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5-STAR DEMOCRACY: A Torrent of Rot

— *Izeth Hussain*

TROUBLE IN SRI KOTHA

— *Bruce Matthews*

THOMAS ABRAHAM: A last look at Lanka

**S. SATHANANTHAN: The Federal Alternative
(a reply)**

D. P. SIVARAM: Destroying Military Castes

**A. M. MACAN-MARKAR: Media and Ethnic
Conflict**



ENRICHING RURAL LIFESTYLE

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Briefly...

Jana gosha

The President said derisively that the Opposition was bankrupt—the Opposition had to ask the people to tap on their pots and pans in a nonsensical attempt to make some noise because they really had nothing to protest about. Other spokesmen for President Premadasa's government said that the 'jana gosha' on July 1, led by the SLFP, was a "total flop".

But joint-opposition leaders (SLFP, MEP, NSSP) claimed that it was a resounding success, even more successful than the 'pada yatra', the protest march from Colombo to Kataragama staged last March. Mr Mahinda Rajapakse (SLFP) and Mr Vasudeva Nanayakkara (NSSP) said that the violence unleashed on the protesters, in some instances, was proof that the government was getting scared of the increasing voices of dissent.

Opposition MPs said that the people were now getting over the fear psychosis.

Growth drop predicted

A private sector survey predicted that Sri Lanka's growth rate would drop to 3.7 per cent this year. The GDP last year was 4.8 per cent. The Forbes and Walker Group's survey, the first ever published analysis of the economy by the private sector, also forecast a 17 per cent rise in inflation.

The "Sri Lanka Economic and Stock Market Review, June 1992" put out by the much diversified Forbes and Walker Group, also revealed that the export growth rate had dropped to 14 per cent in the first quarter of 1992 from a high of 22.1 per cent in 1991. But in a note of cautious optimism Forbes and Walker said that it expects

the Sri Lanka government to resort to much tighter economic management to keep the economy on course.

Money says, Minister

The continuing protests against the Kandalama hotel complex will end if those handling the project offered some money to certain persons spear-heading that campaign of agitation, said the minister of Ports and Shipping at a press conference at the Gam Udawa grounds at Buttala. The minister, Mr. Alick Aluvihare, represents Matale district where the hamlet of Kandalama is located.

JVP attempt?

The JVP strike-cells which were apparently planned to disrupt the Gam Udawa celebrations in Buttala were tracked down and five hardcore subversives were arrested, police sources told the Sunday Times.

Kandalama: travel agents approve

The Travel Agents' Association of Sri Lanka (president — M. Fernandopulle) said in a statement that the dispute over the Kandalama hotel project should be amicably settled as adverse publicity abroad could be

damaging to the tourist industry. "From available data, the developers have taken precautions to ensure that there is no damage to environment nor pollution from sewerage. We are of the view that a project of this nature will enhance the life-style of the people" the statement said.

National Health Policy

A Presidential Task Force for the Formulation of a National Health Policy has recommended the following short term targets: Reduction of Infant Mortality Rate to 15 per 1000 live births; Reduction of Maternal Mortality Rate to 0.3 per 1000 live births; Increase in Life Expectancy from 71 to 73 in males and from 74 to 75 years in females; eradication of poliomyelitis and neonatal tetanus.

Probe tea auctions

The Private Tea Factory Owners' Association wants the government to probe the Colombo tea auctions. Speaking at a tea seminar in Colombo association chairman Heerman Gooneratne said that some of the 200 buyers operating at the auctions were not above suspicion. The auction should come under the complete scrutiny of government, he said.

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Party Politics: Vanishing Battle Lines

NEWS
BACKGROUND

Mervyn de Silva

It's not PUBLISH AND BE DAMNED, but apologise or be sued!

President JR has sent a letter of demand to the UNP journal SIYARATA, the *Sunday Times* reported. The SIYARATA has republished an article which appeared in the SILUMINA of the state-owned Lake House group, which has already published an apology on behalf of the *Sunday Observer*, its editor and political columnist. The former President, a lifelong UNP stalwart will demand 50 million rupees from the Editor in case of non-compliance and Rs.100 million from the publishers of the journal, the UNP.

A senior SLFP'er used the Sinhala expression 'ali kalabala' (literally, 'elephant rumpus' or 'beeg trouble') to describe the situation. However, the SLFP is not in too good a shape either. The *Sunday Times* published a detailed account of the 'elephant trouble' in the SLFP's decision-making bodies. The article by the usually well-informed 'political correspondent focussed on the head-on clash between the "Hela Uramaya" caucus, which is staunchly pro-Sinhala-Buddhist, and the party leader Mrs. Bandaranaike.

The issue was a meeting between the Opposition Leader, Mrs. Bandaranaike and representatives of the Tamil parties which have reached agreement on a Four-Point Plan for a negotiated settlement of the ethnic conflict. The merger of the north and east on a permanent basis is the main point in the Tamil formula. This new Tamil formation has been greatly stre-

ngthened by the inclusion of Mr. S. Thondaman, CWC President and Minister of Tourism. It is in his capacity as long-time boss of the CWC, by far the largest trade union of (Tamil) plantation workers that Mr. Thondaman has joined the Tamil caucus which includes parties that stand for "Eelam", a Tamfl 'state' or "homeland". But the fact that he is a minister of President Premadasa's Cabinet makes his presence and active participation, a problem for the government and a tempting target for the Opposition. But 'Thonda' is a veteran of many a 'war' and his strong political base has given him a clout that no politician has enjoyed over such a long period. It has also made him a political factor that no major party, UNP or SLFP, can ignore. He has also longstanding links with the Indian political establishment and the Tamilnadu parties. No Indo-Sri Lanka agreement, except the 1987 'peace accord' has been negotiated without his participation. It is Mrs. Bandaranaike who knows that best since she is the co-author of the Sirima-Shastri pact a historic breakthrough on the vexed 'stateless' (or citizenship) issue.

The SLFP leader has another matter to bear in mind, a negotiated settlement of the ethnic conflict, a vital concern not just for India but the entire US-Japan-EC led donor community. Sri Lanka is totally dependent economically on this donor community and the IMF-World Bank.

Apart from that, the all-party Parliamentary Select Committee on the ethnic issue is chaired

by an SLFP MP, who also initiated it by way of a private Members' motion. In a previous, post-impeachment confrontation with the Government, the SLFP decided to 'boycott' the Moonesingha Committee. But common-sense and western persuasion soon prompted second thoughts.

Under furious attack by the HELA URAMAYA caucus, Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, the SLFP's national organiser, intervened. Since the Committee was in fact the initiative of an SLFP MP, it would be churlish to ignore or boycott it, or in any way obstruct its work. Permanent merger, of course, was totally unacceptable. Richard Pathirana supported Anura. And there the matter stands, — a serious deadlock in which the "Sinhala Heritage" (HU) group is powerful enough to obstruct any "concessions" to the Tamils.

In a broader perspective however, it means a Sinhala multi-party consensus which rejects outright the core demand of the seven Tamil parties, the Tamil consensus.

But there are two parties that are conspicuously absent from these mutually exclusive consensual platforms — the LTTE and the DUNF. The 'Tigers' will not yield on an "Eelam" which means North AND East, although their spokesmen are on record on concessions to Muslims in the east — semi-autonomy or an administrative unit. What is more, the LTTE is prepared to fight for it to the last young 'Tiger'. At this stage of the struggle, the military is the all-absorbing.

The DUNF has quietly shifted its position. The Executive Presidency as well as the President were the twin targets of those who mounted the 'impeachment' konspiratzia. But the restoration of the supremacy of Parliament was their rallying cry. The logic was simple. The worst excesses of the Presidency, they argued were possible because of the concentration of power in an Executive Presidency. The constitution must go; parliamentary democracy must be restored. This meant of course a direct assault on the JR constitution, a rejection of the JR legacy. And then came the announcement in Kandy by Mr. Gamini Dissanayake, the key figure in the DUNF, in as much as he was JR's trusted negotiator with the Rajiv regime pre-Gandhi-Jayawardene accord. Lalith, the National Security Minister was no favourite of Delhi. In fact, it was Lalith who was told by High Commissioner Dixit that the Vadamaarachchi operation was totally unacceptable to India. JR himself con-

firmed this when he spoke recently about Dixit's 'notes' written on the back of an envelope.

Is the change in the DUNF's line on the Presidency, on the SLFP and Mrs. Bandaranaike, whose leadership Lalith and Gamini accepted on MAY DAY, a coincidence? The DUNF did not receive JR's endorsement because the DUNF repudiated the JR's historic contribution to politics — the Presidential system.

JR had his two terms — the first, from 1978 deemed as one term. There is nothing to stop a man from contesting again, once there has been a break, in this instance post-1988 to the present day i.e. the next presidential election. All this may be purely academic speculation seeing that JR is past his mid-80's mark, and on the road to the nervous nineties, to employ a metaphor from JR's favourite game, cricket. What is clear is that the DUNF has cut its links with Mrs. Bandaranaike, the casualty of the JR regime's legislation which allowed a for-

mer prime minister to become a non-person politically. No civic rights. Is JR's latest intervention a political move that should be seen in the light of higher politics; the politics that may become quite active after September, and a politics where Hulftsdorp becomes the centre stage?

The unity of the United National Party the unity of the SLFP, the unity of the 'Common Front' of the Opposition, the unity of even the smaller parties and mini-alliances are all under the severest strain. That is surely a symptom of a deeper malaise that raises questions about society itself? Or are we seeing too much? Is it only the confusion and fragmentation of the Sri Lankan elite unable to cope with a multiple crisis — ultimately a deadly combination of the ethnic conflict, the endless war, the violence, the rising cost of living, unemployment and the glaring inequalities of our society, as the rich get richer, the poor are slowly driven to the wall, and the lower middle-class marginalised.

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Sri Lanka's search for peace

Thomas Abraham

Two brooding, reclusive men, hold the key to Sri Lanka's future. One is the country's President, Mr. Ranasinghe Premadasa. The other is the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran. The way these two play their cards will determine whether Sri Lanka will continue to be shown as a single nation on the maps of the world, or whether it will join the Yugoslavias and the Czechoslovakias of Central Europe and splinter into two or more fractious pieces.

Both men are possessed of a ruthless determination and are clear about their goals. Mr. Premadasa's is to keep his country united and to go down in history as the man who ended a brutal separatist war and restored peace. Mr. Prabhakaran's is to carve a separate Tamil State out of the island's North and East and be remembered as the warrior who restored to the Tamils their lost pride and dignity.

Neither man is going to find it easy to achieve his goal. Consider the Sri Lankan President's problems. Mr. Premadasa finds himself mired in a counter insurgency war that his military seems incapable of winning, and which the country's faltering economy cannot support much longer.

