

LANKA

GUARDIAN

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Environment Fakirs

— *Ravi Prasad Herath (in Rio)*

What Did Bishop Caldwell say in 1888?

— *D. P. Sivaram*

Man — To — Man Battle

— *Amarnath Menon at the front*

Sri Kotha Schism

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The Question of Borders

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Muslims Mobilise

— *A 3rd factor?*

— *Mervyn de Silva*

Press and Ethnic Conflict

— *A. M. Marcan Markar*



Black Knight
It's your move

TRENDS

UNION UNREST

The GMOA has opted for "trade union action" from Aug. 1st if the Health Ministry does not agree to discuss the union's demand for negotiations. The GMOA wants an interim allowance of Rs. 3,000 monthly to all medical officers, until the government implements its proposed revision of salary scales. The GMOA says that rising costs have made it impossible for doctors to maintain a "respectable living standard."

Meanwhile tea workers have struck work to protest against a new ruling by the management of the recently privatised tea estates in the Bandarawela—Welimada district. The new order calls for each worker to prune 250 tea bushes, instead of 150 bushes.

A JIHAD, SAYS ASHRAFF

Mr M. H. M. Ashraff, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader, has said that Muslims were prepared to declare a Jihad against the LTTE if this terrorist group had decided to kill Muslims merely because they pro-

fessed the religion of Islam. "We do not hesitate to kill LTTEers including (supremo) Prabhakaran, but the Government has a duty to encourage us," Mr Ashraff said, and added that he was prepared to die in battle to slit the throat of 'Bloody Prabhakaran,.

LESS BATTLE DODGERS

After the army began to separate the sheep from the goats, in this instance those who suffered genuine injuries in battle from those who inflicted wounds on themselves to dodge going to the front, there were less cases of self-inflicted injuries in the army, military sources said. The perks of the battle dodgers had been reduced, the sources said, and this has had the desired effect.

"A lot of our soldiers are from poor families who join the army to earn a living," the sources said.

THAI INVASION

Four Thai girls were arrested by the police in a Colombo hotel for allegedly engaging in prostitution. They would be medically examined, police said. None of the Thai girls had passports.

Briefly...

Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the SLFP leader, made a public statement about disruptive forces within and outside her party. These elements were causing splits within the party and disrupting unity with other opposition parties; they were serving UNP interests for material benefits received, she said on the eve of celebrating the 32nd anniversary of her election as the world's first woman prime minister.

Mrs Bandaranaike said that these elements should be unmasked and vowed that she would enforce party discipline and unify all anti-UNP forces.

But her son Anura, the SLFP's All-Island Organiser, reported to be in the middle of a factional struggle against forces supporting his mother, dismissed Mrs Bandaranaike's allegations of an anti-leadership conspiracy as unreal and said that his mother's statement was detrimental to party interests.

SC Condemns Police Torture

The Supreme Court in a unanimous judgement has rebuked the police for continuing to torture people in custody despite earlier rulings. The petitioner, a security officer of the National Paper Corporation, was awarded Rs 35,000 as damages and the Inspector General of Police was instructed to take appropriate action.

Murderous act, Says Ravi J

Mr Ravi Jayawardene, son and security advisor to former President J. R. Jayawardene, described the killing of the Thanthrimale High Priest as "a treacherous, unpatriotic and murderous act", in an interview with the Sunday times. Mr Jayawardene said that Thanthrimale had been a safe area though bordering

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locations infested with LTTE and other terrorist groups because of the untiring efforts of the Venerable Kudakongas-kada Wimalagnana Nayake Thera. "I can't imagine a loss as great as this for this country and especially for the people of Thanthrimale. He is irreplaceable," he said.

The High Priest who had been organising protection against terrorism for Tamil refugees as well as for Sinhala peasants, was killed in a mysterious grenade attack.

"Island will be a hospital"

Government's defence expenditure has soared from one billion to Rs 20 billion in ten years, and a former Air Force Chief has predicted that the whole island will be a hospital soon if this war goes on much longer. It was time to start talking, Air Vice Marshall Harry Goonetilleke told *The Island's* Rohan Gunasekera, or Eelam would have to be yielded because the casualties on both sides would be so high; the financial cost too would be unbearable.

The former Air Force Chief was critical of the way in which political and military leaders were setting unrealistic deadlines for ending the "Eelam war".

The two major political parties should talk to each other and find a solution because the Tamils do not want a UNP solution or a SLFP solution but a Sinhala solution, he said.

That sub-judice bar

At a seminar on "Freedom of Expression and the Principle of Sub-Judice conducted in Colombo by the Organisation of Professional Associations, and the Bar Association, leading lawyers called for a statute to clarify doubts about the law of contempt.

"Till that happens", said Mr H. L. de Silva, PC, "we shall-I am afraid put up our shutters much too quickly,

(Continued on page 24)

LETTERS

Prabhakaran's Mentors

D. P. Sivaram's thought-provoking analysis the history of Tamil militarism (May 1, May 15, June 1 and July 1) was a delight to read. However, he has omitted an essential contributing factor to the militarism of the LTTE. It is too simplistic to believe that the historical traditions of the different castes among Tamils in Tamil Nadu and Jaffna alone contributed to the emergence of Tamil Tigers. If that is so, which caste does Clint Eastwood belong to? I pose this question because Prabhakaran had gone on record to acknowledge the influence of Clint Eastwood movies in developing his own martial acumen.

While Sivaram had commented on the links the current DMK leader M. Karunanidhi developed with the Maravar community, he has failed to note that more than Karunanidhi's journalistic skills, it was the movies of Kandy-born M. G. Ramachandran which brought a sense of martial pride to the Tamil masses, both in Tamilnadu and Sri Lanka. In the late 1940s and whole of 1950s. MGR acted in a series of Tamil historical costume-adventures to highlight the Tamil martial tradition. Especially successful as box-office "hits" were the movies with names that began with the first syllable 'Ma'. The names of these movies told the past glory of Tamil. These include, *Manthri Kumari* (Minister's Daughter), *Marutha Naatu Ila-varasi* (Princess of Marutha Land), *Marma Yogi* (Mysterious Ascetic), *Malai Kallan* (Mountain Thief) *Madurai Veeran* (Hero of Madurai), *Maha Devi* (The Great Devi), and *Mannaathi Mannan*

(King of Kings). In all these movies, MGR exhibited his martial skills to thrill his fans. There is no doubt that Prabhakaran and his original band were more influenced by these MGR moves than by anything else.

