, under the Nazi occupation of his country during the Second World War, sold to the Germans paintings which were authenticated by experts as the work of Dutch Old Masters. When, after the War, he was tried on charges of collaboration with the enemy, he confounded the experts by revealing that the pictures he sold were copies and imitations by his own hand, and proceeded to produce other such 'originals' in proof of his claim. Of course, by then there were any number of fresh experts to argue that nobody should have been taken in by his fakes because of the manifest differences between Van Meegeren's brushwork and style and those of the Old Masters he had mimicked!

THERE AIN'T NO SANITY CLAUS

Regi Siriwardena

1

Tilak got off the three-wheeler. He walked in through the gate and was about to put his forefinger on the doorbell when the door opened. Suresh stood there, hand outstretched, his dark, chubby face grinning.

'Hi! Merry Christmas!' Suresh said.

'Merry Christmas,' Tilak echoed, accepting the proferred hand.

'Come right in,' Suresh added, putting an arm round Tilak's shoulders.

'I only came to collect the stuff,' Tilak said, not yielding to the pressure of Suresh's arm nudging him into the sitting-room. 'Ramani will be waiting.'

'Just come in for a minute. That won't make a difference to Ramani, surely.'

'I have a three-wheeler waiting.'

'Pay it off,' Suresh said. 'You can easily get another at the top of the road.'

Tilak gave in, went back to the gate and paid the driver, then entered the sitting-room.

'Sit down and have a drink,' Suresh commanded.

'No, no, Suresh,' Tilak said quickly, while lowering himself onto the armchair. 'I don't want to stay so long.'

'It's Christmas Eve, you bugger. You can't leave without a drink, this night of all nights. What'll you have — beer or gin or arrack?'

Tilak thought for a moment. He wasn't very fond of either gin or arrack, bnt beer would mean a long drink, and it would make him later still in getting home to Ramani. 'Okay, arrack,' he said.

As Suresh went in to get the drinks, Chandani came out of the bedroom.

'Hullo, Tilak. Merry Christmas!'

'Same to you, Chandani.' He had stood up to greet her, and now shook hands. 'You look tired. Not your usual brilliant self.'

'Yes, it's been a long day.' She dropped her large body heavily on the sofa. 'Baking my cake, and then the last of the Christmas shopping. And did my loving husband help?' she added as Suresh came back with a bottle of arrack and two glasses. 'He didn't lift a finger.'

'Cake-making and shopping are women's business,' said Suresh, grinning again. 'Besides, it was the last working day: I had a lot of work to get through at the Corporation. What'll you have it with, Tilak? Soda, water, ice, Sprite...?'

'Water would be fine.'

'Chandani, can you get some iced water?'

'Get it yourself — that's men's bnsiness.'

Suresh's grin turned to a scowl before he went to the frig and returned with the ice. 'Say when,' he told Tilak as he sploshed the arrack into the other's glass. 'When!' Tilak shouted, but he had got more arrack than he wanted.

'What's all this about not keeping Ramani waiting?' Suresh asked as soon as they had raised their glasses to each other, and Tilak had accepted one of his host's cigarettes. 'I thought you journalists work late hours and Ramani must be used to it by now.'

'That's only on the news side,' Tilak explained. 'I'm on features, we can set our own pace. Today was exceptional: I had to see the page-proofs of the Christmas supplement before I left.'

'But don't you guys finish the day with a booze at the Press Club?'

'That's what I try to avoid doing.'

'Ah! A non-boozing journalist!' Suresh's grin had returned,

with a hint of superior mockery. 'Must be as rare as a white crow.'

'He's a good husband, not like you,' Chandani intervened.

'Well, well! There's more to being a good husband than keeping early hours and lugging parcels for the wife.' Suresh's expression became a leer as he cuddled up to Chandani on the sofa. 'Want some?' he asked her, and held out his glass to her.

'Just a sip.' She lowered her lips to the glass, and Suresh tilted it. 'Mm! that's enough!' she cried, and disengaged her mouth as some drops spilt on her lap.

Tilak took a large gulp from his drink: he had decided he would finish it as soon as possible and go. But Suresh turned the conversation in a new direction. 'What's this rubbish your paper is writing about corporation executives' perks?'

Tilak was jolted: he had himself written the article Suresh was talking about, though under the anonymous by-line of 'a staff writer'. 'What makes you say it was rubbish?' he asked, tensely.

'Because it *was* rubbish. A lot of wrong details, figures and so on. But more than that, a total lack of understanding that the corporations have to compete with the private sector to attract the best men.'

Twenty minutes later they were still arguing. In the middle of the argument Suresh had tipped another two fingers of arrack into Tilak's glass, and Tilak, lost in the heat of the argument, realised this only when it was too late. When they suspended the debate, agreeing to disagree, Tilak had to wait another ten minutes to finish his second drink. Suresh would have forced a third on him, but Chandani came to his rescue: 'No, no, Suresh, he has to get home now.'

Tilak emptied his glass with his last gulp and stood up. 'Now can I take the toys please, Suresh?'

'I'll get them,' Chandani said, and went in.

2

Tilak's small daughter, Aroshi, had written to Santa Claus a fortnight earlier, in a large straggly hand:

Dear Santa Clors

I am a gud girl, so plees bring me a sleeping dorl and a big tedi bare.

Thank yu veri much.

With luv from
Aroshi

She had put the letter in an envelope and, after consulting Tilak, had addressed it, 'Santa Clors, North Poal', and put a stamp on it. Tilak had taken her to the postbox at the top of the road and watched her drop the letter into it.

He had bought the sleeping doll and the teddy bear four days before Christmas, and had wondered how to conceal them from Aroshi until the day. It was then that he had thought of leaving the parcels at Suresh's house: it would be convenient to pick them up there on Christmas Eve because it was on the way home. Suresh and he were old schoolfriends, though they didn't meet very often now because they tended to move in different circles.

Chandani came back with the parcels in the plastic bag, gaily decorated for Christmas, that he had been given by the shop.

'It's a wonder Aroshi still believes in Santa,' she said. 'Now that she's going to school, I 'd have thought more worldly wise kids would have exploded the myth for her by now.'