To see why the war seems unwinnable it is useful to look at the military balance in the island's North and East. The current round of fighting broke out between the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE in June 1990, barely two months after the last IPKF soldier left the country. At that time, the LTTE was in political and military control of the region. The Sri Lankan army has since pushed the Tigers out of the main

towns and villages of the Eastern Provinces and to an extent restored Colombo's authority over the civil administration. But the LTTE has not disappeared from the East it has merely retreated into the jungles from where it harasses the army with constant guerilla raids. Ambushes and landmines have taken a steady toll of military lives, and it is obvious that the army has not succeeded in pacifying the LTTE.

In the North, the LTTE and the army face each other in an uneasy standoff. The army controls Vavuniya town, the gateway to the northern peninsula, Manner island, the islands off Jaffna peninsula, and a chunk of territory in the northern part of Jaffna peninsula. But the heart of the Tamil country, Jaffna itself, is firmly under LTTE control. Colombo's authority does not run in the peninsula, and the Tigers are the Government.

The military's main weakness has been its lack of manpower. The Sri Lankan army, which is around 70,000 strong is better equipped and large than the LTTE. But it does not have enough men to push this superiority through to its logical conclusion by physically occupying the North and the East.

The Government does not have the money to provide the army with the manpower it needs. Mr. Premadasa presides over a cash strapped economy which depends heavily on international aid to keep going. The IMF and the World Bank have so far been supportive of the free market policies the Government has followed, and have been generous with their financial contributions. But this generosity will not continue for ever in face of a long, indecisive war. Within the inner circles of the Government it is clearly understood that it will be extremely difficult to finance

the war beyond the end of this year. Therefore, a quick solution either military or political is essential. But as we have seen, a military resolution of the ethnic conflict is not on the cards.

The chances of a political end to the conflict are not much brighter. For the last 40 years Sri Lanka's Sinhalese and Tamils have been unable to reach an understanding on the Tamil demand for autonomy. Successive Sri Lanka Governments, with an eye on the votes of the Sinhalese majority have taken a hardline on the Tamil demand. Mr. Premadasa has perhaps shown greater willingness than any of his predecessors to reach an agreement with the Tamils, but he is also a prisoner of the Sinhalese vote. Mr. Premadasa's main fear is that any concessions to the Tamils will make him vulnerable to sniping by the main Sinhalese Opposition party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). Therefore, he has chosen not to indicate what he would regard as an acceptable peace package, but has instead left it to a committee of Parliament to evolve a peace package which he has pledged to adopt.

The parliamentary committee, in the way of all such committees, has proceeded by fits and starts. It has not been helped by the fact that neither of the country's two main parties, the ruling United National Party and the SLFP has made any serious contribution to its work. However, despite this handicap, the determination of its chairman, Mr. Mangala Moonesinghe, as well as the Tamil political parties and the leaders like Mr. S. Thondman have ensured that the committee makes a serious attempt to produce a political package acceptable to both the Tamils and the Sinhalese. There is a general agreement

(The writer was Hindu Correspondent in Colombo till last month)

that such a package will involve creating a Tamil autonomous region. The dispute is over the boundaries of this region. The Tamils are firm that the Northern and Eastern provinces should be merged to form the Tamil region. The Sinhalese and the Muslims, who form a sizable section of the population of the East, are equally firm that the East should remain separate. The task before the committee is to find a compromise between these two positions. One possible compromise the Tamils could live with is to provide for the Muslims of the East an autonomous region within a merged North and East. Another compromise the committee chairman has been working out is to have two separate councils for the Northern and Eastern Provinces, with an apex body that would coordinate the work of both councils. This, it is hoped, will give the Tamils a single body to administer both Provinces, as well as allow the Sinhalese and the Muslims to say that the Eastern Province is separate.

The success of these two compromises will depend on the willingness of the UNP and the SLFP to overcome their political differences and evolve a bipartisan package that can be sold to the Tamils. Neither party has shown the courage to do this, and both remain locked in positions that pander to the lowest form of Sinhalese chauvinism. Both continue to use the ethnic conflict as an issue to beat each other with, as they have been doing for the last 40 years. As an SLFP leader candidly commented, "Both the UNP and our party are treating the select committee as a cat and mouse game."

Mr. Premadasa therefore finds himself in an unenviable position from where he can produce neither a military nor a political solution. One way out would be to begin direct negotiations with the LTTE. But this once again carries tremendous political risks. The Sri Lankan Pre-

sident is already under fire for having talked to the Tigers and armed them during the latter part of the IPKF's stay in Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese Opposition, the military, the Buddhist clergy and his former partymen, Mr. Lalith Athulathmudali and Mr. Gamage Disanayake, would denounce him as a traitor to the Sinhalese cause. Besides, India has also made it quite clear that it would be unhappy to see Colombo talking to the LTTE.

Mr. Prabhakaran's position is not very much better. The LTTE chief's determination to create a separate Tamil State in Sri Lanka is beyond question. He is willing to commit the lives of thousands of young Tamils to this cause, and he has made it clear that he is willing to stake his life for the cause of Tamil Eelam. But it is evident that the LTTE will not be able to push the Sri Lankan army out of the areas of the North and East it controls. The LTTE can harass and bleed the army, and prevent Colombo from exerting its authority over the Tamil areas. But it is not strong enough militarily and politically to control the entire area.

There are several factors that have reduced the LTTE's fighting ability. One has been the large losses it has sustained in two or three major encounters with the army, especially at Elephant Pass and at Mullaitivu. Several hundred young cadres died, and though the Tigers have been able to recruit boys to fill the gaps, there is a limit to how long the Jaffna society can continue to support the LTTE's demand for manpower. The Tigers are already scraping the bottom of the barrel by recruiting nine and ten-year-olds.

There is also a limit to how long the rest of Jaffna can en-

dure the hardships of living in a battle zone. For two years the people of the peninsula have endured shortages of food, electricity, medicines and transport. Several thousands have fled Jaffna and live in Colombo or have emigrated abroad. There are definite indications that people's patience with the Tigers is at a low ebb, and they will not tolerate the war much longer. The LTTE realises that it cannot squeeze the population of Jaffna indefinitely and needs to win some breathing space. Mr. Prabhakaran is looking for a way to persuade Mr. Premadasa to declare a ceasefire and invite the LTTE for talks. LTTE spokesmen in Jaffna such as Mr. Yogaratnam Yogi and Mr. Anton Balasingam have made it clear that they would welcome negotiations. The catch is that the LTTE would want to use the ceasefire to regroup its forces and prepare for a fresh struggle. A ceasefire would only be a tactical step on the road to the LTTE's long term goals. Thus the Tigers have insisted that any ceasefire or talks must not include preconditions that would force them to lay down their weapons.

Objectively, both Mr. Premadasa and Mr. Prabhakaran need to stop fighting and start talking. The LTTE is looking for an offer from the Government that would freeze the current military balance and allow them to continue to keep their stronghold in Jaffna. Mr. Premadasa cannot afford to make them this offer, since it would raise an outcry from the Opposition. But with the military getting nowhere, the political process frozen, and time and money running out, the Sri Lankan President has few options but to talk to the LTTE, and the next few months could well see either open or secret contacts between the Government and the Tigers as a prelude to peace talks.

Ecology of the question of nationalities

S. Sathananthan

1. Introduction

A critique of the opposition to a federal alternative in Sri Lanka (de Silva, 1991) was published by Amita Shastri (Shastri, 1992). In his reply, H. L. de Silva reiterated his anti-federalist assertions but in the process, he added a new, ecological dimension to the anti-federalist stand. He claimed: "In a well-reasoned presentation Professor C. M. Madduma Bandara has advocated a re-demarcation of provincial administrative boundaries on the basis of the major river basins in the country" which were "eminently fair and reasonable. If this proposal were to be accepted by the Government the enthusiasm for federalism in this country will evaporate sooner than the morning dew" (de Silva, 1992:15). Evidently the reader is expected to believe that Professor Madduma Bandara has discovered the comprehensive solution to the nationality question, the solution which was sought by social analysts across many countries for well over a century. The present essay will examine this "final solution" to the question of nationalities in Sri Lanka.

But first, a brief note on the terms "devolution" and "decentralization". **Devolution of power** involves the **parcellization of sovereignty** which changes the unitary State to a federal State. **Decentralization of authority** is affected through a **delegation of functions** which preserves the unitary State. Devolution and decent-

alization could co-exist within a federal State; but a unitary State permits decentralization only. Since the Sri Lankan State has been a unitary State from Independence, it follows that a devolution of power was never attempted in the country. But this fact has been obscured by the sloppy use of the two terms interchangeably: a case in point is the research paper titled "Sri Lanka's Proposals for Devolution and Decentralization — financial implications of the Provincial Councils system" (Leitan, 1987). In the present essay, a clear distinction is maintained between the two terms and incorrect use of the term "devolution" is indicated by the qualification "(sic)".

2. Resource development vs rights of nationalities

During negotiations conducted after the collapse of Thimpu Talks in August 1985, a proposal to decentralize authority in Sri Lanka (dated 12 December 1985) was prepared by the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and submitted to Mr. Rajiv Gandhi. The Government of India (GOI) invited the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) to comment on the proposal. The January 1988 observations of the GSL rejected the proposal and argued *inter alia* that natural resources of the country.

(a) "are a common heritage of all its people...and all communities of this country have a right to share and an obligation to manage all natural resources";

(b) "transcend all provincial and district boundaries which have been demarcated purely for administrative purposes";

(c) could be utilized "on an objective and scientific criteria"

only "under an overall National Plan"; and

(d) "this proposal is in keeping with the concept of the unitary character of the country" (GSL, 1988).

Thus, the planning imperative was invoked and the development of the country as a whole, it was argued, superseded the rights of different peoples to have access to, and exercise control over, their immediate life-sustaining environment. It was implied that the violation of rights of minor nationalities (Tamils and Muslims) by the major nationality (Sinhalese) is an unavoidable and perhaps necessary cost of development. That the minor nationalities cannot share this view should not come as a surprise.

Moreover, western neo-colonialism has advanced almost identical arguments to justify exploitation of national resources of "third world" countries. Negotiations on the Law of the Sea under UN auspices replete with instances where the west, particularly the United States, has insisted on access to seabed resources within the Exclusive Economic Zones of littoral States of the Indian Ocean on the grounds that outdated notions of national sovereignty and rights of nations should not stand in the way of scientific exploitation of resources in an inter-dependent world for the benefit of "mankind as a whole". The observations of the GSL merely applied this neo-colonial approach to justify internal colonialism (Sabaratnam, 1986) within Sri Lanka.