Sachi Sri Kantha

Osaka BioScience Institute
Osaka 565, Japan

George Keyt

May I set the record straight on two matters in Tilak A Gunawardhana's perceptive and generous review of *George Keyt Drawings* published on the occasion of Keyt's 89th birthday over two years ago (LG 15 June '92) Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* was done into English in 1940 with help not of Harry Pieris the painter but of Harold Peiris, Keyt's brother-in-law, who was well versed in Sanskrit. In the second place, Keyt has not in the least stopped drawing or painting. In January this year he moved to yet another village home near Kandy, his beloved terrain, and on the eve of his 91st birthday on April 17th set up his easel, paints and brushes in a brand new studio. Despite frailties of great age, infirmities of the flesh, and an inevitable inspirational fatigue, the urge to create remains no less insistent. One can only wonder at the strength of an inner flame which refuses to go out. The two paintings I saw there on April 28th bore eloquent testimony to that spirit.

H. A. I. Goonetilleke

Ouwela.

Endless Ethnic Wars

Mervyn de Silva

The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader, Mr. Mohammed Ashraff MP has asked the government to create a "Muslim Battalion" called the JIHAD" regiment like SINHA (Lion) regiment of the Sri Lankan army. It will fight the LTTE along with other units of the Army against the Tamil 'Tigers' who have been massacring Muslims, particularly in the Eastern province. The 'Jihad' regiment will not only serve the "national cause" but "the Islamic cause".

The "Sinha" regiment is not the sole Sinhala regiment in the Sri Lanka army. There are the Gemunu, the Gajaba regiments and other units named after Sinhala heroes, usually warrior kings. This is no aberration. The Sinhals are the majority, overwhelmingly so. Whereas in other institutions and agencies, this ethnic ratio is reflected more often than not by the ordinary law of arithmetic, there was a time when the minority Tamils were "over-represented", so to say... e.g. medical services, Civil service, diplomatic service, medical and engineering professions, these historical or post-colonial imbalances have been rectified, by and large.

Not so the armed forces. That did not matter in times of peace, when the army in fact was largely ceremonial. The first army commander was General Anton Mutucumaru, a Tamil. There was however a transitional period during which Brigadier Caithness was in charge, under a Ceylon-UK agreement signed by Prime Minister D. S. Senanayake. Brigadier Caithness's views fell short of Mutucumaru's "concept of what the Army of independent Ceylon should be". The first task in fact was to draft an Army Act.

In his history of the Sri Lankan army, General Mutucumaru'

regards, quite rightly, that the 1971 JVP insurgency was the first real national security threat which independent Ceylon-Sri Lanka had to face, while the most serious problem which the government confronted up to the 1970's was the abortive officers' coup of 1965. The first real "war" ('low-intensity conflict' in the internationally accepted jargon) was what this journal has called EELAM WAR 1, that is the war before the IPKF intervention.

The plotters of the Colonel F. C. de Saram-led army coup came from the racial-religious minorities (mainly westernised upper-class Christian) while the so-called kakussi (toilet) coup was allegedly masterminded by Sinhala-Buddhist officers. Major-General Udugama, was the first accused.

It is the challenge of EELAM WAR 1 which matured the Sri Lankan army, turning it into quite a well-equipped professional army. From the 80's, it has increased 5-fold, with a qualitative improvement in the Navy and Air force. Defence spending has soared to 21 billion, a top item in the budget, a trend strongly opposed by the IMF-World Bank, and the donor group, which account for an increasingly large percentage of the foreign exchange budget.

As important as its economic consequences however is the impact of the war on the nation's unity, political stability, and communal harmony. This is not a conventional war but a separatist insurgency that has grown out of ethnic problems starting with language. Once the Tamil rebels had access to modern arms and communication equipment, the military character of the conflict began to change, the challenge to

the State and its territorial integrity more and more serious. What did NOT change however was the basic character of the confrontation — ethnic and territorial. The first was accentuated by a nearly 100% Sinhala or Sinhala-Buddhist army. The "enemy" or the other, the combatant, was 100% Tamil.

In that sense, the lines of division, were clear, however nasty, costly and hopeless the war itself. Not any more. Who killed the highly regarded and intensely popular Chief incumbent of the Tantirimale Raja Maha Viharaya the Ven. Kudakongaskande Gnanawimale Thera. The theory that it was the (Tigers' has been rejected. A top-level inquiry is now going on. The *modus operandi* has been established. The unknown assailant had flung a hand grenade into the monk's bedroom. The grenade, identified as one used by the army, had killed the monk instantly. Reuter reported that a local journalist had suggested a motive for the killing. The monk had evidently told the authorities that at the time of an LTTE attack on the army camp (52 soldiers died in the Tiger raid) many soldiers who should have been on guard duty were asleep.

No longer then is the "battle-line" clear — heroic Sinhala-Buddhist soldiers fighting the savage Tamil 'Tigers'. The Sinhala opinion-makers who fostered that morale-boosting view of the bloody conflict, have been utterly disoriented by the Tantirimale tragedy, particularly after reading the comments of Mr. Ravi Jayawardene, President JR's son who was also his security adviser. (See News) The Nayake thera was one of the most humane and bravest of men, said Ravi Jayawardene.

He helped families in distress, no matter what their race or religion.

A nearly 100% Sinhala army fighting Tamil rebels make the war a racial confrontation that undermines professional judgement. Elemental passions make nonsense of discipline and skills acquired through years of training. And now the Third Community deeply involved in the bloody and confused conflict in the "mixed" (Tamil over 40% Muslim a third and Sinhals the rest) Eastern province, wants its own Muslim battalion. The war is no longer a battle between soldiers and guerrillas but a tribal war, nasty, brutish but by no means. And that, in a tiny compact little island — a theatre without the advantage of space, and therefore all the bloodier and messier.