'But that's because she trusts us so much. Actually, one girl in her class had told her it was all lies. She came home and asked Ramani and me. We said, "No, no, he's real", and she believed us.'

'Well, it's in the interests of kids to keep up the myth.' Suresh said. 'Or to pretend to believe it, even if they don't. Santa Claus is a conspiracy between the kids and the toyshops.'

'No, I'm sure Aroshi is a true believer,' Tilak replied.

It took him a short walk and another ten minutes to pick up a three-wheeler. He looked at his watch: a quarter to ten. He felt a little guilty because Ramani must have begun to worry quite some time ago. But they had no phone, so he couldn't have rung her; and Ramani knew he had to pick the toys up on the way. He felt another

small twinge of guilt about something else. Aroshi had asked for a big teddy bear, but he had already spent so much on the doll — it was a really pretty one — that he had decided to economise on the teddy and bought a smaller one. He wondered whether she would be disappointed. But he could say in the morning that Santa had explained that the big teddy bears had already been set aside for children who had asked for them earlier. Perhaps it was a good thing for Aroshi to learn to put up with little disappointments of this kind. As their only child still, she was being spoilt (he sometimes feared) by getting almost anything she asked for — more, in fact, than they could really afford. Was the Santa myth a good thing after all, when it kept children ignorant of the sacrifices their parents had to make to satisfy their wishes? Perhaps Suresh was right, and it was perpetuated for good commercial reasons.

'There ain't no Sanity Claus.' The line drifted into his mind, from... where was it...? A Marx Brothers film, of course, but which one? *A Night at the Opera*, was it? He wasn't sure, but he could remember the scene. Groucho reading to Chico a legal contract: '"The party of the first part shall be known as the party of the first part." Do we need that? No.' And Groucho tore the first clause out. The joke was still funny when he got to 'the party of the third part', each time tearing a strip of paper off, until he was left only with the last clause. 'What's that?' asked Chico. 'Oh, that's what's called a sanity clause.' Chico looked puzzled, then his face cracked in a grin. 'Ho ho, you can't fool me, there ain't no Sanity Claus.' The audience in the cinema had laughed uproariously throughout the scene, but on the last line, the solitary chuckle was Tilak's: nobody else got the joke. He smiled, self-satisfied at the recollection, as the three-wheeler turned into the lane where his house was.

3

Ramani had been sitting up, waiting, two hours after she had put Aroshi to bed and read her a story. The TV was on in the sitting-room, but she was hardly watching it: she was divided between anxiety about what could have happened to Tilak, fear at being alone in the

house, except for the sleeping child and an old servant-woman, and rancour against Tilak for keeping her waiting. As the minutes wore on and frayed her patience more and more, it was the rancour that grew stronger.

When Tilak walked in as she opened the door for him, she caught a whiff of arrack, and her feelings exploded into anger.

'Where have you been all this time?' she asked.

'I had to work late to see the Christmas supplement through,' he explained.

'And I suppose there was a Christmas party after that.'

'Party? What nonsense!'

'You smell of it.'

'You know I had to go to Suresh's to pick up the toys. He insisted on my staying for a drink.'

She looked at him with cold silent resentment. He walked into the bedroom, carrying the parcels. He exchanged his shoes for slippers, his trousers for a sarong, then went to the dining-table where his dinner was waiting, and served himself. The dinner, naturally, was cold. Usually, on those rare occasions when he came home late, Ramani would warm the food for him, but there was no question of her doing that tonight. He began to eat.

Ramani came up to the table and stood watching him silently for a few moments.

'Where did you get that measly teddy bear?' she asked. 'Aroshi wanted a big one.'

'I'd already spent so much on the doll, I decided we couldn't afford a big teddy bear.'

'To think you grudge your daughter a little money — and at Christmas! When you spend so much on your cigarettes.'

'That has nothing to do with it,' he said defensively, looking away from her quivering eyes. 'We shouldn't pamper her.'

'If you had asked me, I would have given you the money for a big teddy bear.'

'If you don't like that one, you can put it in the dustbin.'

'And then? What am I to tell Aroshi in the morning?'

'Tell her what you like,' he said, assuming a tone of indifference

and serving himself a spoonful of gravy from the fish curry.

'That's how much you care for us,' she said in a tone of cutting reproach.

'You don't even allow me to eat my dinner in peace,' he said, bitterly. He pushed his plate away and washed his fingers in the finger-bowl. Then he rose and went to the bedroom. He changed back into trousers and shoes, then took the doll and teddy bear out of the plastic bag, and went with them into the adjoining small room. Aroshi was lying in her cot; she had fallen asleep, sucking her thumb. He gently took the thumb out of her mouth. He put the doll and the teddy bear at the foot of the cot where Aroshi might find them in the morning.

As he turned away, he found himself face to face with Ramani.

'Where do you think you are trying to go?' she asked.

'Anywhere. Out of this house,' he said, brushing past her into the bedroom.

Ramani followed him. There was a silence as they faced each other.

'Tilak,' she said, dropping her eyes. 'Tilak, Aroshi had some pain again today when she made water.'

Aroshi had had a urinary infection a month earlier, which was supposed to have been cured, but occasionally the pain returned. Was Ramani speaking the truth, or was she making up a story to prevent him from walking out? He didn't know, but it angered him that she didn't say straight out, 'I am sorry. Please don't go,' so he hardened his heart.

'I don't care,' he said, and walked to the front door. On the TV a children's choir was singing 'Silent Night'. Ramani followed him to the door, but said nothing, only stood there and heard his footsteps crunching on the gravel, and then receding down the road into the night.

4

Tilak had walked out of the house not knowing where he was going, only out of a blind feeling that Ramani had wronged him and that he wouln't tolerate it. Now that he was on the road, he had to ask himself

the question: Where could he go? And with no clothes for the night? He had several friends at whose doorsteps he could turn up and ask for lodgings for that night, but most of them lived too far away: only Suresh was close enough. At a pinch, he could even walk there if he didn't get a three-wheeler. And after all, Suresh was partly responsible for the trouble he was in, not just holding him up but making him drink. Let Suresh put him up then for the night.