3. Domination through demographic engineering

The violation of the rights of people as nationalities can be sustained only through political

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domination of minor nationalities. Demographic engineering is one instrument of domination through which States have attempted to neutralize the political power of minor nationalities. In some European countries racist policies on settlement have, under the guise of "integration", sought to disperse immigrants from the "third world" among indigenous populations so as to prevent the immigrants from coalescing into politically significant cultural groups. The "welfare" policies of the British State with respect to West Indian and Asian immigrants is a well known case in point.

In "third world" countries where minor nationalities are already established on a territorial basis and States articulate the cultural-religious identity of the respective major nationality, the aim of creating a homogeneous "national" society has led States to pacify and contain "minorities" (Sheth, 1992: 425). Towards this end, one strategy used by the State is to finance and introduce land colonization programmes to settle populations of the major nationality among those of the minor nationalities. The intention is to disrupt the geographical cohesiveness of minor nationalities and in time to eliminate the attribute of territorial expression of their identities as nationalities and thereby undermine their political significance. The preferred slogan here is "nation building". In Sri Lanka the land colonization programmes sponsored by the State to settle, on State lands, Sinhalese populations among Tamils and Muslims in the Northern and Eastern Provinces typify this approach (Shastri, 1990).

4. Environmental rationality and demographic engineering

Unlike land colonization, which by its nature takes place over a long period of time, a quicker strategy to pacify and contain minor nationalities is to alter internal territorial borders in such a way to ensure that

(a) each new territorial unit contains a multi-national population and

(b) the population of the major nationality is numerically the largest group in each unit.

The attribute of territorial expression of the identity of a minor nationality could thus be effaced; the population of each minor nationality would be so segmented as to reduce each segment to a minority in each new territorial unit. In this way any claim to self-determination by a minor nationality could be made redundant.

This strategy is at the core of anti-federalist arguments based on environmental rationality. They were first aired publicly at a seminar on "Towards Rational Provincial Boundaries", which was held in Colombo on 18 May 1991 and was jointly hosted by The Organization of Professional Associations and The Surveyors Institute of Sri Lanka. The panel was chaired by Dr Lionel Dassanayake and the speakers included Prof Shelton Kodikara (Department of Political Science, University of Colombo), Dr Nath Amarakone (Former Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Construction), Mr A Thangadurai (Member, TULF), Prof C Madduma Bandara (Department of Geography, University of Peradeniya) and Mr A Denis N Fernando. Except for Mr Thangadurai, who is a Tamil, all others are Sinhalese.

The writer was present at the seminar.

4.1. The "rational" approach

In his introduction, the Chairman alluded to attempts at decentralization of authority as the broader political context within which deliberations of the seminar would take place. In particular, the word "rational" was stressed as best describing the approach adopted by the panel in probing the basis of provincial borders within Sri Lanka. Here, the notion of **rational** thought was used to denote a technocratic approach which is

believed to be **scientific** and **objective** and to imply that analyses presented by the speakers are **politically neutral** and uncontaminated by national chauvinism.

This faith in an abstract and universal rationality was dominant in Western epistemology up to the early 20th Century. However, major advances in quantum physics undermined the notion of an objective science which exists outside and apart from human consciousness. Serious scholars today are familiar with the landmark contribution of Thomas Kuhn (1970) and know that human consciousness is integral to the social reality constructed by human beings and, therefore, that "rationality" is relative. But the "rational" approach ostensibly pursued at the seminar was based on the archaic belief in objectivity and discredited idea of absolute rationality.

4.2. On "resource rational" provincial borders

The title of the seminar implied that existing provincial borders are irrational. Prof Kodikara supported this view by arguing, firstly, that the history of changes in the provincial map show that provincial borders are not "sanctimonious" and could be altered again in future. Secondly, and with more than a touch of patriotism, it was argued that the provinces were created by the British colonial State, which had its "own reasons": namely, as a political strategy to break up the Kandyan kingdom in the central highlands and "to weaken the national feeling of the Kandyans". A further change in provincial borders was then elevated to the exalted exercise of decolonization although the re-establishment of the kingdom was not suggested. However, he ignored the strategy of the Sri Lankan State of redrawing district and provincial borders in the North-East Province (NEP) in the context of the strong challenge it faces from the Tamil nationalist movement in that province.

(To be continued)

Rethinking Education

Fantasy or Vision?

Premadasa Udagama

"There has never been a more propitious time to commit ourselves to provide basic learning opportunities to all the people of the world." So ends the penultimate paragraph of the Declaration made on 9th March 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand by the World Conference on Education. Like all historic documents it abounds in Churchillian phrases and stimulating rhetoric. One more example "Never before has the world had at its disposal so much knowledge and capacity to disseminate it so widely and at such low cost." One is reminded of the Bible, Quran, Dhammapada, Bhagavat Gita and even writing as contemporary as the speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.

The vision of this document has its antecedents in the recent history of UNESCO. The regional programmes that culminated in 1985 in Sophia, the ASPBAE (Asian-Pacific Bureau of Adult Education) seminar in 1983, APPEAL (Asia-Pacific Programme of Education for all) and in the Fourth International Conference on Adult Education. Perhaps there were many more national regional and international organisations, institutions and agencies advocating and planning "Education for all."

For UNESCO, it appears to be a new path. Having espoused scholastic intellectual and academic type of education and science and culture of the Eurocentric world for so long, the organisation is now changing its course. Not too soon either. Of course, there was adult and non-formal education to be sure on its agenda. But the seminal work sponsored by UNESCO twenty years ago in **Learning to be** had no reference in its index to 'poor,' 'under-privile-

ged' or 'deprived.' It had 'Poor' 'unemployed' and 'devaluation.'

Now almost a Messianic and missionary concept seems to have overtaken its sullen but elegant prose in English or French. Why this sudden enthusiasm? Is it a realisation of its impending old age? Or has it found the poor in the world an embarrassment and a nuisance that elitism of the North and the South could not easily ignore?

The poor in developing countries (the vast majority in these societies) are overwhelmed. They are even suffocating from theories, strategies, projects and the other intellectual paraphernalia of development. Perhaps the same fate that overtook the 'Head Start' project of President Johnson awaits this new thrust in educating the poor and the deprived especially of the South.

The document contains this assertion, "education for all is an attainable goal." Is it possible? The Declaration is idealistic as all such declarations of the development of humans tend to be. The declaration to my mind, is optimistic, simplistic and Eurocentric. It is the least realistic.

The declaration consciously ignores social and political attitudes of the ruling classes to education in poor countries. Once Sir Edmund Leach in a B. B. C. Reith Lecture in 1962 stated that formal education is a kind of undeclared war. In order to get employment, a promotion, social recognition, an educational advantage of even one mark at an examination, one does not share one's knowledge or experiences with others. Education, that gives social, political, economic and intellectual power, is virtually monopolised by the elite or the professional middle classes in developing societies. "Good" education is theirs by right. Literacy education and populist edu-

cation are the only educational remnants for the poor, powerless and forgotten classes of the South. Will they share this education?

To expect the 'owners of education' the elitist groups in developing countries is asking their leaders to emulate a Buddha, a Christ or a Gandhi. There are no signs of such changes in the political world of the South. However, UNESCO's rhetoric in education has produced in developing countries a (populist) type of education as has happened in Latin America so well documented by German Rama). Similar results can be seen in SAARC countries and S. E. Asia. Only few of the countries have developed a mass system of education, distinctly different from 'populist' education. Most developing countries have doled out doses of elite education to the masses. It is of no use to them in their personal lives or in their community and certainly of no advantage in employment and in vocational or recreational activities.

Freire has reminded us that every act in education is a political one. Even the Faure Commission asserted that education 'is a domain where politicians in developing countries after independence had unquestioned faith in education as a nation building and a development process. After nearly 40 years the euphoria is losing its clout in the minds of the ruling classes and even the masses. Nationhood had not been achieved. Development has not taken place as hoped. The decline in the GNP devoted to education is but one aspect of the loss of faith in education. Those who have benefited from education are those who always had it — the middle and upper classes.

India is an example of a country which honestly believed and planned to remove illiteracy in four decades. What is the result? Tertiary education has expanded at the cost of primary and adult education. Education funding goes to the powerful

(The writer was Secretary, Ministry of Education in the 1970-77 SLFP administration)

group of voters and not to the silent masses. The largest possible number of learners has been left behind while the highest possible level of knowledge is given to the chosen few. Why do the UN Agencies think that the future will be different? Because they advocate such policies! No privileged group in any part of the world has voluntarily abdicated from power to help other groups in society.

The poor and the disadvantaged, if ever they perceive their goal of a better life for their children, if not for them, have always been fooled or beaten up or destroyed or lectured on the political virtues of observing democratic norms in fighting for their rights. The intellectual, the educated and the power groups in developing countries cannot teach survival skills to the poor. The survival skills of these power groups are of a different order. They are in readiness 'to pack their bags to go to Yale and Harvard' as a German publication said of their scholars. The survival skills of the power groups in the South are to search for greener pastures on the other side of the fence and not necessarily in Yale or Harvard.

Nearly two years has gone by since this document was first issued. We do not see much public interest generated in 'education for all' in this part of the world. This region incidentally, remains the largest reservoir of the world's poor and illiterate. Leaving aside this document, even the concessions given to the underprivileged classes and castes were opposed by the upper classes in India. Even in Sri Lanka the positive discrimination shown to rural areas in university admissions is under attack by the urban groups. There appears to be no groups or leaders anymore to speak on behalf of the poor, the illiterate and the needy. Some NGOs and churches still do so. But where do they end up? In creating enclaves of power and even destroying politics to suit their own struggle.

The cost of education is mounting. Increasing investment in education is Kerala, for example, has not increased enrolment in educational institutions. Sometimes the educational budgetary provisions for primary education is diverted to tertiary education. The education of the poor has no priority. In this context some of the self criticism of adult educators in India seems to be a healthy sign. One such educator wrote, "Indians comprise the largest group of illiterates in the world. As for as women are concerned, we swamp the rest of the world put together." Another stated that adult educators indulge in "lofty perorations and sweet words." One eminent adult educator confided to the writer some years ago, 'They built a college amidst an ocean of illiteracy in a particular state'. These statements are coming from activists from an organisation which had worked for over half a century in adult education.

The increase in literacy is marginal in all South Asian countries. Even in Sri Lanka which has a high literacy rate the literacy rate has declined in the last few years. One researcher from this country wrote of "schooling literacy." Even the formal schools appear to be failing in their basic role. The occasional success story in adult education hides the failure of the many grassroots movements for equity, social justice and human dignity. In this environment if the World Declaration on Education for All is able to motivate educational planners, bureaucrats and politicians to educate all the people of their countries, it will be as momentous as the French Revolution for "Liberty, equality and fraternity."