To make matters worse there is conflict within the army itself, at the command level,

overtactics and strategy; a conflict intensified by professional ambitions, personality conflicts, and career prospects.

And finally, we have the strategic issue. Is military power being used to impress on the 'Tigers' that they have no "military option" (i. e. no "Eelam", won by force of arms)? To make them face up to the fact that they must lay down arms and negotiate a political settlement. Or are we fighting a war to the bitter end to impose COLOMBO's will on the separatists? If so, can we? Do we have the resource to do so? Will not the IMF-WB and the donor groups tell us that they will not sustain a military budget beyond a given point? Has that point been reached? If so, aid and credit will be reduced. The result will be obvious. Economic hardship in the South. Then a new "war", albeit a different kind of war, will commence in the south — the war born out of

material hardship, the anger which divides the poor and lower middle class from the rich, a class war, economic unrest, strikes, violence, and who knows a recrudescence of JVP-type "warfare". The impeachment saw the UNP split up and the emergence of the DUNF. The Nittambuwa meeting to celebrate the 32nd anniversary of Mrs. Bandaranaike becoming the world's first women prime minister, saw fisticuffs and rowdy scenes — open 'warfare' between Anura loyalists and the supporters of sister Chandrika who is backed by her mother. Families, political parties, leaderships are all breaking up — the stark symbol of a society wrecked by divisive conflicts, the constant exposure of the fundamental fact of fissure. Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold wrote W. B. Yeats at the height of the Irish rebellion, the longest war of the kind that now ravages the world, what used to be called the first, second and Third World.

THE WAR

Personal View

There are some, like former Air Force Commander Harry Gunetilleke, who feel that if the war goes on the country will be a walking hospital by the turn of century and that Eelam will ultimately have to be given, because casualties on both sides will be so heavy and the financial cost so high.

"So its time to stop this nonsense and start talking," Air Vice Marshal Harry Gunetilleke says. He advocates a meaningful dialogue with Tamils before which he thinks it essential that the two main Sinhala parties the UNP and the SLFP, should talk to each other and arrive at a consensus on a solution to the ethnic problem. "The two Sinhala leaders should get off their high pedestals and start talking to each other," he explained. "What the Tamils want is not a UNP solution nor an SLFP solution, but a Sinhala solution". He believes these two parties

which together represent 90 per cent of Sinhala opinion, should come to an agreement on any solution and points out that serious consideration will have to be given to the north-east merger which is now the Tamils minimum demand.

The former Air Force Chief is critical of the way in which military and political leaders have set unrealistic deadlines for an end to the Eelam war and feels that even the latest such timetable, given as the end of the year, and the hope about a massive offensive to wrest control of Jaffna are propaganda exercises mounted with UNP's re-election prospects in mind. He says he does not believe the war can be ended by the end of the year and adds that if it did thousands — soldiers, Tigers and civilians — will die. "Let them prove me wrong," he declared.

It is the rank and file and the field commanders who get hit by the political pressure for a quick end to the war and differences of opinion and per-

sonality clashes at the top of the military hierarchy. "I'm talking also as a parent and on behalf of all servicemen's families," declared Air Vice Marshal Gunetilleke who has two sons in the Air Force. "I believe that nowhere can there be a military solution to a political problem.

If the government believes this war can be done quickly and servicemen must be convinced it is a winnable war so that they will not fight it half-heartedly. If not they must stop the war and start talks."

A central command organisation totally free of Defence Ministry and of political interference is essential to run the war, Air Vice Marshal Gunetilleke believes. "It is the men who are getting caught in the cross fire because of friction at the top and divided command. The government must make up its mind and have one command to run the show.

by Rohan Gunasekera
(Sunday Island)

From The Front

K. Amarnath Menon

The Sri Lankan Army's siege of Jaffna means frustration for anyone who tries to enter Jaffna. From Anuradhapura, the command headquarters of the operations against the LTTE, the journey to Vavuniya and the Thandikulam checkpoint is easy enough. But for Principal Correspondent AMARANATH K. MENON and Photographer SHYAM TEKWANI it was impossible to travel beyond this point into Tiger territory. An official curfew was in force and the operations of the security forces were in full swing. At the windswept Palaly airbase, the story was the same. The heavily fortified forward defence lines prevented any movement by road. Trying to get to Jaffna from the sparsely-populated, army-controlled islands of Kayts, Mandaitivu and Karainagar was an even more nightmarish experience, as the choppy sea and bad weather put paid to their plans. Unable to enter Jaffna town, the INDIA TODAY team spent two weeks in and around the peninsula to chronicle the story of a people living a twilight existence and what seems to be the bloodiest battle yet in a tangled ethnic conflict.

The Sri Lankan Army claims that if the decade-old war seems closer to a finale, as the Tigers fight with their backs to the wall, it is mainly because of its own tactical successes in the battlefield. From Palaly, the troops last month advanced as far as Tellipalai, north-east of Jaffna. The islands north of Jaffna are already under army control—they were captured soon after the offensive started in October last year. Moreover, coastal shelling by navy gunboats and aerial pounding of the Tiger bases and defence positions along the coast and inland have forced the Tigers to retreat into the Wannu jungles. Last fortnight the troops sealed off the remaining land route, near Iyakkachchi, east of Elephant Pass, linking the peninsula with the rest of the country. "The LTTE admits that we have trapped them now which we could not do during Operation Liberation in mid-1987," says a Defence Ministry spokesman in Colombo.

LTTE against a wall

At Palaly airbase, the rat-a-tat of gunfire and the pounding of artillery is too close for comfort. But soldiers have found their own way to distract themselves. The bunker walls are pasted with photographs of Sri Lankan and south Indian film stars such as Rajnikant and even Hindu deities, notably Ganesh. Some grow kitchen gardens just behind the lines in a touching attempt to create a tiny oasis of normality.

Getting in and out of the peninsula for the LTTE men is nearly impossible. Even though it takes only 20 minutes by speedboat to move out of Sri Lankan territorial waters—the distance between the Indian and Northern Peninsula coastline is more than the internationally-accepted nautical limits and makes policing difficult—the sea route is sealed by navy patrol boats and hovering helicopter gunships.