He walked on more than half a mile, finding a gloomy satisfaction in the effort. The first three-wheeler that passed him ignored his wave and his shouts and drove on. Five minutes later, another, approaching him from the opposite direction, stopped when he hailed it, and he got in. The driver was garrulous and inquisitive: Tilak suspected that he was tight, and his reckless driving seemed to confirm the suspicion. 'If we were to crash,' Tilak thought, 'it would serve Ramani right.'

But they arrived without mishap at Suresh's house, which was dark. Suresh sent the three-wheeler away and rang the doorbell. After some time the light above the door came on, and he heard slippered footsteps approach the door: then Suresh's voice said: 'Who is it?'

'It's me, Tilak.'

A key turned in the lock, and Suresh peered out. 'What's wrong, Tilak?'

'Suresh,' Tilak said hesitantly, 'can you put me up tonight?'

'Well, well. Yes, of course. But tell me: have you walked out or been thrown out?'

Tilak was silent. Then he said: 'I walked out, but I had to.'

'Come in, come in anyway.'

Tilak woke up the next morning in Suresh's spare room and wearing a sarong of Suresh. Suresh had asked no further questions after the brief inquiry at the front door, for which Tilak was grateful. Waking in a strange bed, it took him a few moments before the recollection of the night's events returned. He had no time for reflection on them before Suresh put his head in from behind the door-curtain.

'Good morning. Christ is born, but I won't say, "Merry Christmas", it would be a bit incongruous, don't you think? I've brought

your bedtea. I'm sorry I can't lend you a spare toothbrush, but there's a towel in the bathroom there, and breakfast is ready when you feel like it.'

'Thank you, Suresh.'

At breakfast Suresh and Chandani kept up their customary banter between themselves, but he was silent most of the time. After breakfast he retreated to the spare room and lay in bed the greater part of the morning, smoking cigarette after cigarette. He thought of Aroshi, who must by now have had her toys: what, he wondered, did she feel about the teddy bear? He hoped that she would find enough pleasure in the doll to compensate for any disappointment. Tears of vexation filled his eyes as he thought how much he would have liked to see her expression when she discovered the doll at the foot of the cot. About Ramani he still thought with bitterness: why couldn't she overcome her pride and say she was sorry instead of pushing him into leaving the house — on Christmas Eve!

Later in the morning he felt bored and looked around for something to read. In the spare room there was only a pile of old *Readers' Digest*s, and in the first one he opened, he found an article on the origins of Santa Claus. He read it, but it irritated him. He was now inclined to think not only Santa Claus but the whole institution of Christmas was a commercial conspiracy.

Lunch was another nearly silent meal, as far as he was concerned. Suresh and Chandani refrained from asking what exactly had happened the previous night, or what his plans were. He was again grateful for this, but by the end of the meal, he decided he had no alternative but to go home.

He went back to the spare room and changed into his trousers and shoes. When he came out, Suresh and Chandani were watching TV in the sitting-room.

'Thank you very much for putting me up,' he said.

'That was nothing,' Suresh said. 'Where are you going?'

'Home. Where else can I go?'

'Come and see us if you need any help,' Chandani said.

5

When Tilak rang the bell outside his house, it was the servant who opened the door for him. When he walked into the bedroom, Ramani was sitting on the bed with Aroshi, who had the doll on her lap, and Ramani was teaching her to lull the doll to sleep with 'Doyi, doyi...' Ramani looked up at him with a tortured expression in her eyes, but Aroshi burst into a cry of 'Thaththi!'

Ramani rose and left the room. He sat down on the bed, and Aroshi settled herself on his lap.

'Thaththi,' she began chattering, 'Santa brought me this doll, such a sweet doll, it looks just like Princess Diana. And he brought me a teddy bear also, but not a big one, because he had said all the big ones were finished. Thaththi, next year I must write early and ask for a really big one...'

Something seemed to crack inside Tilak's head. He felt he wanted to puke.

'What's this nonsense you're talking?' he said, harshly breaking into Aroshi's flow of talk. 'There's nobody called Santa Claus.'

'Nobody? But he came last night, Thaththi, and he brought this doll.'

'It's all lies,' he said relentlessly. 'There's nobody called Santa Claus.'

'But you said, Thaththi. You and Ammi said...'

She was looking up at him with bewildered, yes, and frightened, eyes, and he already felt half-contrite, but another emotion pushed him on.

'It was all lies. I brought you that doll, and that teddy bear too.'

She looked at him again, as if he was a stranger, jumped off his lap, dropped the doll, and ran out of the room.

*****

Two Poems

Jane Russell

One hopes for some kind of peacefulness at the end:
For a beautiful voice singing Abide with Me from a high house
Across the evening dusk
As the breath leaves the body like a flower blown on a gentle breeze.

One hopes for some kind of perfection at the end:
For the sudden sight of a flowering talipot palm
In some forgotten Kandyan valley where the rice sheaves
Are green as lemons still green
And the wind follows egrets' flight across the fields
To the massive rock walls of the hills.

One hopes for some stillness at the end:
For scudding clouds and whitetops clashing far out
On a diamond blue sea seen from the rusty stone
Of a Cornish cross, raised at the trig point where
Surveyors may come to measure grid lines
And pilgrims come to rest and look down upon
A country churchyard.

In this ever moving concatenation of events that is our karma -
On this belt that conveys us inevitably to the checkout
That is life's single moment of enlightenment -
When we finally meet the Great Cashier and inspect
Our till-roll of good and bad actions;
When we tender our credit card, in fear,
In hope or stand by as innocently as children stand
By their mothers, waiting for our tender to be accepted -
Or rejected -
We consumers of experience, flotsam of the aisles of life,
Anonymous shoppers all, victimised by our trolley of desires.

One hopes for some kind of balance at the end
To help us walk across that thinnest of bridges - the final sigh.

Springsong Blues

The sound of pantechnicon trailers
Pulling the corpses of two million cattle
From slaughterhouse to supermarket
Is the slow drag of the blues.

The lullaby of city blackbird
Heard above the pantechnicons
Is the poignancy of the blues.

The agitated voices of caribbean boys
Shouting above the traffic on the A202
Is the rhythm that syncopates the blues.