Can the document at least, provide a flicker of hope for the adult illiterates and the unschooled poor? The document itself enumerates the pressing problems of humankind, including "the brutalities of war, civil strife and violent crime". With an impending world re-

cession or even a depression and with a heavy burden of debt can the developing countries find the resources for educating all their citizens? The adult education process in developing countries is a conservative unchanging missionary process without much dynamism. It is like the study of geriatrics in these societies. No medical student studies it as there is neither money or prestige in practising geriatrics. Adult education is similar. It has no prestige unlike science education, management studies, and computers.

Then who will innovate? Who will promote a new order in

- political, economic and social liberation of the poor unschooled and the unlettered in developing countries;
- promoting specific modern and scientific techniques in educating the poor;
- recognising the special needs in education culture, science and technology for these disadvantaged groups;
- ensuring sustainable development for the silent masses?

The populist education for the masses with a watered down classical type curriculum does not provide employment for them. Can the non-formal education for the illiterate adult or a formal education with an unqualified teacher, an old book, a blackboard under a crumbling roof provide employment opportunities for the poor in the developing world? If formal elitist education is not easily changed for 21st century living, what makes us believe that the intellectuals and teachers in adult education will change to empower the poor and the disadvantaged in the South.

Cliches in education promoted by international bodies are scattered in all sections of the documents. Some are useless cliches at that. 'Learning begins at birth' I thought learning begins

(Continued on page 13)

The Problem of Sri Lanka's Non-Democracy

Izeth Hussain

The writer has earlier argued (LG of 1 May 1992) that in Sri Lanka there is freedom of expression for the representatives of the people, but not the people. It has since been shown spectacularly, that freedom of expression for the representatives is also limited. The Government refused to allow parliamentary debates on the Auditor-General's report on the Central Bank, on the Elections Commissioner's report disclosures about rigging at the last General Elections, and on the Udugampola allegations. The refusal was made in each of these cases on grounds that practically everyone recognizes as thoroughly specious. Evidently the Government's position is that parliamentary debates will be allowed only to the extent that they will not be too embarrassing to the Government.

The Government's position makes nonsense of democracy. Sri Lanka's peculiar version of democracy might be called "quasi democracy" because it does have some notably democratic features, but that seems too neutral a term to describe something so patently nonsensical. Sri Lankan democracy was made nonsensical by the 1977 Government. It will be remembered that under that Government we were deluged by an unrelenting torrent of rot about Sri Lanka's far-famed five-star democracy, a performance that was vastly impressive for its sheer zaniness. The more appropriate term might therefore be "nonsense democracy". In the interest of brevity, we shall call it "non-democracy".

A little reflection will show that the present Government is in no way to blame for Sri Lanka's non-democracy. During the furore provoked in Parliament by the Government's display of non-democracy, an Opposition politician asked whe-

ther the Government was trying to kill democracy. It is a charge of which the Government is wholly innocent. For it can kill only what is alive, not something that was murdered years ago. The 1970 Government assaulted democracy, but Mrs Bandaranaike set it on its feet again by holding free and fair elections in 1977. The next Government briskly set about brutalizing democracy, and held a Referendum instead of General Elections in 1982. We see in the newspapers that Mrs Thatcher once described referendums as a "device of demagogues and dictators", a fact noted also by Karl Marx long ago. By the 1982 Referendum, characterized as it was by malpractices fully substantiating the charges of Thatcher and Marx, Sri Lankan democracy was kicked to death in maniacal glee. Since then the corpse of Sri Lankan democracy has been in an advanced state of decomposition, the autopsy has been performed several times and the facts are well known, so that it is not necessary to go into detail here. What has now to be recognized is that the present Government is merely acting in terms of the norms of non-democracy well and thoroughly established by the previous Government. A further point that has to be made is that according to widespread perceptions the opposition parties are also non-democratic and it is confidently expected that should they ever come to power they too will show great devotion to non-democracy. Why then should the present Government alone be blamed for non-democracy?

Instead of blaming the Government, and endlessly bemoaning the fate of Sri Lankan democracy, we could try to establish whether there might be some advantage in non-democracy. There is a great deal to be

said for looking at the cheery side of things, particularly in Sri Lanka where the people, according to one researcher at least, have attained the second-highest, possibly the highest, suicide-rate in the entire world. It is relevant to mention also that in the matter of disappearances, we have greatly impressed that rest of the world. In this situation we must try to promote cheeriness rather than alarm and despondancy.

Before examining a possible advantage in non-democracy, we must state that there could be great value in merely recognizing Sri Lanka's democracy for what it is, nonsense, because that is the truth. For some reason, all known human societies have attached high value to Truth. Why this should be so is perplexing because, obviously enough, falsehood is so much more useful in making one's way in life as shown by the careers of successful politicians. It may have something to do with a species characteristic, the human drive to seek out the facts, which varies in intensity but is there in practically all human beings. Whatever the explanation, the recognition of Sri Lankan democracy for what it is, nonsense, should have great value for us.

The possible advantage of non-democracy that we have in mind could turn out to be a very substantial one. This idea has been prompted by a reading of Islamic political theory. In the earlier period of Islam, there was a strong insistence by jurists and others that rulers should justify themselves in terms of legitimacy and justice. However, the Islamic world never managed to sort out the problem of legitimate dynastic succession, usurpers took power quite often and the focus in political theory came to be exclusively on justice as providing the legitimation for rulers.

That is to say, they were required to act justly in terms of Islamic precepts and norms. In other words, rulers were expected to legitimize their power not by a legitimate process of coming to power, by their performance and nothing else.

In the good old days Sri Lankan governments came to a power through democratic elections the legitimacy of which was never questioned, except of course that there were minor infractions which led to elections petitions. After getting elected democratically, they came to behave more and more undemocratically, and placidly enjoyed their term of power however poor their performance. The rationale behind that was that as the Governments had come to power legitimately, nothing could destroy their legitimacy and there was no case for throwing them out before the next elections. The situation has changed after 1982 as the legitimacy of our Governments has become problematic, both in terms of the process by which they came to power and their non-democratic behaviour. It is a situation, just as in the Islamic world at one time, in which only performance and nothing else can provide legitimacy to the Government. The great advantage one can see in this situation is that it provides a strong incentive for a government to become performance-oriented.

It must be acknowledged, however great our commitment to democracy, that there can be excellent performance outside the framework of democracy, as formerly in South Korea under military dictatorship. It is conceivable that President Premadasa, who is pre-eminently the doer and not just another talker, may take the corrective measures necessary for good governance, provide legitimacy for his Government through performance and bring Sri Lanka through eventually. This prospect cannot be ruled out, but a question arises. What happens

after him? We can have another 1977 Government, which quickly gets drunk with power and proceeds to wreck the country again.

It has been understood right down the ages that no state should depend on just one man if it is to secure its future. To quote by way of illustration from a source near, at hand, this is what the brilliant hard-headed realist Machiavelli wrote in his Discourses:

"Hence it comes about that kingdoms depending on the vigor of one man alone are not very lasting because that vigor departs with the life of man..." This means that we have to establish a political system under which Sri Lanka has a reasonable chance of securing its future. The problem really is to establish the norms under which power can be controlled, as uncontrolled power can become maniacal, as happened under our 1977 Government. In brief we must somehow try to establish a proper democratic system in Sri Lanka.

In trying to do this we have to take several factors into account, such as changing the Constitution which has some provisions which make it look like an anti-democratic monstrosity, our political culture which has apparently become non-democratic, the role of our opposition which according to some is coming out of its long hibernation, and a possible external input which could turn out to be crucial in promoting or aborting democracy. We will set these important issues aside for the present, and deal in the remainder of this article with the question of whether the President can really be expected to establish democracy.

The prospect for that looks rather bleak. It should be obvious that few governments, if any, can be expected to readily agree to a diminution of their own power, for the reason that normally the appetite for power grows in the eating.

The attitude to power of most governments, right through history, was put succinctly by the Renaissance Pope who on assuming office proclaimed to his friends, "Gentlemen, God has given us the Papacy. Let us enjoy it."

It looks particularly unrealistic to expect a non-democratic government to agree to a democratic system because that involves a far greater diminution of governmental power than under any other political system. Some degree of democratization is one thing, a full-fledged democratic system quite another. The record shows that most governments in the Third World countries have fiercely resisted democracy, until the pressure became too great to be resisted.

What is most important to realize is that even in countries where democratic ideology has taken hold. Governments and their supporting elites have resisted, and fiercely resisted, actual full-fledged democracy for protracted periods. In the modern period, as distinct from the ancient Greek period of democracy, democratic ideology seems to have begun during England's Puritan revolution of the seventeenth century with the Levellers and Diggers and others approaching the revolutionary idea of the sovereignty of the people, and thereafter it became powerful during the eighteenth century, leading to the American and French Revolutions. But it is only in this century that a fundamental requisites of modern democracy, universal adult franchise, has been realized in the West. Since the U. S. today is the foremost champion of democracy, it is worth recalling that notwithstanding the magnificent Declaration of Independence, enshrining the noblest democratic principles, and the American Bill of Rights, both of them way back in the eighteenth century, the American blacks and women had to wage a heroic and protracted struggle to get their democratic rights, which became possible only in

the course of this century. The truth appears to be that rulers and their supporting elites have never really taken kindly to democracy, perhaps for two reasons at least. One is that under democracy it could become difficult to keep the people, more particularly the lower classes, in their place. The other is that it does not allow sufficient power to make its abuse worthwhile. That Renaissance Pope, who so pithily expressed the purpose of government from the ruler's standpoint, would probably have disdained to take power under a democracy, except of course to subvert it. Democracy, it appears, is something that has to be extorted from Governments.

If such has been the travail of democracy in countries where democratic ideology took root long ago, what are we to expect in Sri Lanka where instead of democratic ideology we have democratic rhetoric, form of Orwellian duck-speak in which the noises made about democracy are not much more meaningful than the quacks of ducks. We must remember that in Sri Lanka democracy broke down without a shot being fired, whereas in other Third World countries coups were required for the purpose. Furthermore, both the Government and the Opposition are widely regarded as non-democratic. We Sri Lankans have not exactly been consumed by a grand passion for democracy. It is a situation in which the prospect of the Government taking to democracy like a duck to water looks remote. The continuance of duck-speak on democracy is more likely.