The operations north of Jaffna are, however, hampered by the presence of hundreds of Indian fishing trawlers, which used to be employed by the LTTE to smuggle in arms and fuel from Tamil Nadu. Indian fishermen are routinely intercepted by the Sri Lankan Navy. Says Commodore Mohan Jayamaha who heads the naval northern command: "If India can persuade the trawlers to stay away from the maritime boundary, we can do our job more effectively. "A stricter watch on the Tamil Nadu coast by the Indian Navy has already helped to make the Sri Lankan operation considerably smoother.

With the land route from the south at the Poonerny crossing of the Jaffna Lagoon no longer open, troops manning the forward defence lines shoot down all intruders moving under the cover of darkness. The troops did open the strategic Elephant Pass to allow the war-weary populace of the peninsula to travel to Vavuniya, the gateway to the beleaguered Northern province, or further south to Colombo. But the Tigers laid mines on the way to keep the troops from advancing to Jaffna and the Tamils from escaping.

A crucial and effective shift in strategy

The army's increasing control can be attributed to a crucial change in strategy. Earlier they moved into Tiger-controlled territory with the limited objective of demolishing their bases and inflicting as many casualties as possible before returning to their own camps. But it proved costly in terms of lives and equipment. To top it all, the Tigers returned for an action replay. Now the army advances its frontiers and retains control of the seized areas. "We are in full control of the 78 sq km area beyond Palaly (stretching from Tellipalai to Tondaimannar) and will press forward," says General Hamilton Wanasinghe, the tall, sturdy National Defence College fellow, who is the chief of the joint operations command

which was set up to flush out the Tigers from all areas.

Changed tactics have also meant a bigger role for the navy and the air force than in the four-year war that preceded the 1987 accord. Men from the two forces are even drafted for ground patrol work to ease the load on the infantry. Since the departure of the IPKF in 1990 the army has grown in strength from 70,000 to 85,000 and has been strengthened by the infusion of heavy equipment.

Separating the operations in the east and the north, too, has paid off. Having to fight on two fronts keeps the Tigers off-balance. "It's a man-to-man fight and not a war in the conventional sense where generals move large formations," says the stocky, gungho Major-General Denzil Kobbekaduwa, the mastermind behind the army operations in the north. The forces are now better armed than before. For the first time the army has genuine armour up its sleeve with the deployment of the newly acquired Chinese T-55 tanks, on which several cadets have been trained at Indian corps schools.

The only dampener for the armed forces is Premadasa's overtures to the LTTE. A defence expert in Colombo says that the conflict would have been all over but for the Government's lifting of the economic blockade early this year, following international pressure to spare civilians further hardships. Inevitably, it also gave the Tigers breathing space. One officer says: "We are feeding the bug-gers and then fighting them." But the army's mood, as it gets ready for the final offensive, is upbeat. As a confident Colonel Anton Wijendra, leading the troops from Palaly, says: "Civilian casualties are our only worry."

Army intelligence claims it has intercepted messages from LTTE cadres telling their leaders that they are quitting their posts. Fresh recruits are also at a premium. Says a senior army officer: "Cadre commitment is no longer at legendary heights be-

cause those carrying cyanide vials are surrendering readily instead of killing themselves." Moreover, the Tigers have not launched any offensives outside Jaffna since mid-1991. They are running short of well-trained men and are strapped for cash and arms supplies. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalalitha's onslaught has had a crippling impact on their erstwhile supply bases in the state. In their efforts to prepare for the last battle, officials both in Colombo and Palaly charge them with grabbing the food and fuel brought through official channels for civilians.

Internal dissensions in the LTTE have made matters worse. Pirabhakaran has disbanded the LTTE's political wing. And last month he stripped Gopalaswamy Maheन्द्रajah and Yogaratnam Yogi of their key roles in organising the cadres and waging political propaganda. Instead, according to Sri Lankan intelligence reports, he is busy trying to promote a close relative. 'Baby' Subramaniam, who is one of the accused in the Rajiv and Padmanabha assassination cases.

The grimmest development for the Tiger is that, increasingly, even Tamils are coming round to the belief that the struggle for Eelam was a pipedream. "Why does the region have to run its own economy anyway?" asks R. Ambalavanar, a retired government doctor at Karainagar. But most Tamils do not speak up for fear of reprisals. Last month the Tigers issued a new diktat forbidding more than one person from a family to leave. But at many places only the old and infirm are left behind.

The ace up Premadasa's sleeve

Premadasa is fighting his own battle for Tamil hearts. He offers a security and development package in areas cleared of the Tigers. The security forces are also making an effort to develop a rapport with the Tamils—though it may not be enough to assuage long-festering resentment. Premadasa knows that a political solution will help him stay in

power. He will be able to impress the watchful donors of a country heavily dependent on foreign aid. He has already indicated that he will agree to anything short of the merger of the Northern and Eastern provinces, which is the main demand of the LTTE and other Tamil groups. By rejecting the merger, he is assured of retaining substantial support in his United National Party's (UNP) Sinhala strongholds which are being chipped away by former UNP ministers Lalith Athulathmudali and Gamini Dissanayake, who have formed their own party.

That Premadasa has kept his options open for talks with LTTE is clear from his refusal to ban the militant organisation despite pressure from India and vociferous demands by other Tamil groups to follow India's example. Yet Premadasa may just have to toe the army's line if he does not want them to whip up Sinhala sentiments. But a parliamentary select committee, half of whose members belong to the UNP, is already working on a package. A merger of the north and east as well as more autonomy for the area are obviously the most contentious issues. Fortunately for Premadasa, neither the UNP nor the main opposition, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party of Srimavo Bandaranaike, want to take a firm stand. Meanwhile, the deputy leader of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress and senior lawyer, Motilal Nehru, has argued that the LTTE is more entitled than any other group to negotiate with the Government on the ethnic question.