The fruitily gorgeous bonnets
Worn by carribbean matrons
On springtime Sunday mornings
Is the luscious vocal of the blues.

The mumbling rhapsody intoned
By a dying alcoholic camped out
On Camberwell Green on a gale whipped February night
Is the wisdom of the blues.

Welcome Mendlessohn
To the Springsong Blues

BOOK REVIEWS

J.N. Dixit, *Assignment Colombo.* Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Bookshop, 1997.

In his earlier book, *My South Block Years*, Mr. J.N. Dixit said in his preface (p. 9):

> Having written this book, I ruminated that I have departed from the very appropriate motto which René Descartes adopted for his life: *Bene Vivit, Bene Qui Latuit* (he lives well who is well hidden). The motto is an equally applicable norm to the profession of diplomacy to which I belonged. But then I thought that at some point in one's life indulging in the adventure of transparency to the extent possible might neutralise the incipient narcissism which one possesses; hence, this book.

This declaration provides one criterion by which the author's new book can be assessed. Here is one of the major participants in Indo-Sri Lankan relations in their most critical years (he himself describes that assignment as 'the most tense and challenging asignment in my diplomatic career'), deciding to go public with his account of the events. How far then does he drop the mask of the diplomat, and to what extent does he attempt or achieve transparency?

But before I turn to those matters of substance on the basis of which these questions must be answered, I want to make a preliminary criticism of the published text. It amazes me that a book that chroniclers and researchers of Indo-Sri Lankan relations of the crucial years are bound to consult, now and in the future, shiuld be so carelessly written, and prepared for the press with such slipshodness. The book teems with errors at several different levels. The reader is pulled up short already in the introduction on page xi when the author speaks of 'the Sinhalese government'. S/he will probably conclude that Dixit is making a political point — that the Sri Lankan government wasn't really representative of anybody but the Sinhalese. Not so, for

throughout the book the author alternates indifferently between references to the government as 'Sinhalese' and 'Sri Lankan'. Dixit tells us that before he began his assignment in Colombo he spent ten days undergoing a sort of crash course on the political, economic and security developments in Sri Lanka since the late 1970s', and, anyway, he spent four years interacting in Sri Lanka with leaders of both government and opposition and other public figures. Yet after all that experience he remains helplessly at sea about how to use the terms 'Sri Lankan' and 'Sinhalese'. The acme of this confusion is reached when at one point he even speaks of 'Sinhalese Tamils' (p. 21)! The result is that when, in the aftermath of the Accord, he refers to certain reports in 'the Sinhalese press' (p. 192), we are left uncertain whether he means the Sri Lankan press in general or the Sinhala-language press in particular.

That crash course in New Delhi for diplomats coming to Colombo surely needs to be revamped if it has left a former High Commissioner in Colombo with the impression that the Jaffna Public Library was burnt by Sri Lankan security forces at the time of the 1977 general elections (p.12). A constant source of irritation to the local reader will be the mutilation of the names of Sri Lankan persons, both Sinhala and Tamil, on about every other page. Thus, Sepala Attygalle becomes a hyphenated double-barrelled name, of which the first component is spelt Cepal, and Menikdiwela, JR's secretary, a triple-barrelled one: Menik-de-Wella. Some names are Indianised, like W.T. Jayasinghe's, the first part of whose surname becomes 'Jai' as in 'Jai Hind'. Neelan Tiruchelvam in several places is transformed into 'Tilchalvam'. Poor Pieter Keuneman is denied the mark of his Dutch ancestry by his name being spelt on the basis of the sounds — 'Kenner' like 'tenner'. After all the annoyance caused by these misspellings, I found comic relief when on page 74 Mr. Dixit refers to the Quakers as 'the Quackers'. It's a creative coinage that would have delighted the author of *Finnegans Wake*.

It would be tedious to list all the errors of fact and usage that the book contains, but in the preface to *My South Block Years*, Mr. Dixit tells us that in the writing of that book he deliberately didn't consult official records or files but relied on his daily engeament diary

to refresh his memory. Perhaps he did the same thing in writing the new book. One can imagine him scrawling in his diary: '4.30: appointment with — who's that fellow? — ah yes, Menik-de-Wella' — and transcribing the name thus years later into his book. But there's another clue to the source of the errors in the text of the new book. Writing of the grenade attack in parliament, Dixit says, 'If memory serves me right, two or three people were killed.' (p. 193) One is left wondering how often the author relied on an obviously fallible memory. Surely he should have employed a researcher to verify his facts, by reference, if not to official records, at least to newspaper files.

Since I began by referring to Dixit's claim to transparency in his earlier book, I will now examine this claim in relation to the new book, where the issue looms larger. It arises very early in the book, in relation to Indira Gandhi's policy of providing training and other assistance to Tamil separatist militant groups, which of course preceded Dixit's term of office. Dixit doesn't deny that such assistance was provided, and he couldn't have because the reality is incontrovertible. But how does he assess that policy? There are actually two very different assessments in different parts of the book. In his first discussion of it on p. 21, after setting out the motivations of Mrs. Gandhi's policy, he says:

> So both at the political and personal level, Mrs. Gandhi had reasons to adopt the policy she did towards the Jayawardene Government. The question whether it was right or wrong is a different matter. I would not like to pass value judgements about such situations in inter-State relations because they are usually determined by considerations of realpolitik than ethical norms. The Indian approach at that point of time was a reaffirmation of the unpalatable political reality that politics and diplomacy remain an amoral phenomenon.

So at this point the author adopts a neutral, detached and philosophical approach to the question of the legitimacy of Mrs. Gandhi's policy of assisting Tamil separatists. What we have near the end of the book, on p. 349, is very different:

> While Mrs. Gandhi's support for Sri Lankan Tamil aspirations was correct and justified, her policy of materially supporting Tamil militant separatists was wrong. India's interests and the Tamil cause which oriented her towards generating pressure on Jayewardene could have been pursued by political and diplomatic means insrtead of extending material support to Tamil militants.

So here the judgnent in terms of right and wrong that was excluded at the beginning of the book seems to be explicitly invoked. One remains uncertain, however, in what sense Dixit is using the term 'wrong' in the second passge, Is he appealing to a moral imperative, or is he saying that the policy was mistaken, imprudent or damaging to India's own self-interest?