Let us assume, however, that President Premadasa decides that a properly democratic system is required to secure Sri Lanka's future, and proceeds to install it. He will probably be opposed by his own supporters. Here we must note the significance of the impeachment move against him. Factors such as caste and class could have been important, but probably more important

was the fact that he was curbing the powers and privileges of the UNP bigwigs and their henchmen. In other words, the major part of the motivation for the impeachment was that they were expected to have in manner befitting democracy, not continue to misbehave in the non-democratic manner to which they had become accustomed. What we might expect from

the Government side is democratization, stopping short of democracy, to the extent required for "good governance" as understood by Sri Lanka's aid-bosses. For democracy, pressure has to mount from the other side, that is to say not just the opposition political parties but the Sri Lankan people who are supposed to be sovereign.

Fantasy . . .

(Continued from page 10)

before that event. "Strengthening partnerships." Education of the formal type is not on a partnership but based on a relationship of dominance over another. Expert advice or donorship is not a partnership but a relationship of dependence.

Partnership in education of all government departments and other social sectors in promoting education is an absolute necessity. Partnership in vertical structures in education well emphasized in the 'Guidelines', is a sine quo non for promoting action and planning in this area.

The proposal in the action plan in obtaining the support of "community, associations, Co-operatives, religious bodies and other non-governmental organisations" is welcome indeed. In many developing countries religious institutions still contribute much to education. The role of Buddhism and Islam in the past and of Christianity in modern times in the education of the masses should open our eyes to new possibilities of providing basic education for all.

But I wish to find evidence for the statement "Given the im-

portant contribution that basic education can make to national development and to resolving major global problems. . . ." This is the missionary section of the document. But in spite of it all this attempt to promote the education of all is a worthwhile gift to mankind, at least to those living in sullen societies. These societies refer to quality and standards in education and not the education of all their peoples. There is a sustained myth in education that more means low quality education and that equity and excellence are diagonally opposed and that both cannot be achieved. This is a propagated educational mythology of the educated elites of colonial countries.

I have read somewhere that the average literacy of the Third World was 56 per cent. To achieve a literacy rate of 100 per cent for all Third World countries will perhaps take another century if we retain that as a goal in the 21st century. The document is, therefore, of historical importance as were the Karachi, Addis Ababa and Sand Diego plans drawn up about three decades back, good archival material and not easily implemented.

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The suppression of Tamil military castes

D. P. Sivaram

One of the first concerns of the British as soon as they conquered the southern parts of India was with the ancient and ingrained "habits of predatory war" among the Tamils. The extirpation of these "habits" and culture was considered essential to establishing their authority in Tamil society. The Tamil region was ceded to the British in July 1801; a proclamation was issued by them in December the same year whereby the use of arms was suppressed and the military service traditionally rendered by the Tamil military castes was abolished. It was stated in the proclamation that "wherefore the Right Honourable Edward Lord Clive, ... with the view of preventing the occurrence of the fatal evils which have attended the possession of arms by the Poligars and Servaikaras of the southern provinces... formally announces to the Poligars Servaikaras and inhabitants of the southern provinces, the positive determination of His Lordship to suppress the use and exercise of all weapons of offence" and that the Palayams would be turned into Zamindari estates for the purpose of preventing the Tamil military castes from engaging in their customary military services. The British proclamation abolished the Palayam system "In the confident expectation of redeeming the people of the southern provinces from the habits of predatory warfare" and in the hope of inducing them to take up "the arts of peace and agriculture". The ban on carrying weapons was crucial to the urgent task of depriving the Tamil military castes of their traditional status in the southern provinces. The woods and fortresses of the turbulent Poligars were destroyed and removed from all maps and official documents (they remained so until the time of Karunanidhi). Lushington, one of the

first British officials to be sent to the Tamil region, had noted that the military castes by remaining armed amidst an unwarlike population wholly devoted to agriculture stood between the east India Company's coffers and the vast revenues of the land. (Caldwell:1888, chapt, 9) The demilitarization of the Tamil region did not spare even the Kallar caste which had rendered valuable service to the British in the important wars of the Carnatic by which they subjugated the whole of south India. The hereditary chiefs of this military caste were the kings of Pudukkottai — the Thondamans who had sided with the British against Hyder Ali and later his son Tipu Sultan. In many of the early wars the British fought on behalf of the Nawab of Arcot in south India, the Kallar had made up a sizable portion of their forces. But the Kallar and the other Tamil military castes had to be disfranchised to rid Tamil society of its ancient habits and culture of predatory warfare. What did the British mean by the Tamil habit of predatory war? The Tamil works which contain treatises on martial life and the conduct of war define it as Thannuru tholi (a task undertaken on one's own) and Mannuru tholi (a task undertaken on behalf of the king or commander)—Tolkappiyam, purathinaiyal-60. Unlike many other martial castes of the subcontinent the Kallar and the Maravar were not yeoman peasants who dropped the plough for the sword only in times of war. They had to seek battles even when their king or chieftan was not at war. Most of the hero-stones found in Tamilnadu commemorate such battles between groups of Kallar or Maravar. Some of the warrior gods who are worshipped to this day in southern Tamil nadu are Marvar who distinguished themselves in such battles which took place even after the British

began to abolish the culture of predatory war. The bow-song of Eenamuthup Pandian, a Tamil demigod, describes the martial life and heroic deeds of that Maravar warrior who lived in British times. The warrior's virtue was to desire the bliss of the heros heaven; it was degrading for him to seek fertile lands. The Puranaanooru (an anthology of Tamil heroic poems) derides the newly arisen kings for their interest in rice yielding fields (verse 287). War was the sole occupation and aim of the Tamil warrior clans. A mother describes the Tamil martial ethos — "To bring forth and rear a son is my duty; To make him a warrior is the father's duty:

To make spears for him is the blacksmith's; To bear bright sword and do battle, to butcher enemy elephants and return, that is the young man's duty" (verse 312). In many seventeenth and eighteenth century British reports the epithet "fierce and turbulent" is very often used to describe the Tamil military classes. Their ancient and deeprooted cultural hegemony in Tamil society was seen as a positive threat to the perpetuation of colonial rule. To eradicate it the British adopted a dual strategy. On the one hand they attempted to destroy the social structures which sustained this culture; on the other they promoted castes which stood to gain from the suppression of the military castes. The most important structure which gave the Kallar and Maravar immense power in the Tamil countryside was the system of Kaval. It was abolished in 1832. This has been the traditional means by which the Kallar, Maravar and Ahampadiyar derived their livelihood in times of peace when they were not employed as soldiers. The manual of the Tinnevely district described the origins of

the Maravar Kavalkaras thus "As feudal chiefs and heads of a numerous class of the population, and one whose characteristics were eminently adapted for the followers of a turbulent chieftan, bold active, enterprising, cunning and carpricious, this class constituted themselves or were constituted by the peaceful cultivators, their protectors in times of bloodshed and rapine, when no central authority existed. Hence arose the system of Desha and Stalum Kaval, or the guard of Seperate Villages. The feudal chieftan (and his Kallar and Maravar) received a contribution from the area around his fort in consideration of protection afforded against armed invasion" The Village and district Kaval system permeated many levels of rural Tamil society and hence was hinderance to the effective implementation of new form of administration and revenue collection. In some instances Kaval was taken over from the military castes and was handed over to the Shanar (Caldwell: 1888 p 224) or anti-Kaval movements were encouraged among non-military castes to coerce them to give up Kaval, sell their lands and leave. (Madras presidency Police administration 1896) Many efforts were taken to put a stoo to the Kaval services of the Tamil military castes in the countryside in the first half of the nineteenth century culminating in the organization of a new police system in 1860 which recruited mostly from among castes which were considered favourable to the British. The Adi-Dravidas or Parayar were recruited heavily into the Indian Army. The Nadu-Ambalakarar institution of the Kallar by which justice was traditionally dispensed in regions dominated by them was also abolished to make way for the penal and judiciary system introduced by the British. Deprived of their traditional occupations of Kaval and soldiering and in some instances of their lands a large section of the Tamil military castes became in the eyes of the colonial govern-

ment, a delinquent mass, a danger to the rural social order. A body of administrative and ethnographic literature arose on this perception and on the need to portray and classify the Tamil martial castes as criminal. It also relegated them to the margins of Tamil history and culture. The Kallar and Maravar who had been referred to as the military tribes of the southern provinces by early British writers were classified as criminal tribes towards the end of the nineteenth century.

The task of disfranchising the Tamil military castes and destroying the structures of their traditional power in Tamil society was strengthened by the promotion of the Vellalas, Shanars (Nadaras), Adi-Dravidas and the Nattampadis who contrasted favourably with the Maravar and suited the aims of revenue, security and conversion. Among these the Vellalas acquired the most favoured status for the following reasons.

a) They were, according to the 1871 Madras census report "a peace loving, frugal and industrious people". They were essential to consolidating the new revenue and administrative manual (Coimbatore) noted that the Vellalas were "truly the backbone of the district. It is they who by their industry and frugality create and develop wealth, support the administration, and find the money for imperial and district demands."

b) It was ascertained that "according to native ideas" husbandry was their only proper means of livelihood and that they had no established traditions of kingship like Kallar Maravar. The Madurai manual noted that Aryanayaga Mudali the great general of the sixteenth century was dissuaded from making himself a king on the ground that no Vellalan ought to be a king.

c) They were found suitable for the expanding manpower needs of British administration. They were unsurpassed as

accountants and many of them were employed as Karnams or village accountants.

d) They were extremely conservative in their outlook. The Tanjore manual observed "in religious observances, they are more strict than the generality of Brahmins; they abstain from both intoxicating liquors and meat"

It is in this milieu that the Dravidian movement took shape as the pro-British of the demartialized Tamil social order.

Letter

Militarism and Caste

With the reference to the above article in **Lanka Guardian** (1/7) 1992. In the article the writer Mr. D. P. Sivaram, some facts are incorrectly stated.

The statement a strong, narrative is found in Myliddy is correct.

The names of the chieftains are Veeramaniccathevan, Periyannaduthevan & Narasinhathevan.

The statement that the marava chieftains and their castemen married among Karaiyar of the village is also correct.

But the statement about Thuraiyar and Panivar is incorrect.

The facts:

The clans known as Thuraiyar and Panivar in this village are the descendents of the ancient families of Myliddy.

The martial arts of marva are popular among these two clans though the Thuraiyar is considered as superior.

Thuriyar as well as Panivar were connected by marriage to Ramnad the home country of the Maravar for which evidence is available.

I am one of the descendents of the ancient family of the village and the writer of an article titled as 'Ancient Villages in Jaffna' which appeared in Eelanadu on 13.07.1986.