If the Tigers agree to negotiate, Premadasa will have the last laugh. He can give them power and then tell the dominant Sinhala electorate that he restored peace without conceding Eelam. He would then be assured of a smooth ride to power in the next elections. The Tigers for their part could take solace in the fact they were spared total humiliation. But between the Sri Lankan forces' eagerness to fight, Premadasa's Machiavellian moves and the Tigers' desperation, this may be the last chance for a political settlement.

The Dissidents sneak attack

Bruce Matthews

By way of summary, four central observations can be ventured concerning Sri Lanka's serious constitutional crisis of 1991. First, the incident shows an unexpectedly powerful Parliament, whose wings were otherwise thought clipped by the 1978 Constitution. Nonetheless Parliament's attempt to achieve a dramatic political change for the country was less a matter of parliamentary strength and commitment than it was of mere chance. The right circumstances suddenly coalesced to permit manipulation by the discontented section of the UNP and by the SLFP.

From the viewpoint of the non-conforming UNP parliamentarians, the proroguing of Parliament for the month of September caused the momentum of revolt to falter. The quicksilver nature of the moment, charged as it was with fear of reprisals should the initiative fail, provoked substantial numbers of wavering to abandon support for the impeachment motion. This, combined with the as yet unknown sequence of importuning events that must have crowded in upon the Speaker, sealed the fate of the attempted parliamentary reclamation of authority.

Second, the crisis was not primarily about parliamentary discontent with the presidential system. A return to the Westminster model was touted from time to time as the main reason for the anti-presidential and anti-government motions. More important by far, however, was a widespread, antipathy, both within and beyond Parliament, with the style of the incumbent presidency. Although a populist politician who had worked his way to the top over a period of four decades in public life, the

presidential rule of Ranasinghe Premadasa was perceived by his opponents as unwarrantedly monarchical and inappropriate to the objectives of a modern state. In this regard, it was a revolt against what critics took to be the President's near monopoly of power and the way he exercised it. By *de facto* peripheralizing Parliament and Cabinet, the President emerged as a 'Leviathan', not sharing authority with other constitutionally empowered institutions.

It is possible that the presidential 'style' will soften somewhat after this close brush with forces that are by no means in full retreat. Much depends on how open to reconciliation and compromise the President is, both with his own party and with Parliament. Parliament further wants to be recognized as having some significant role to play in determining national issues. Failure to take heed of these factors can only result in further antagonism and disillusionment with the whole presidential system. Clearly, the crisis has shown that the President's office is not wholly beyond the reach of Parliament, or other political bodies, such as the Provincial Councils and other local authorities.

Third, the future of the UNP as Sri Lanka's traditionally most powerful political party is now in doubt. If the expulsion of the eight dissidents from the party is upheld by the Supreme Court, it then might well provoke them to form a schismatic, alternate party that would divide the UNP. No one knows for sure the depth of popular support for Lalith Athulathmudali, Gamini Dissanayake and other disenfranchised colleagues. Political rallies held for them in September and October spawned prodigious

crowds, showing again that these politicians are not without long-standing influence and public appeal. They are not likely to be self-admittedly penitent about their decision to use constitutional means to try and overthrow the President. At the same time, the next presidential election does not have to be held until January 1995, and parliamentary elections may be as late as May 1995. If the President succeeds in reasserting his full authority, this is a long time for the dissident and alienated MPs to wait. How they would politically survive and react during this interval remains to be seen. The possibility of political exile from Sri Lanka is not inconceivable but it would only encourage an underground UNP lodestar that in due course would emerge as a magnet for all kinds of dissent.

Fourth, unarguably Sri Lanka is still a more successful functioning democracy than virtually all of its regional neighbours (with the exception of India). But many recent blows, such as the Referendum of 1982 and the vicious Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna insurrection of 1987-89 (to say nothing of the civil war in the north and east), have severely pummeled the country for a decade, and to some degree (by reactive response) have threatened its democratic institutions. It is not so much a matter of whether these institutions will survive as much as it is a question of whether voices of dissent or discontent can be tolerated and given a legally sanctioned time and place to be heard. Failure to accommodate reasonable dissent and debate in the past led to violent upheavals and the erosion of many features and ideals of political democracy.

(Continued on page 10)

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Environment Fakirs

Ravi Prasad Herath

The 'World Environmental Summit' the showpiece of the 90s, was held in Rio, the capital of Brazil, which claims the world's largest forest cover within its territorial boundaries. It was concluded on June 14.

Nearly 110 countries at government level participated. In addition there were other representation as well. Close upon 300 converged on the city to exhibit plant and animal species specimens and there was another 250 or so as observers of several other organisations.

Apart from the facilities provided at the Flamingo Park for the convenience of almost 10,000 guests, there were about another 50 public halls catering to the needs of those participating.

Of the large number of participants those from Asian countries, in particular exhibited a sense of lethargy and boredom. This sense of disillusionment tended to abate once they were confronted with the angry outburst from the US President. But the courageous stand the African countries took regarding matters under discussion was very refreshing.

Before the summit proper began a flurry of other activities were observed. The programme on India's 'Development Activities' and the 'Centre for a Common Future' conducted with 100 participants lasting about two and half days was a very significant event. This focussed the attention on the achievements of various programmes launched through the offices of UNCED. Similarities and contradictions that emerged from various programmes done by different countries were placed before the Earth Summit.

African countries have always attempted to enjoy their res-

TO EXPLORE, ENJOY, AND PROJECT

You and I share a great love of this earth. The oceans pounding surf, spring covering the earth with that season's newness, a bird's song reaching out..... and we are moved.

Our curiosity calls us we explore a bit. Some travel to a distant wilderness, some no farther than a corner of the back yard. But each of us looks and listens to the wonder of the natural world around us.

We enjoy the earth's beauty it's grandeur. The endless sweep of colours, and sounds, and everywhere, the excitement of life. But there are some that do not see the wonder of it all. And so we, of the Wathashi Nature Project, join together to protect the earth

We work for legislation, that guarantees clean air and water. To regulate the use and disposal of poisonous toxic chemicals. To set aside the most special places for parks and wilderness.

We invite you to join with us.

To explore, to enjoy, to protect this wondrous earth. For all of us forever. For membership information write.