A French commentator once said of an action of Napoleon: 'It is worse than a crime, it is a blunder'. I too believe that there is little point in preaching morality in inter-state relations to political actors: policies of states in their dealings with others will always be guided — I won't say 'by the national interest' because I don't believe the nation is a homogeneous body — but by the interests of the ruling regime and of the groups and classes it represents; and the only effective restraints are those necessitated by prudence as well as the countervailing forces and pressures of other states. But in terms of success or failure from India's own point of view, there can be little doubt what the verdict on Indira Gandhi's policy towards Sri Lanka should be. She did not, indeed, live to reap the consequences of that policy because she had already fallen victim to the unintended results of a similar machiavellian strategy in the Punjab. It was her son and political heir, Rajiv, who inherited the fatal consequences of his mother's aid to armed separatists, in an assassination whose reverberations are now undermining the stability of the Indian state itself.

But it is both futile and dangerous for Sri Lankans to find comfort in moral indignation against Indian assistance to Tamil militants. It's futile for reasons I have already given; it's dangerous because it distracts attention from the culpability of our own rulers and policy-

makers. Who created the opening for Indira Gandhi to weaken and punish the Sri Lankan state by using Tamil militancy as her instrument? It was a succession of Sri Lankan governments of both major political groupings that obstinately and stupidly bypassed every opportunity, if not to resolve, at least to ease, the ethnic conflict and to mitigate the discontent of one important group of its citizens. It was stupid because it should have been apparent, even to the deaf and blind, that, particularly with a large Tamil population on the other side of the Palk Strait, the prospect of Indian involvement at some time was an ever-present danger. But more specifically, and in the years of Mrs. Gandhi"s engagement with Sri Lanka, the culpability is above all that of one man, J.R. Jayewardene.[1] It was he who, by his actions and non-actions, (and especially by his failure — to put it at the lowest level — to prevent, to take punitive action on, or even to express contrition for, the burning of the Jaffna Public Library in 1981 and the anti-Tamil pogrom in Colombo of 1983) made militancy a popular cause in the Nortn and East and turned the LTTE from a small conspiratorial sect into a powerful, mass-based group. If, then, the growth of the LTTE as a political-military force was fathered by Indira Gandhi, it was mothered by J.R. Jayewardene.

Dixit's memoirs provide plentiful examples of the evasions, subterfuges and prevarications of JR in his deakings with India — strategies that are so familiar to us from his record in domestic politics, and which earned him from his followers the admiring and affectionate title 'the old fox'. To me it seems that the more appropriate sobriquet would have been that applied to an American President who shared the same first name — 'Tricky Dicky'. But once again, the relevant criterion isn't morality but success or failure. What can be the judgment

[1] It is usually unwise to blame the failings of a regime on a single individual, even if he is a powerful leader. However, in the case of the 1977-1988 UNP regime, Jayewardene's position within his government as unchallenged autocrat, who in the latter half of that period even insured himself against possible dissent within the ruling party by obtaining undated letters of resignation from M.Ps, makes it both possible, and indeed necessary, to characterise the failures of his government as his own.

on a practitioner of Machiavellian or Kautilyan statecraft who, within weeks of orchestrating indignant Sri Lankan demonstrations against the Indian airdrop is obliged to capitulate, totally and humiliatingly, to the man he had earlier described patronisingly as 'young Rajiv'?

Dixit's account of the moves that led up to the Indo-Sri Lankan Peace Accord is full of dramatic incident and revelation of details, but it's less than transparent, to use his own term, on the crucial issues. On the airdrop, for instance, he repeats the bland public professions by the Indian state that its sole concerns were humanitarian, when it was clearly one step in the arm-twisting that culminated in the Accord. But he does make clear that India had already reacted to the Vadamaratchi operation by threatening intervention of a drastic kind:

> I told Lalith when he went on claiming his impending victory, that India would not allow the capture of Jaffna and the persecution of civilian population there. I also told him that if Indian advice was not accepted, India would provide logistical support to the LTTE. (p. 98)

There is a considerable imbalance in the book between Dixit's respective depictions of the two Sri Lankan Presidents with whom he dealt — JR and Premadasa. At one level, this is explained by their different stances towards India: Jayewardene was, after all, the President whose compliance made possible the induction of the IPKF to Sri Lanka, Premadasa was the one who got them out. But I think there's more to it than that. In Dixit's narrative of his interactions with JR, one can detect a tone of respect and even of something approaching affection. In his account of his numerous visits to Ward Place, one senses, beneath the divergent interests they represented, one brahmin (I'm not using the term in a caste sense) responding to another, over the whisky for the guest and the brandy and dry ginger ale for the host. There was clearly an affinity of class and culture that transcended their political positions. I should like to quote two passages that bear this out:

> In my four years' stay in Sri Lanka I must have had nearly 100 to 150 meetings with President Jayewardene. Not even

> once was I kept waiting when I arrived for an appointment. Many of these meetings were in Jayewardene's private residence at Ward Place. Whenever I met him at his private residence, there was always an exquisite drink followed by a Coluba (a high-quality Cuban cigar). Whenever I visited Jayewardene at his home, despite his status, and his great age (he was over 80), he would invariably walk me to the door, reassuring me about his personal goodwill and friendship towards me. This was so even if the discussions preceding such occasions were tense and unpleasant. (p. 278)

> Whichever way he [JRJ] is remembered for his role in public life, he was an impressively attractive individual, endowed with calculating intelligence, a wry sense of humour and personifying Edwardian elegance. (p. 308)

In contrast, Premadasa's treatment of Dixit was formal, sometimes brusque, and even discourteous. Dixit complains that at his first meeting with Premadasa after the latter's election as President, he was kept waiting half-an-hour; such delays became a regular event on the few occasions when he met the new President — and, of course, there was no whisky or cigar. One guesses that the discourtesy must have been deliberate; it must have been part of Premadasa's purposes to demonstrate that he was not going to be subservient. Perhaps this may help to explain a misjudgment that Dixit makes in his assessment of Premadasa. He describes him repeatedly as 'anti-Indian and anti-Tamil', and sometimes as virulently so. The 'anti-Indianness', in the sense of opposition to the Indian political establishment, can be readily granted. But was he particularly anti-Tamil, by the standards of Sinhala nationalist politicians in general, or of the UNP leadership in particular? Indeed, Dixit in one place records circumstances that are at variance with that assessment:

> He could also claim to have experience in dealing with Tamils and in structuring multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, multi-religious political mechanisms because of his creditable performance first as the Mayor of Colombo, then as a Cabinet Minister

> and finally as Prime Minister of Sri Lanka dealing with developmental issues. (p. 274)

Since many of the charges that Premadasa was strongly 'anti-Tamil' are made in the context of comparisons with JR, it's strange that Dixit should not have detected an anti-Tamil bias in the man who was the first to demand in the legislature that Sinhala should be the only official language (and was later very proud of it), who led the march to Kandy against the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact, and who was also culpable,by action or inaction, for the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983.