M. Raja Joganantham
Colombo 6.

Democracy: Strains and Perils

Bruce Matthews

For almost 20 years Sri Lanka has regarded itself as a socialist democracy. In order to express what this means, it has dramatically changed its constitution in 1972 and 1978, adjusting the latter with 17 amendments in little over a decade. It has done this at a time when the country has been wracked by ethnic communalism, insurgency and much accompanying social and economic distress. Yet despite this disorder and the fact that one-third of the island is still in much turmoil that it is beyond the reach of representative government, Sri Lanka in some sense sustains a political democracy. It can be argued that it is quasi-democracy or a democracy under siege but nonetheless a system of multiparty elections remains in place at four levels (presidential, parliamentary, provincial and local).

We discuss here the uncertainties of Sri Lanka's current dilemma of democratic government by focusing especially on its Parliament. The authority of Parliament in particular has been much reduced since 1978 (an almost total concentration of power in the office of an executive president reinforces this impression), but it nevertheless continues to involve itself significantly in several levels of political power and influence. In this regard, a major confrontation between oppositional elements in Parliament and President Ranasinghe Premadasa in the autumn of 1991 made it evident that the legislature was not altogether impotent. This incident deserves analysis.

It showed that Sri Lanka's executive presidency, short of declaring itself a dictatorship, depended for its political survival both on internal party democracy and a legislature which must work in reasonable harmony with an omnipotent executive.

Role of Parliament

The question of the present role and prestige of Parliament arose largely because most of its power was transferred to an executive-style presidency in 1978. When compared to this presidency, with its large and fully independent secretariat, Parliament may not appear to be all that important in the context of Sri Lanka's polity. Indeed, most citizens equate the presidency with the 'government' of Sri Lanka rather than with its Parliament. Critics of the present system of government point out how the consolidation of power in the presidency has compromised of Parliament's very *raison d'être*. There questioning that a presidential system putatively introduced to provide the political stability required for economic growth and investment, and 'freed from the pressure of passing political winds', has transformed itself into a sort of authoritarianism. Paradoxically, former President J. R. Jayewardene, who established the executive presidency, was referred to as a 'committed parliamentarian' even overseeing personally the building of Parliament's lavish new premises. But Jayewardene also brought forward measure hitherto not part of Sri Lanka's post-independence experience, such as requiring signed but undated letters of resignation from all 140 of his members of Parliament. The integrity of the 1977

Parliament was also weakened when, in December 1982, President Jayewardene cancelled the proposed 1983 parliamentary elections and, by use of a dubiously conducted referendum, extended its term for another five years.

Parliament was to a degree kept alive during these years by the sheer dynamism of the then long-time prime minister, Ranasinghe Premadasa, who had to struggle constantly with other cabinet Ministers to maintain his pre-eminence. Parliament was their forum, the place for MPs to work up the necessary political support and achieve high public profile. It might be noted that President Jayewardene appeared willing to share some of his powers with ministers. His venerable age and gentlemanly style helped him exercise his presidency without overt challenge from his party or from the public at large.

What makes the present Parliament so different is the fact that there is no longer a strong prime minister, little devolution of presidential power to the cabinet, and no struggle for dominance among the cabinet ministers themselves. This being so, the authoritarian character of the executive presidency has become even more apparent. In some quarters there is anxiety and pessimism about a perceived lacklustre role and a declining relevance of Parliament.

Some will maintain that in a system where there is an elected president, parliamentary election is merely a confirmation of the President's popularity and public image. In the case of Sri Lanka, however, the introduction of proportional representation in 1988 has

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provided Parliament with a substantial political opposition. There are currently 225 members of Parliament 196 are elected on the basis of proportional representation and another 29 are appointed from a 'National List'. With 125 seats, the United National Party holds a modest majority. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party has 67 seats, and the remaining 33 belong to a variety of political parties and alliances. Thus in an important way, Parliament continues to reflect the public will. And because only Parliament can pass the budget, it provides some degree of check and balance to an all powerful presidency.

Further, as the constitutional crisis of August 1991 demonstrated, the President needed the goodwill and support of his MPs to hold on to authority. It was not a question of how much constitutional power the 1989 Parliament had, but how much real influence it could exercise over the polity.

The constitutional authority of Parliament was tested to its utmost in the crisis which unfolded on 27 August 1991, when 127 MPs, including supposedly 47 from the governing UNP, signed a resolution of impeachment against President Premadasa. Fifteen paragraphs of allegation of abuse of power were detailed, including charges of extravagances and corruption, of operating a police state, and of arming the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

The petition which sought the removal of the President was suddenly (and at the appropriate astrological hours) submitted to House Speaker M. Haniffa Mohamad, who at once informed President Premadasa that he would 'entertain' it. Because of the secrecy with which the impeachment plans were worked out between dissident UNP forces and the Opposition SLFP, the action took many by surprise. According to

the Constitution, the Speaker has the power to consider such a resolution and to place it before Parliament if it is signed by half of the whole number of MPs and if he is 'satisfied that such allegation(s) merit inquiry and report by the Supreme Court.' Not unexpectedly, the response of President

Premadasa was swift and decisive. He immediately prorogued Parliament for a month. This allowed him time to gather support and worked out a strategy. The four weeks that followed were brimmed with invective and commotion, with no clear indication of how events would unfold.

The impeachment process is a complicated one involving four steps: entertainment of a resolution by the Speaker, passing of the resolution in Parliament by a two-thirds majority, proving the allegations before the Supreme Court, and passing the resolution again in Parliament with a two-thirds majority. By any count it appeared a long shot for the disenchanted UNP group and the SLFP, not impossible. Before the crisis was over, it was to involve further motions of no confidence in the government and no confidence in the Speaker. In sum, the period from late August to mid-October of 1991 was chaotic and tense, but it was also a time when the power of Parliament — and in particular that of the Speaker — held the political destiny of the country in its grip. Detailed accounts of the action of the opposition groups and the Presidential forces during these restless few weeks can be found elsewhere. There had been rumours for over a year about the possibility of a parliamentary 'coup' involving the the SLFP and a 'ginger' group of the UNP. At last a plan was worked out. Two days before the impeachment resolution was handed to the Speaker, the rebel UNP and SLFP parliamentarians quietly closed ranks.

Onetime Cabinet Minister Gamini Dissanayake dropped in a cabinet re-shuffle in 1989 perhaps for questionable loyalty to the President Premadasa in the latter's eyes, and the all-island organiser of the SLFP, Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, reportedly met at the funeral of Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991.

Not all SLFP members of Parliament could be counted on to support the initiative of an impeachment order. Former SLFP Speaker Stanley Tillekeratne refused to endorse the proposal and other SLFP MPs were to be approached because of uncertainty over their disposition. Of the various smaller political parties represented in Parliament, support was mustered from the USA and the MEP. Finally, with the critical backing of three UNP Ministers (Lalith Athulathmudalai, G. M. Premachanda and Chandra Gankanda) and 44 other UNP members of Parliament, a petition with the signatures of over half the House was secured. Without a two-thirds majority, Speaker Mohamad might have straight away rejected the resolution but the Opposition must have determined that he would opt to exercise his powers of review, which he did.

The initial predicament for President Premadasa was his not knowing who had signed the resolution from the UNP. A 'vanguard' of eight MPs clearly acknowledged their link with the Opposition. The other 39 signatories had to be sought out for possible 'reconversion.' By Thursday, 29 August, the President had obtained for signatures of support from 90 MPs, leaving only 35 rebel parliamentarians. In due course, most of these recanted. In the meantime, the President secured an understanding from the armed forces that they would not intervene in the crisis. He also made an important visit to Kandy for an audience with the two powerful prelates of the Siam Nikaya the Mahanayakes of Asigiriya and Malwatte. Two weeks

later, in mid-September, the UNP dissident Gamini Dissanayake also went to Kandy to explain the position of the rebel group to the monks. There is some indication of a split in the attitude of the *sangha* (the collectivity of monks) over the crisis. The possibility of their political involvement, although unlikely, cannot be entirely disregarded.

By mid-September Speaker Mohamad appeared to be lending his support to the impeachment procedures. He rejected an advisory opinion from the Attorney General that the resolution had lapsed by virtue of the fact that Parliament had been prorogued and that the resolution had not been placed on any parliamentary Order Paper. Resisting requests from his supporters to permit a motion of no confidence in the Speaker, President Premadasa instead presented Mohamad with a list now signed by 116 loyal UNP members of Parliament — well over half the House. He further obtained the parliamentary support of the SLMC, TULF and EROS. Although EROS had split into two factions in June 1990, with one branch returning to Jaffna and the other loosely aligning itself with the government, in early October the Jaffna group returned to Colombo, ostensibly to lend further weight to Premadasa's struggle for survival.

Even as late as 24 September, Speaker Mohamad gave every indication that he would eventually proceed (possibly by secret ballot, although this device is not in the Standing Orders of Parliament) on the impeachment resolution once Parliament reconvened. Enormous rallies in the name of the UNP rebels attracted both the committed and the curious. Two more UNP ministers joined the ranks of the rebels, while others vacillated, trying to determine which way the tide was turning.

Parliament was ceremoniously reconvened by the President on

24 September. It was a wild, jeering, heckling session. For the first time, Speaker Mohamad indicated that he had doubts about the validity of some of the signatures on the impeachment resolution, but that he would rule on the matter shortly. On 7 October, 40 days after he accepted the motion, he notified Mrs Bandaranaike (who had given the notice of the resolution) and the President that there were not enough valid signatures and that the impeachment matter had 'ceased to be entertained' by him. The decision appeared to catch the Opposition off-guard. They had submitted a further motion on 1 October of no confidence in the government on the grounds that it had armed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

An attempt was made to postpone this second motion; it was instead declared invalid by the Speaker. On 10 October, in a final attempt to force the issue, the Opposition tried to oust Speaker Mohamad in a third motion of non-confidence. He was accused of dishonesty and corruption in rejecting the initial motion of impeachment. After a full day's debate, Speaker Mohamad survived the motion by 123 votes to 85. President Premadasa and his parliamentary allies had at last won the day — but not without great effort and cost. Taken as a whole, the incident left a divided but exhilarated legislature, a House that now enjoyed powers it had probably thought were no longer in its grasp.

For the SLFP, the parliamentary challenge to the President could not have come at a better time, as the party was mired in an unresolved internal ideological and power struggle. They welcomed the diversion that the crisis provided, although it is fair to assume that the SLFP leadership never accepted Ranasinghe Premadasa as a rightful occupant of the presidency. This is so because of the questionably conducted presidential election of December 1989, which

Mrs Bandaranaike narrowly missed capturing. It is also because of habitual expectations in the matter of the social background of the head of state.