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SRI LANKA

pective environmental rights without being influenced by the affluent countries. Thus their representatives appreciated such activities.

A hint of Indian defiance not to accept everything without question which unfortunately was the attitude of a great many countries, was evident in the programme. The lethargy of the less affluent nations due to innumerable other reasons tended to fade away before the activism of India.

The Wathashi Project of Sri Lanka displayed nearly 100 slides of few remaining plant and animal species and five other research conclusions on Sri Lankan environment and wildlife.

Introduction of a programme dealing with tribal representatives from differing regional sectors

under an activity launched by the International Indigenous Commission was another item of very special significance.

To illustrate the lifestyle of such a community a model of the village called Karioka by the Tijeica forest was set up at Riocentro.

Nearly 400 aborigines of Brazil and hundreds of similar tribal specimens were present here.

Tisahamy of Sri Lanka was not there. (He is not a pure Veddha but a Kandyan Sinhalese married to a veddha girl — which of course is not the reason for his non-participation).

A team of government officials represented Sri Lanka at the Summit.

India presented a programme on 'Traditional Games', which brought together many indigenous aspects of traditional games

from the participating countries.

Yet another item of interest was the 'Voice of the Children' staged by the womens centre of activities with almost 1000 women taking part.

Entire proceedings of the summit constituted of 285 exhibitions and 249 meetings.

North America was allocated the highest number of sessions. In number it was 56, Europe, both East and West had 50 sessions while the African quota was 15. Limiting of the Asia/Africa region meetings to 9 was very unsatisfactory, to say the least. In terms of exhibitions Asia-Pacific region had to be contented with 16, which definitely was not an encouraging move. Africa single handed held 10 exhibitions to the 63 held by North America. Europe's share of exhibitions for both Eastern and Western sectors was 49 while Latin America and the Caribbean region had a massive 147 exhibitions.

The less affluent nations of Asia where reams and reams of paper is wasted on writing on the environment and its significance and where environment activists conduct seminars till the voice's become hoarse, were poorly represented in this section.

Once again it became evident that only the African nations had grasped the importance of

this summit. It was also clear that the environmental forces of Africa would before long would make their voices heard on the international political platform.

Sri Lanka too was a participant, but it behoves well for all to remember that the summit was not an extension of the Gam Udawa concept. Attempts to sweep human problems under the carpet of environmental celebrations could result in one alienating oneself from the masses than integrating with the people at grass root level.

Kandalamawewa, Nuwara-Eliya Gregory wewa and the Horton Plains project are some of the anti-environmental moves undertaken, while actively participating in conferences and seminars on environment at great expense have to be viewed as two ends that are incompatible.

Nearly 600-900 varieties of plant and animal species have been destroyed during the week the summit was in session. Reuter report while mentioning that some 197,256 hectares of cultivable land had been abandoned and an equally large portion of tropical forest cover too had been cut down.

At present 500 tons of carbon monoxide, 30 tons of hydrocarbons and 20 tons of nitrogen oxides are being released into space in Sri Lanka alone.

Daily water consumption requirement stands at 80 million gallons.

If the ecological balance is to be maintained while all this is being done at least 1/7 of the land area should have forest cover.

Of the sixteen million acre land area of the island 72 lakhs (acres) was forest cover in 1956. Now it stands at 40 lakhs (acres).

A study report filed by the Swedish Advisory Institute on the forest resource development of Sri Lanka says that by the time the 10 million housing project ends the forest cover (presently 24%) would decrease to 12.5% by the year 2000.

If the participation in the Earth Summit has enabled us to find solutions to our pressing problems, then surely it has been worthwhile the effort. Small nations are being used to rubber stamp approval for the grandiose plans of big nations. But the small nations must compel the richer states to guarantee them the protection and safeguards that are necessary.

Else the environment overlords (fakirs) the world over would seek to take the path of least resistance saying that one's security should be provided by oneself.

The Dissidents . . .

(Continued from page 7)

Fifth, the crisis of September 1991 was conducted entirely along constitutional lines. Significantly, the armed forces did not give the slightest indication of intervening, upholding a longstanding tradition of remaining loyal to the elected government. Sixth, the crisis has served to heighten political consciousness in Sri Lanka. It has reinvigorated Parliament and other elected bodies, whose value in the mind of common people has been in decline as increasingly the government came to be linked only with the presidency.

This is not to suggest that President Premadasa has failed to provide leadership and stability. He alone came forward to take command of the UNP at a critical time. He masterminded the vanquishment of the JVP, who came close to destroying the country. This required full and skilful deployment of the executive powers provided for the president in the constitution. His political fortitude and perseverance helped the country survive a very dark moment in its recent history. In some ways it is correct to say that his presidency was born during the greatest emergency Sri Lanka has ever known. Perhaps for these reasons not unexpectedly the President's style of office

still reflects the sort of authority needed to counter the perils of political terrorism that surrounded it at the beginning. But there is growing resentment of and resistance to the symbols of personal power that seem to have evolved from this early experience. Still, the traditions of democracy in Sri Lanka are too respected to be put aside in response to whatever forces periodically buffer it.

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Bishop Caldwell and the Tamil Dravidians

D. P. Sivaram

Robert Caldwell (1819-1891) was the father of the Dravidian movement. He was the Bishop of Tinnevely — the heartland of the Maravar Poligars — during the times when the British were engaged in suppressing the Tamil military castes in the Tamil region. His monumental work **The Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages** which was published in 1856 laid the theoretical foundation of the political, academic and cultural movement that came to dominate Tamilian life in the twentieth century. The work argues that all south Indian languages (and a few others elsewhere in the subcontinent like Brahui) belong to a distinct family of tongues called the Dravidian languages. This challenged the widely held view of the time that most of India's cultivated languages were derived from Sanskrit.

It followed therefore that the culture and civilization of the Dravidian peoples of south India were intrinsically unique. The role of these ideas in the inception of the Dravidian movement has been examined in detail elsewhere (Irshick: 1969. Hardgrave: 1965. Sivathamby: 1978). These studies have seen it in terms of the cultural and political contradictions between the newly arisen non-Brahmin elites and the Brahmins who had achieved a preeminent place under colonial rule in the Madras Presidency.