On the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord, Dixit acknowledges certain errors of judgment, both on the part of the Indian government and of himself, hut he fails to recognise, even with hindsight, two cardinal mistakes. There was an underestimation of the shock to Sinhala consciousness of the presence of an Indian armed force on Sri Lankan soil, on which the JVP was able to capitalise. Secondly, it was a blunder to link the provisions concerning political solutions to the ethnic conflict with those concerning India's security and power interests. This made it inevitable that Sinhala nationalists, and even some Tamils, would perceive the pact as an exploitation of the Sri Lankan conflict for Indian interests. Further, Dixit remains convinced that if the IPKF had been allowed more time, without interference from Premadasa and V.P. Singh, they could have fulfilled the objectives for which they had been brought down. A very different assessment was given to me at the time by another Indian diplomat. He told me, 'India is learning in Jaffna the lesson that the Americans learnt in Vietnam and the Russians in Afghanistan — that a foreign army of occupation can't make headway against a native guerilla force.' He added, 'It's salutary that India should learn that lesson at this stage of its development as an international power.' I think this second assessment is truer than Dixit's.

The infirmities and partialities of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord have tended to obscure its positive features, even though these were imposed on the Sri Lankan government — that it made possible the first official commitment by a Sri Lankan government to the multi-

ethnic character of the island's polity, and the first attempt, however imperfectly, at a regional devolution of power. It's one of the ironies of history that some of those who bitterly opposed the 13th Amendment and predicted doom and disintegration if it was adopted are now resorting to it as a last-ditch defence against the present government's constitutional proposals.

I conclude with one last set of observations. At the end of his introduction, Dixit reports a conversation he had with P.N. Haksar, former Foreign Secretary, when Dixit asked whether 'our Sri Lankan experience was a tragedy'. Haksar replied, quoting the precedent of Shakespearean tragedy where in every play there was a single individual who was 'the focal impulse to all the tragic developments'. Dixit says he leaves it to the reader to identify the individual at the centre of this particular tragedy. But he has already indicated his own answer: 'And to my mind Rajiv Gandhi's violent demise epitomised the tragedy.' (p. xvi) Rajiv Gandhi is also the man to whom, together with the members of the IPKF, the book is dedicated. To Mr. Dixit, therefore, the Sri Lankan experience, or what he calls '*our* Sri Lankan experience', was an *Indian* tragedy, and Rajiv Gandhi its tragic hero. But what of the tens of thousands of Sri Lankans, both Sinhala and Tamil, whose deaths were the price paid for the policies and blunders of both Sri Lankan and Indian leaders? They don't come into Mr. Dixit's reckoning: for him one Rajiv's death outweighs them all. No doubt, he would see their fate in a different Shakespearean light, in the spirit not of grand tragedy but of Falstaff: 'Tut, tut, good enough to toss, food for powder, food for powder. They'll fill a pit as well as better. Tush, man, mortal men, mortal men.'

Regi Siriwardena

Rajiva Wijesinha, *An English Education*. Colombo: McCallum Books Ltd., 1996.

The genre of the Campus novel is a rather dicey affair. The Campus novel could either be totally irreverent and delightfully subversive as Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* or it could end up being insufferably self-conscious and self-important. If it is at least self reflexive, it might throw up fairly interesting perspectives. But the novel under review, unfortunately, does not fall either in the subversive mould or in the self-reflexive mould.

The book has for its *leit motif,* the vicissitudes of English language university education in Sri Lanka since Independence. The characters that animate the narrative (most of whom are listed in a "List of Characters" in the beginning of the book) are university professors, administrators, students or their spouses. The fortunes of the realm they inhabit are attempted to be played out against the backdrop of the continually emerging political scenarios. Interspersed with these are intrigue and suspense involving all the different characters. To put it in a much hackneyed form, the story of the characters that inhabit this novel is also the story of the Sri Lankan nation, (or nations, should we say?). And the book is only 218 pages long.

This book follows then, a trend in recent South Asian novel writing in English inaugurated by Salman Rushdie in *Midnight's Children*; that of an English novel whose main characters, plots, themes and concerns are said to mirror, and be in a constant dynamic with, those of the nation they inhabit. My copy of *Midnight's Children* had on its cover a on-line extract from a New York Times review of the book that said something to the effect that in it (i.e. in the book) "a continent finds its voice". The tone of the New York Times review was clearly adulatory and the hollowness of that adulation has somehow remained nagging. If I may hazard a guess, the adulation is perhaps explained by the possibility that the New York Times critic found in Rushdie a writer from the sub-continent, from an ex-colony at that, who had finally learnt to create a fictional narrative which had for its grand framing references, a secular and hence "civilizing" perspective;

that of the "Nation" as we understand it today, in the European sense. In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie talked of India in terms of a Nation, (or nations), a mode of conceptualizing and imagining a people that the New York Times critic himself (coming as he would from a clearly Eurocentric position) presumably used. It must also be remembered that American literary critics are brought up on a staple diet of Walt Whitman's 'humongous' American ego; hence the celebration of the grand national idea. And that line of argument claims further that no previous fictional writing in English which came out of India (if not in the other languages of India) used the idea of the Nation as the framing reference for the grand narrative about the post-independence Indian entity that the west had now been dealing with for over 30 years. And what's more, this Eurocentric conceptualisation of the Nation was articulated by Rushdie in the European Colonizer's own language, English. So Rushdie was patted on the back for giving "a continent a voice". In a sense this is a case of the White Man's Burden continuing to be discharged by his brown skinned proteges. This grand national narrative idea is now being increasingly mined with considerable success. Shashi Tharoor did it with aplomb in *The Great Indian Novel*, and so did Mukul Kesavan in *Looking Through Glass*, to mention just a couple of instances.