UNP involvement

At this point it is important to consider the causes that lay behind UNP involvement in the affair. The first allegations stated to have been supported by the 47 non-conforming UNP parliamentarians were based on the charge that the President had 'knowingly and intentionally violated' many Articles of the Constitution. In our opinion these charges focused, in essence, on three features. First, taking over the powers of Parliament to the extent of reducing the role of cabinet ministers. Second, 'carrying on a secret pact' with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, thereby 'imperiling the security of the state'. Third, what was generally alleged as Presidential corruption, wasteful expenditure and vanity. Quite remarkably and gratuitously the document suggested that this was due to 'mental infirmity'. Some of the charges concerning corruption were crudely phrased. They diminished the importance of other, more urgent issues. The charges associated with how the President was responsible for arming the LTTE to fight the Indian Peace Keeping Force and rival Ceylon Tamil groups (and ultimately the Sri Lankan army) were likewise not what was really at stake. Unfortunately, they have since been used not only to discredit the President but to fan the divisive fires of communal chauvinism.

It is the first of these charges which warrants careful review. The crisis was primarily the result of an internal UNP party revolt over *style* of presidential leadership. **At the heart of the matter is confrontation between the old elite of powerful families (*walawe deshapalakas*) and that of a new order which claims to transcend class distinctions and tradition.** President Pre-

madasa avers that this 'class struggle' is what caused the attempted coup. The incident was representative of a genuine dislike by certain key elements in the UNP for the way in which power had come to be exercised by the incumbent President. On the question of a 'class struggle' within the UNP leadership it can be argued that the majority of UNP parliamentarians selected by President Premadasa in 1989 were from more commonplace or less-than-privileged backgrounds than those MPs from former UNP governments. Such representatives have loyally supported President Premadasa's political vision for the country, and have been supportive of him in Parliament. A process of what James Jupp once called 'renationalization' has taken place, with the result that many MPs and even cabinet ministers are less well-educated, less sophisticated and less 'Westernized' than their predecessors in previous parliaments. This is, however, not a matter of caste adjustment. Our studies of caste affiliations for both MPs and cabinet ministers indicate no important caste shift in this regard. Further, it is not a matter which affects only the UNP. New members of Parliament for the SLFP reflect a similar background. As a consequence many from all parties remain vaguely informed about national and international issues, and the level of constructive parliamentary debate remains low. For the UNP, in particular, the parliamentary political system of choosing candidates has proved incapable of throwing up a new generation of thinkers or leaders.

Conformity and 'renationalization' has been achieved, but at a price. Possibly many more UNP parliamentarians than signed the impeachment petition resent the constraints put upon them by the President. Although the prerequisites of office remain attractive, clearly there is dismay over the declining significance of parliament in Sri Lanka's polity. The dictatorial trend in the UNP had become unbear-

able', claims Gamini Dissanayake. Ministers continue to complain about being powerless; the authority they did have has been given over to a few close presidential advisors and permanent secretaries. When a UNP member of parliament, Weerawanni Samaraweera, similarly observed that MPs had been reduced to a level lower than that of a *Grama Seva Niladhari* (a local government official), he could well have been speaking for dozens of his colleagues. This marginalization and powerlessness of parliamentary representatives in the processes of government resulted in the present crisis shortly after 33 months of the new presidency. The revolt was precipitated by President Premadasa's alleged refusal to consult with influential sections of his Cabinet and the UNP majority in Parliament. It further appeared to some, at least, that the President did not fully respect the autonomy of his Cabinet and the UNP parliamentary majority and that he expected them to conform to his vision, his programme and strategies. Not surprisingly internal party democracy decayed, followed inevitably by a decline of party discipline and loyalty.

Presidential Style

Finally, there is the matter of personal presidential 'style'. This related in part to the issue of the President's image as a populist, a man of the people. The type of government has been characterized as Bonapartist. Yet another interpreter described a situation in which a leader 'cultivates a separate and personal political base independent of the party'. This is sometimes termed *caudillismo*. President Premadasa, however, has always been careful to nurture his ties with the masses both as former Minister of Housing and Construction and now as President. One way he did this was through the 'village awakening' (Gam Udawa) scheme. In a leading critique, Serena Tennekoon described this as a countrywide programme where old villages are rebuilt, renamed

and 'returned' to the villagers. In addition, models of buildings and religious sites are made to scale (all of which also point to President Premadasa's progress to the presidency over 40-year period, including his local government phase in Colombo City Hall, his various official residence as Prime Minister and President and places of Buddhist pilgrimage visited by him). Lavish festivals are conducted to depict this career.

These flourishes are relevant to the accompanying image of a somewhat beleaguered president so very dedicated to his country but increasingly strident about perceived foreign interferences in the state. Perhaps consistent with the ever-present undercurrent of Sinhalese nationalism and culture pride (*jathika chintanaya*), some recent presidential actions suggest an inward-turning presidency.

They are not similar to the patterns of former heads of state, who had international connections of one kind or another, even if only with neighbouring India. It is President Premadasa's uncertain response to the outside world that must confuse sectors of his own party. On the one hand he seems to indicate that he wants Lanka to be a modern nation-state, integrated into the world economy and recognized as geopolitically consequential. On the other he appears to retreat into a narrow interpretation of how this is to be done. With foreign access to the President extremely limited and his own worldview and politics shaped largely by pressing internal matters, President Premadasa has had no opportunity to generate either a strong international profile or many significant overseas allies. Both the UNP and opposition critics allege that this is a weakness, and they will exploit it. The situation results in even further populist manoeuvres on the President's part, as he seeks support where he can find it.

Next: Constitutional Crisis

Gender gap hindrance

Sakuntala Narasimhan

PERSISTENT INEQUALITIES: Women and World Development. By Irene Tinker, O. U. P.

As the preface describes it, this book offers an overview of the past and present debates on the subject of women in development, through a set of 15 essays by authors drawn from different regions, ideologies and specialisations—theoreticians, activists, men and women, experts from the Third World and the developed countries. "The unifying theme is women; the unifying problem is the persistence of inequalities in the face of development, the unifying goal is the identification of approaches that will improve women's condition."

As societies move from subsistence to high technology economies, women's work, their roles in and out of the family, their perceptions as well as social perceptions of their place in the scheme of development, all undergo a change. This change, in one sense, benefits (some) women; in another sense, it harms (some) women. The how-and-why of this process, is what these essays offer insights into, each from a different angle.

Women are now able to engage in outside work without being dependent on permission from their male guardians, but these guardians still, largely, remain the masters of her activities, with the right to appropriate her earnings if they choose to. In addition, women's household obligations, pregnancy and infant-and-child care duties restrict the scope of her economic options. For this reason, and as part of a vicious circle, improved techniques, whenever and wherever introduced, get monopolised by the men (who either channelise the inputs to their own areas of work, or

move into and take over work areas that were previously the women's domain) widening the gap between the sexes as development takes place.

Tensions, social as well as familial, result; this often brings pressures to reinforce the traditional pattern, in order to retain the status quo which is seen as threatened by women's altered circumstances. (For example, the rise of fundamentalism in the middle-eastern regions.)

Irene Tinker's essay traces the development of organisations like WID (Women in Development) which challenged the definition of work, conventionally used (under which, even women who spent 12-14 hours per day on the farm or kitchen or fetching water and fuel and fodder, were "not working"). WID also had a hand in bringing about what came to be known as the Percy Amendment to the guidelines for USAID under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1973, to include "the integration of women into developmental activity" in the aid receiving countries as one of the criteria.

She traces the legitimisation of women's concerns in the eyes of the policy makers, to set in motion the process of bringing women in from the margin to the mainstream of national effort, following three world conferences on women. It was these conferences that initiated sex-disaggregated data on various basic indicators, to highlight the point that it is not enough merely to say that per capita nutrition or education facilities or work oppor-

tunities had improved; it is also necessary to see if this improvement was being reflected among all sections, including women who form half the population.

* * *

JANE Jaquette's paper examines Ester Boserup's wellknown work on women and development, while Susan Borque and Kay Warren deal with technology and education in gender perspectives (the constraints on these two counts on women, and how they work). Women's work in export factories is the theme of Linda Lim's paper which examines the stereotype (of exploitative conditions) against the reality (of women enjoying some undeniable gains through such industries).

One of the longest papers in this collection is by economist Amartya Sen, who offers an academic analysis of gender and co-operative conflicts in development. Another interesting essay in this sub-section on intra-house hold distribution and control, is that of Benjamin Senauer who examines the impact of the value of women's time on food and nutrition (what happens when a woman's opportunity costs rise with education, and she has to choose between spending her time cooking conventional food for the family, and taking up work outside and going in for commercially prepared food?). This is a dilemma familiar to many middle-class households in India, and an area of research worth undertaking.

The title of Hanna Papanek's paper, *To each less than she needs, from each more than she can do: allocations, entitlements and value* says it all. One of the more readable papers in this volume, this one refers to cultural customs like foot binding in China, and genital mutilation of females in

(Continued on page 24)

The Role of the Media in a Multi-Ethnic Society

A. M. Macan-Markar

Let me begin with a confession. During my short stay as a reporter for the *Observer*, I wrote five stories about events in the North. All of them dealt with violence, a situation that provided a neophyte journalist with an opportunity to obtain stories with minimal work. At that time, it was customary to depend on the Police, the Army, or a Government spokesman for information. Further, I acquired the habit of writing the report in Colombo, which was made easy because of the telephone. The distance between me and the scene of the events, in most cases Jaffna, did not appear as a problem. And as I recall, any acts of violence against the State sufficed as news.

Among my reports was a story on the autopsy of K. Navaratnarajah, who was found dead in his cell at the Gurunagar army camp. I began this account by identifying the dead man as a terrorist, and went on to add that there was no indication of violence on the body of the prisoner. This story had one source, a military man, who explained that if violence had occurred "a ruptured spleen, kidney, or broken rib would have been noticed while the autopsy was being conducted." By the way, the Police investigated the cause of this death.

Last year, during a research assignment for the Marga Institute, I happened by more information about the same K. Navaratnarajah. It stated that on 10th April 1983, the victim, who was also a Trincomalee farmer, died with 25 internal injuries. Prior to his death in military custody, he was forced to crawl on broken glass, then hot chillie powder was stuffed up his nostrils.

Forth Kanthasamy Memorial Lecture

June 17, 1992

In retrospect, I realized that there was no desire to examine the veracity of my source when I wrote that story. This was a natural bias since he represented the status quo. Moreover, the dead man was a person whom I could not relate to and there was no empathy in me for his personal anguish or the conditions, if ever, that had motivated him into political action. This distance fed my mental withdrawal, my dehumanizing, of a victim of political violence. It is likely that I was very comfortable with the idea that he had violated the law, and law breakers need to be punished. What is most certain is that I did not question the nature of the law, which in that instance was the Prevention of Terrorism Act of 1979.