The intention of this study however is to show that the fundamental tenets of the nascent phase of the Dravidian ideology were essentially linked to the political and cultural legacies of the British attempt to demilitarize Tamil society.

The writings of Bishop Caldwell presuppose a teleological

project which was not uncommon to what were conceived as great intellectual undertakings in that era of empire building. The assumptions of the project formed the basis of his Dravidian theory. They were a). that the British empire was destined to finally bring order amongst Tamils, a large portion of whom had been more prone to the habit of war than to the arts of peace from the dawn of history in south India. b). that this order would be the one in which the immanent protestant ethos of the Dravidian civilization would reach its full expression — an ethos which the English administrator saw as the virtue of those classes which "contrasted favourably with the Maravar" and whom the Bishop considered the legitimate Tamilians. c). that the rediscovery of Dravidian linguistic and cultural uniqueness would help consolidate the position of the 'lower classes' among the Tamils who had played an important role in the military expansion of British rule in the subcontinent — the Tamil Christian soldiers who were the Empire's alternative to the traditional Tamil military castes.

a). In the concluding remarks of his 'A History of Tinnevely' (1888) Caldwell says "A mixed government. . . . came thus to an end and was succeeded by a government purely English, at unity with itself, and as just as it was powerful. The results of this change have been most important and valuable. Professor Wilson. . . places in a striking light the course things would have taken if the English Government had not been enabled to interpose its authority. "It may be concluded" he says "that had not a wise and powerful policy interfered to enforce the habits of social life, the fine districts to the south of Kaveri. . . would have reverted to the state in which tradition describes them

long anterior to Christianity, and would have once more have become a suitable domicile for the goblins of Ravana." The first reflection that arises in one's mind on reading the foregoing sketch of the history of this district is, that war seems to have been the normal condition of Tinnevely, as of the rest of the old Pandya country. . . from the beginning of man's abode in these regions till A.D 1801" (the year in which the Tamil country was ceded to the British). Caldwell also notes that "Of the beneficial changes that have taken place since then, the most remarkable is that which we see in the Poligars themselves." He claims with satisfaction that many among the region's martial classes were taking to agriculture; and of the Maravar he says "the change wrought amongst the poorer class of the Maravas is not perhaps quite so complete...though once the terror of the country they are now amenable to law and reason. . . ." Tamil society was thus at 'unity with itself' and was realising its destiny under the British Empire. He asserts that "Race after race of rulers have risen up in this country, has been tried and found wanting, and has passed away." But that the Tamils "accept our government readily and willingly as the best government they have ever had and the best they are likely to have in this age of the world". Under the "paternal government" of the English Tamils were becoming a peaceful and industrious nation. The last "race of rulers" which had risen up and passed away in the Tamil country were the turbulent Maravar. English rule was the only one that was not found wanting because its principles and protestant ethos were in consonance with what Caldwell assumed were the 'true' religious and moral ideas of the Dravidian race.

b). Although as a historian he was well aware of the hegemony of the Maravar's martial culture in Tamil society, its exclusion from what he desired to portray as the true Dravidian civilization was central to the Imperial and religious interests of Caldwell's teleological project. The English, in suppressing the martial castes, were restoring the sovereignty of Tamil society's "legitimate rulers" — the peasantry and lower classes.

In Caldwell's view the Tamil military castes had to seek "the safer and more reputable occupation of husbandmen" (Caldwell: 1888. p. 229). However, he was deeply suspicious of their peace. Commenting on the Poligar wars, he wrote "The population of the sequestered Polams (Palayams) seemed to be delighted with the opportunity afforded them of trying their strength with the English once more, **being thoroughly discontented, no doubt, with the peaceful life now required of them**" (p. 197). And he condemned a suggestion ventured by the author of the Tinnevely Manual Mr. Stuart that the Palayam system of the Tamil military castes was historically inevitable as the fiefdoms of medieval Europe — "It is so seldom that one hears a good word about the Poligars that I quote these remarks of Mr. Stuart with pleasure. . . . I fear, however, that the misdeeds of the Poligars were more systematic and audacious than those of the feudal nobles of Europe in the middle ages." (p. 59) Apart from concerns shared with the British Government, the Bishop's hostile attitude towards the Maravar arose from the bloody violence they unleashed on the Shanar, large numbers of whom were embracing the Protestant faith. For him if the idolatory and the Sanskritic culture of the articulate Brahmins was a spiritual threat to the propagation of the Gospel, the violence and misdeeds of the Maravar against the faithful was a dire physical threat. In his scheme of Tamilian history the culture and ethos

of the classes through whom the British government and the Anglican church sought to consolidate the gains of Tamil society's demilitarization were seen by Caldwell as the true characteristics of the Tamils. The martial habits of the Maravar and the Sankritic culture of the Brahmins were alien to the social order and moral ideals of the 'true' Dravidians.

These views were shared by many English missionaries of the 19th century who worked among the Tamils. Missionaries and administrators found evidence for this in many religious and didactic Tamil texts. Henry Martyn Scudder published a book in 1865 in which he "used Tamil texts and poems to support the missionary position that even in ancient Tamil texts many Christian ideas were present" (Irshick: 1976. p 15). This belief led to the introduction of what were thought to be Tamil works with little or no extraneous influence in institutions of higher education run by missionaries.

The college curriculum created a market for the publication of such works. This in turn gave an impetus to the rediscovery of many ancient Tamil works (U. V. Saminathalyer: *En Sarithiram*. p. 714) — which paradoxically led to the publication of *Puranaanooru* and the *Purapporul Venbamalai*, texts that portrayed the ancient Tamils as a fierce martial race and lay the foundation of modern Tamil militarism. Thus Caldwell's teleology assumed that Tamil revivalism would help consolidate the protestant ethnic and the allegiance to English rule among the non-military castes in Tamil society by giving expression to the moral and religious ideas which he assumed were immanent in their ancient Dravidian culture and language.