So, so far as ambitions go, you can't accuse Rajiva Wijesinha of trying to play it safe. At the outset I would like to mention a couple of irritants in the narrative technique that Wijesinha adopts in telling his story. Given that the novel is short and depends overwhelmingly on the chronology of events that have occurred in post-independence Sri Lanka, the author's adoption of a narrative that is not linear in time (in that incidents from different time periods are juxtaposed against one another) gets quite irritating at times. What compounds this is the fact that this novel runs to only 218 pages; so that the incidents narrated are brief and give only those details that are strictly essential.

Given the undeniably elite settings of the novel and also given its claim to being a national narrative, a fair measure of the success of the novel can be obtained by examining the presentation of the "other" experiences, the non-elite experiences, in the narrative. The third person narrator, it must be mentioned, tells his story with great

sympathy for all the characters. Most of the characters belong by upbringing or otherwise to the English education or university circle. Firstly, let us look at the portrayal of the Tamil experience. The Tamil character in the book is Rajan Pillai, who becomes the third Head of the English Department at Malwatte. But the first "Tamil" experience is that of his wife, Jenny, who is Sinhalese and the niece of Charles, Rajan Pillai's predecessor as head of the department;

> Before the riots of 1981she had, she would say later, been blind to the world that surrounded her, the world into which she had entered of her own volition a decade previously. For years she had thought that her own culture had to remain dominant, and that she could and should reformulate that other world on her own terms. And in the end it was only the assaults on that world that had brought home to her its enduring strength. It was the suffering the riots caused that had awakened her, her visits to the refugee camps, her awareness of what people had been deprived of, and what they clung to...
> So she had taken to exploring it, insisting on going up with him to Nallur in the August of 1982 for the grand festival, the last one to be celebrated properly for years as it turned out. Pillai had felt he needed to recharge his batteries after the trauma of the previous year, but it was Jenny in the end who got more out of it, coming back with a new vein of creativity that she was to mine with stunning effect over the next few years. Inspired by that, she had herself asked that they spend Christmas with her in-laws at Haputale. She had never done this before, and perhaps Pillai would not have wanted it earlier, but now he was pleased and so were his parents. They spent five days at the tiny bungalow which was longer than she had been able to bear previously; and instead of the Christmas tree and plum pudding which she had conscientiously produced even while finding them increasingly meaningless over the years, she observed the simple daily rituals her mother-in-law performed with an interest never felt before. She had already begun to read up about the religion, now she observed carefully the cooking of special foods. And from all this there welled up a

spring of poetry, tentative at first, then more and more assured, that celebrated the rituals of the past and bemoaned the suffering separate identities made inevitable. (p. 104-106).

Jenny seems to possess this seemingly chameleon like ability to don a new identity and experience the "other". The description has all the naivete and exoticism of a European or American student's experience of participatory research in South Asia, which is, in this context, rather ludicrous.

The case of Jenny's husband Rajan Pillai himself is more interesting. This is a description of Rajan Pillai's transformation after his house has been burnt down in anti-Tamil riots;

> In Jenny's view that was the incident that transformed him. He may have suffered more himself, later in the year, *but it was the realization that the university itself had become a plaything for politicians that galvanized him.* If nothing were to be considered sacred, then there was nothing for him to worry about; what he might sacrifice in terms of position or status was not worth keeping anyway. (p.109).(emphasis mine).

And all along Pillai's elite mindset is not lost at all. Talking about the prospect of admitting serving teachers of English who had passed the English first year examination externally into the university English course, Pillai says;

> "It's complete madness," Pillai said when he got back. He was talking to Susil Perera who had replaced him as dean of arts. Susil had looked on the appointment as temporary, and wanted to give it up, but Pillai would not accept the post again. Indeed he even refused to be head of the English department. "None of them is capable of doing a special degree, and even if they were there would be little point in it, since they're only meant to teach English in ordinary schools." (p.131).

Subsequently, in the light of the emerging ethnic conflict, Pillai goes on to join the English department in the Jaffna university, becomes

an LTTE sympathiser and even negotiates with the government on behalf of the LTTE. But after the talks break down there was, as Susil puts it, "little for him to do" (p.201), and so he returns.

The JVP experience is that of Michael, whose father, Charles Corea, is the second head of the English department. Michael does his undergraduate studies at Oxford and on returning to Sri Lanka heads straight for Moneragala in rural Sri Lanka as a teacher in a school there. It is there that he is immersed in JVP activities, takes part in the 1971 insurrection and ends up in jail. And after that of course, he sees light and in a complete volte face, starts working for the government. Margaret, the third person in the original English Department hierarchy becomes, after the 1980 workers strike, the spokesperson of the Christian Workers Union.

The Sinhala experience, or Sinhalese experience rather, represented by Amaradasa is slightly more amusing for it seems to adopt a sort of *reductio ad absurdum* logic. Amaradasa shares the other characters' elite background even though he is nominally Sinhala;

> Amaradasa did not attack him directly, which some said showed that he was as shrewd a politician as anyone. Instead he waited till that election had been won. Then, during the parliamentary election that followed, he turned the debate on its head by replying to one of the UNP's most populist ministers who declared that coca-cola would be banned and that Sri Lankans should be content with one of the thirty two varieties of fruit juice the island offered. Amaradasa's response, without referring to the speech itself, was to attack those who used their personal power to impose restrictions on a free people instead of honouring their individuality. The Sri Lankan national ideology was based on the importance of the individual, he said, trotting out all sorts of learned authorities to prove his point...
> It was perhaps only Willy who realized fully how much Amaradasa enjoyed himself in the few months of life that were left to him. After a particularly snide article by Mala, he declared that homosexual activity was an essential aspect of Oriental culture, even though paederasty was anathema because it was necessarily

selfish. He declared, when some opposition spokesmen advocated a reversal to socialist protectionism, that multinationals were essential for progress, though he added that the country should not allow its labour laws to be dictated by them but should make use of them for its own purposes. Sri Lanka should, for instance, he claimed, insist that factories be set up all over the country, rather than only near Colombo, where village girls who came to seek employment were bound to be corrupted. (p.151-152).