This illustration is to reveal my failure to supply the readers with sufficient information on the death of Mr. Navaratnarajah. Often, deadline pressure does not provide journalists with the luxury of eliciting a diversity of facts. However, that is no excuse for a conscientious reporter, for he or she can develop the story by subsequent reports, the follow-up. In the example I cited, that was not the case; it was a violation of a fundamental tenet of journalism: a news report needs to provide balanced and accurate facts to enable a citizen to arrive at an independent conclusion, helping to make an educated decision. But what did I accomplish? To play judge, prosecuting attorney

and jury; thereby influencing the reader to my own prejudice, denying him or her the truth.

It is relevant to disclose that my editors never corrected me. Their silence encouraged me to blatantly pursue a preach of faith and trust the public has of the press. Our collective negligence contributed in a small way to the widening schism between the Sinhala and Tamil community.

The man we are honouring today, Mr. Kanthasamy, was conscious of this dichotomy by 1981. He responded by publishing the *Saturday Review*, which rolled off the press in January 1982. Although not a journalist, he realized that the media in the country were failing to uphold a primary responsibility to society. There is little doubt in my mind that he had the savvy and perspicacity to understand the process by which information is gathered by the media and disseminated to the public. This is evident in his own writings to justify the creation of the *Saturday Review*:

"There are no less than 13 daily newspapers published in Sri Lanka in all three languages, and with one solitary exception, they are all published in Colombo, in the South. (The exception is *Eel-anadu*, a Tamil tabloid published in Jaffna, in the North.) This in effect means that news happening in the North or East are sent to the South, where they are filtered, processed, edited, often doctored or distorted, published in the South and sent back to the Northern reader. . . . While a minority of perceptive readers in the North could at least be in a posi-

tion to question their credibility, the bulk of the readership in the rest of the island the majority of whom are Sinhalese, tend to accept the printed word. This process has been going on the past 25 years. In some small way, through the columns of our weekly, we hope to reverse the flow of information and thereby correct the present imbalance."

The topic of this year's commemoration lecture, "The Role of the Media in a Multi-Ethnic Society," gives life to an idea affirmed by the late K. Kanthasamy. Indeed, it is an honour for me to be associated with his ideas through this lecture. As we all know, there were abrupt ends to the lives of many Sri Lankans in the 1980s, and the abduction of Mr. Kanthasamy was typical of the human degradation that proliferated on this land, which some still call paradise. To continue to refer to this land as an Eden, I think, is to ignore the macabre environment that denied people like Mr. Kanthasamy a full life. And history offers us ample evidence of the fate of peoples who ignore the realities, the social forces, during their time. In Sri Lanka, the media, too, contributed to the prevailing attitudes and beliefs. Rather than serve the community as a force of enlightenment, the press, the radio, and the television have blinded people from the truth.

An example that comes to mind is the one-sided, bias reporting that preceded the killing of 13 soldiers in July, 1983. The public perception at the time, thanks to the media, was that the Sri Lankan forces, most of whom happened to be Sinhalese, were the victims of a brutal campaign by armed Tamil youth. Not much was written about life in the North under Emergency Laws, nor were the public informed of alleged attacks by the Police and Army on non-combatant civilians. The little that was

written came out of debates in Parliament.

For this lecture, I shall identify the responsibility of the media, as an institution, in a multi-ethnic society. In this regard, we need to ask: what is the role of the individual journalist in gathering information, processing it, and presenting it to the public? And an area that I shall highlight is political reporting, since it is relevant to the topic.

In my preamble, I referred to the rice and curry of the media: information. But those of us who watch television, listen to the radio, or read newspapers need the same commodity to be informed, educated, and entertained. In modern or modernizing societies, information has been recognized as a vital component to progress, and the body of knowledge selected for mass communication mirrors the attitudes of the media and the nature of the society it serves.

As it appears, the role of the media is a convention that has become part of our reality. This format of social communication has evolved to become an inherent feature of any democracy. Often, the institution of the press is described as the "watchdog" of the government. What needs to be stressed in such a description is that it serves as the "watchdog" for the people. This flows from the right of freedom of expression, a concept that has gained wider currency with the evolution of people's rights.

In our country, the earliest example of the press fighting for the people against the government can be traced back to the last century. In 1848, when a rebellion broke out to protest against the harsh taxes, the Colonial Government under Lord Torrington responded with martial law. However, the victimized local population found an ally in Christopher Elliot, editor of the *Observer* at that time. The loss of life was his rallying cry, and

he called for an inquiry, which was opposed by the Governor. But the latter's recall to Britain vindicated the principles that guided the editor.

That confrontation highlights the unwritten social contract between the press and the people: the media is accountable to the public interest only. Although much has happened since, the idea that aligns the people and the press remains a hallmark of a virile medium.

To uphold such an obligation, virtually making the media the unelected representatives of the citizenry, men and women in this field need to determine that communication exists in their particular medium. For a medium to communicate, it should serve as a forum for ideas, ensuring a two-way transmission of information and opinion. Consequently, journalists become active players in protecting the citizens right to information. This right is guaranteed in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

It states:

- 1) Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.
- 2) Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kind, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art or through any other media of his choice.
- 3) The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph two of the article carries with it special duties and responsibilities: (the need) for the respect of the rights and reputations of others.

Judging from these provisions, it is clear that the emphasis is unequivocally to protect the right of the citizen. On the one

hand, the structures of government are expected to guarantee the social right for information. On the other hand, there is a bearing on the media as an institution, too, since nowhere in Article 19 is there a clause to protect the right of the media to exist as an institution. Rather, it is in the interpretation of the provisions that provide the basis for the media to clamour for the right of free expression.

In Sri Lanka, the media regularly violate the obligations of Article 19, by not providing the citizens with diverse information. Sometimes this violation borders on the ridiculous as happened in August 1981, when a leading Sinhala language newspaper justified the State imposed censorship by blaming Tamil news papers for "false reporting." This same newspaper minimized its coverage or ignored altogether the acts of racial violence that month.

Since independence, the ethnic question has remained a central theme in the political agenda of the country. What is more, nationalism as political rallying point, as a means of political expression, and as a method of organizing has not been limited to one group. Both Sinhala and Tamil politicians found in their respective linguistic communities a powerful electorate. Given such a reality, the institutional responsibility of the media is heightened. It has the framework to link different groups together. That could only be achieved if each medium tolerates different views, beliefs, and ideas. Here again, the media has been far from liberal, a phenomenon that was even around when the press was independently owned. Such an attitude was typified during the coverage of the 1956 General Election, where the newspapers and the ruling class. After his victory, the newly elected Prime Minister, S. W. R. D. Bandarnaike, described the press as a dictatorship.

There is no doubt that a multi-ethnic society will have its share of political disagreements. It is an inevitable feature, since each group will identify with its culture. But the challenge for

the media is to transcend the temptation of becoming partisan.

Before elaborating this function, I need to stress another element in understanding the position of the media. Economically, we are a Developing country. The problems that journalists face in such societies are quite different from the conditions of their counterparts who work in Developed multi-ethnic societies. In the *Handbook for Third World Journalists*, Al Hester: "The reporter deals every day with a world in flux. He or she cannot automatically assume, for example, that there will be consistency in the outlook of political leaders, that his or her pay cheque will buy same amount of food each week, or that power will always be on to run the presses in the newspapers or for transmission from the broadcasting station."

In countries such as ours, poverty is not limited to economics; there is poverty of information. If we were to chart the distribution of and access to information in Sri Lanka, the pattern would reveal an uneven state, where a minority enjoy a wealth of knowledge and the majority depend on limited offerings. This disparity is due to the existing structure of the domestic media, which is limited because of the substantial investment and high operating costs needed to function. However, as we progress, the condition is bound to improve, resulting in a growth of outlets of information. A quantitative increase will provide a variety of media for the citizen to select from, and it would help people ascertain the accuracy of news and opinions that flow to them. Such a condition would invariably improve the quality of public debate on national policy.

Be that as it may, reporters in Developing countries cannot search for excuses when the quality and content of information is at fault. One cannot draw a parallel between the medium of dissemination and the subject matter. While the former may be constrained for reasons that I have explained, the latter thrives on the commitment by the individual

journalist to serve the public good.

Those who report in countries like ours do impact significantly the perception made by the people of incidents and events in their environment. Further, knowledge that is transmitted through the media gives it legitimacy, authority, and authenticity. It is essential, therefore, to provide the citizen with the facts: diversity of news sources makes for a fuller and richer content of knowledge. To accomplish such an objective, a reporter needs to distinguish between quantifiable fact and opinion, to scrutinize the veracity of information, to guarantee the legitimacy and credibility of the source, to ensure confidentiality, to offer comparative opinion, and to report the news free of bias.

(To be Continued)

Gender...

(Continued from page 21)

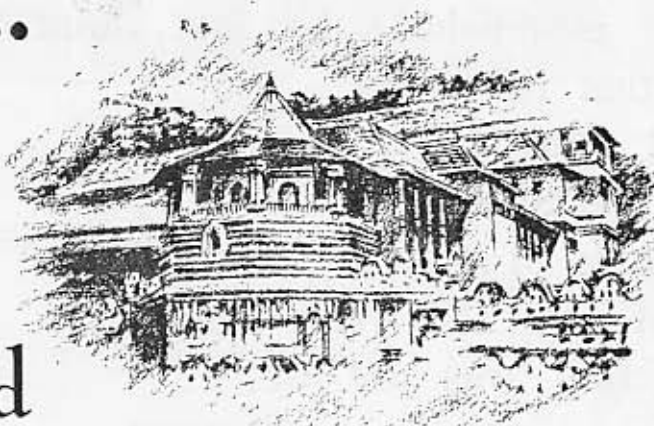
some communities. As she remarks, "conscious and unconscious experiences shape the way one thinks the world works" as evidenced by women (mothers) justifying and perpetuating customs that they have themselves suffered but nonetheless, impose them on their own daughters. Likewise, Christine Obbo's essay describes what exactly happens in African countries, through a couple of case studies that make the point very nicely about women losing out in the process of development.

She says, "Development never will be, and never can be, defined to universal satisfaction... development is more than passage from poor to rich, from a traditional rural economy to a sophisticated urban one. It carries with it not only the idea of economic betterment but also of greater human dignity, security, justice, and equity."

There cannot be a better justification for studies of this kind that sensitise us to the differences between the effects of development on men, and those on women. Development will occur when poverty is reduced, and the only way of reducing poverty is to reduce gender inequality.

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