The exigencies of the grand national narrative demand that the characters in the novel represent the varieties of experience in Sri Lanka in the last 50 years. But each one of these characters, as I said earlier, has an elite background. To pass off their ersatz experiences as the true or representative "other" experiences is unwarrantedly presumptuous, if not downright insensitive. What it also does is that it de-sensitizes local English-speaking readers to the experiences of "other" people and demeans the integrity of those "other" experiences.

A novel about English education in Sri Lanka must necessarily visit the Kaduwa debate. In the first half of the novel (in the 1956 "Sinhala only" context), all the arguments revolving around the Kaduwa debate are set out. Yet all this debate does not really make much headway because it is framed by the assumption that language is only an instrument, a point of view whose claim is that (and I quote from an article by Darini Rajasingham- Senanayake in *Pravada*.vol.5, No.2, p.15 at p.18) "There is (then) nothing intrinsic to a particular language, whether Sinhala, Tamil, English or Russian outside the context of its use and performance that makes for the oppression or exclusion of peoples". As a result the debate takes place strictly within the categories that western rationalism sets up.

Even from a purely literature for pleasure perspective, the novel does not offer much. The novel is not particularly riveting or anything; in fact, I must confess, I had to try hard to stay interested and ended up starting the novel some three or four times because I found I just couldn't proceed beyond the first 10 pages. Occasionally there are observations that hold your attention;

"And look what's happened." Cecil sighed and took off his spectacles to polish them on his tie. He had deep sunken eyes and as they peered at Margaret without any clear focus she suddenly felt sorry for him. It was as though the dominant personality had fallen away with the spectacles,and all she saw was a tired man trying to do a serious job without much hope of success. (p.50) and

"Oh, they died of course. At least they never came back, when we finally reopened after the problems had begun to settle. Then there were rumours, and all my enquiries hit a blank wall which was a sure sign of what had happened. In fact I was in the end told, very politely, that it was unwise to keep asking." Hassan realized suddenly that the gleam in Margaret's eye was a t e a r, l i n g e r i n g without falling. (p.55).

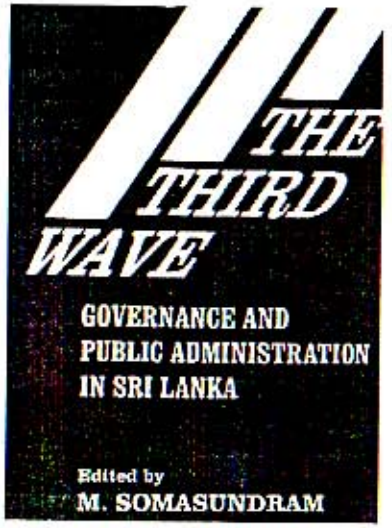
But these are few and far in between and for the most part the novel is crammed with plain historical factual details. The novel has no rooting in its physical context; no Sri Lankan sights, sounds, scents, suburbs, etc. At times it reads like a plain pastiche of historical facts interspersed with conversation.

The one notion that comes through totally unscathed from the novel is the exalted and privileged status of English. In the initial part of the novel, the English that is privileged is that of the Western Canonical English of Shakespeare and Chaucer. Here debates are centred on subjects like the retention of the English Honours course, a course which "inculcates the correct values".(p.99). However towards the latter part of the book the view that gains ascendance is one that recognizes the important and central role that English will play in national development in the future and also argues that it is only pragmatic that such a view be adopted. And Jerry Wilson (the Englishman who had come down to teach English in Ceylon just before Independence), the grand patriarch who plays witness to, and presides over, his English empire in post-colonial Ceylon dies (despite the distraction of his murder) a happy death, presumably secure in the knowledge that English will continue with its developmental, if not civilizing, crusade.

Finishing the novel leaves one with a feeling of great relief, the kind of relief one obtains when a particularly boring, and utterly

irrelevant, lecture on "Tradition in T.S.Eliot" or "The Alliterative Revival" in a rural South Asian setting abruptly and fortuitously comes to an end.

Dattathreya



THETHIRD WAVE: GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN SRI LANKA

Edited by **M. Somasundram**

ICES, 1997. 452p
Rs. 600
U.S $ 20 for SAARC countries
U.S.$ 25 for other countries

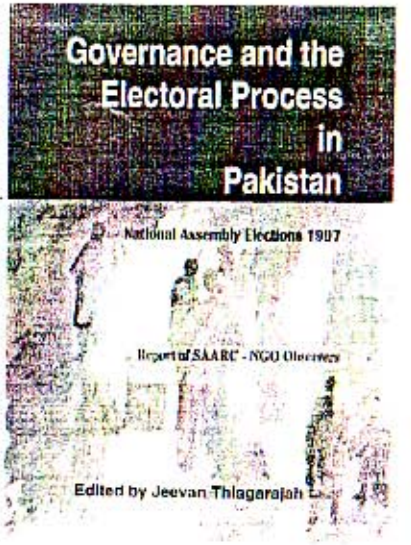
A number of research studies on different aspects of governance pertaining to Public Administration reform agenda of Sri Lanka. Contributions have been made by public administrators, academics and researchers.

GOVERNANCE AND THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN PAKISTAN: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS 1997

Edited by **Jeevan Thiagarajah**

ICES, 1998 215p
Rs. 300
U.S.$ 15 for SAARC Countries
U.S.$ 18 for other countries

A forty-one member non-governmental election observer group from four SAARC member states conducted its work in Pakistan from January 29 to February 6, 1997 to observe the National assembly Elections. The report is the record of their comments and recommendations.



International Centre for Ethnic Studies
2, Kynsey Terrace, Colombo 8, Sri Lanka.

ICES

COLOMBO

Printed by Unic Arts (Pvt) Ltd. Colombo 13.