The administrative manual of the Madurai district commended a section of this class of Tamils thus "They. . . contrast favourably with the Maravans, being

very orderly, frugal, and industrious". Other section, the Shanar it was stated "have risen enormously in the social scale by their eagerness for education, by their large adoption of Christianity, and by their thrifty habits. Many of them have forced themselves ahead of the Maravars by sheer force of character." (Thurston: 1906. p. 372) It was to these 'loyal' classes of Tamils that Caldwell referred to when he wrote in the introduction to his Grammar that "All throughout Ceylon the coolies in the coffee plantations are Tamilians; the majority of the money-making classes even in Colombo are Tamilians; **and it seems not unlikely that ere long the Tamilians will have excluded the Singhalese from almost every profitable employment in their own Island.** The majority of the Klings or Hindus, who are found in Pegu, Penang, Singapore and other places in further east, are Tamilians: a large portion of the Coolies who have emigrated in such numbers to the Mauritius and to the West Indian colonies are Tamilians; **in short wherever money is to be made, wherever a more apathetic or a more aristocratic people is waiting to be pushed aside, thither swarm the Tamilians, the Greeks or scotch of the east, the least superstitious and the most enterprising and persevering race of Hindus.**" (Caldwell: 1856. p 7)

Caldwell's Dravidian theory thus gave rise to a vocabulary in which the word Tamil came to connote the non-Brahmin, non-martial aspects of Tamil culture. Bishop Robert Caldwell in laying the foundation of the Dravidian movement also endeavoured and partially succeeded in dispersing the impression that the Tamils who, only a few years before his time were thought of as being "prone to the habit of war", were a peace loving and industrious nation. The intellectual endeavours of the learned missionary made the British Empire cherish an ulterior

(Continued on page 24)

The Image of Africa

Emeka Anyaoku

“The continent is engulfed by economic collapse, war, famine, AIDs and malaria which may bury hopes of freedom, peace and prosperity.” That was the picture of Africa painted by a London quality newspaper on 29 July 1991. And it is the way you might come to think if you relied solely on the general image purveyed by what Lord Jock Campbell once aptly described as VIPs — Very Itinerant Pundits — who generally depict Africa, especially black Africa, as an area of economic and environmental disaster, land of instability and dictatorship. That view is far from being the whole truth. But like any myth, it is not wholly wrong either. Let me explain.

It is of course true that most of the period since African countries achieved their independence has been marked by a great deal of political upheaval including no less than 40 attempted and successful military coups d'état. In a number of cases, the upheaval has ended in outright civil war, conflicts some of which are still in progress as I speak. The consequences in places such as Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan have been disastrous in creating thousands of refugees and worsening the effect of nature-induced famines.

But it is equally true that the projection of Africa in the Eurocentric world as a region of stagnation if not outright retrogression is based essentially on historical prejudice. There is nothing new in notions of racial superiority of this kind. The Greeks, we all know,

looked down on the Romans and everyone else as lesser beings. The Romans in their turn took a similarly exalted view of themselves and their civilisation in relation to the Britons, the Gauls and other subject peoples. And it remained so down to the European conquest of the 19th Century and the resulting Eurocentric world view in which Europeans appeared as the lords of human kind. The point is made in a very telling manner by the historical evolution of the word “barbarian”. According to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, the word first meant a non-Greek; then later a non-Roman; and when these two supremacies vanished, it came to designate a non-Christian and later still, in the age of the Renaissance, a non-Italian.

But where the prejudice of the Ancients stemmed largely from ignorance, that of our modern pundits stems in the main from a mixture of motives, not the least of which is a reluctance to acknowledge that, for all its afflictions, independent Africa has some achievements to its credit and is working even in inauspicious circumstances to secure its future. There is more to Africa than wars and famines. However real the present difficulties, there are good grounds for Africa's hopes of freedom, peace and prosperity.

The socio-economic achievements of independent Africa tend to be overlooked in the interest of sensational reporting. The extent of the achievements can be seen by comparing the position at independence with the position in subsequent years using the usual indicators of the quality of life. In the field of education, for example, only a very small percentage of the

population could read and write. In places such as Niger, Mali, Sierra Leone and Senegal, to name a few, as many as 80 per cent of adults could neither read nor write. From this poor foundation, Africa set out to win the war against illiteracy. By 1985 the situation had improved considerably with the result that the number of adults who could read and write had risen to 48 per cent. This improvement was particularly marked in countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania, and Botswana.

The achievement was even more remarkable in the education of women. Again, let me mention one or two figures. In 1970 only 17 per cent of adult women could read and write in sub-Saharan Africa, ie black Africa as a whole. By 1985, the number had increased to 38 per cent. In some cases, the increases were quite dramatic. For example, in the same period, the number of women who could read and write rose from 18 per cent to 88 per cent in Tanzania; from 47 per cent to 77 per cent in Zimbabwe and from 44 per cent to 69 per cent in Botswana.

Another area where independent Africa has made great strides but which is not often reflected in much of what we read in non-African publications is public health. At independence, the infant mortality rate was generally very high. 284 children out of every thousand died before the age of five. In some cases, the rate was in excess of 350 per thousand. However, this depressing picture steadily changed for the better in the years following independence. By 1988, infant mortality rate had fallen by more than 100 per thousand in many countries including, Burkina Faso, Benin, Malawi, Nigeria, Cameroon, Zambia and Gabon.

Even in the more difficult area of economic growth, there have been notable advances. Between 1965 and 1973 — that

Text of a Presentation by Emeka Anyaoku, Commonwealth Secretary-General for Channel 4 Television Programme "OPINIONS"

is before the onset of the oil crisis — a number of African countries experienced an average annual growth rate of over 4 per cent. These included Malawi, Kenya, Lesotho, Cote d'Ivoire, the Congo and Gabon. A few averaged even higher growth rates. Nigeria registered an annual growth rate of 5.3 per cent; Swaziland, 5.8 per cent Botswana, a staggering 9.3 per cent.

For most African countries, this period of economic buoyancy came to a close at the end of the 1970s and was followed soon after the beginning of the 1980s, by a crisis which continues to this day. Rising prices of oil and manufactured imports, the continuing fall in commodity prices and, not least, mistaken policies in the past, are the principal reasons for Africa's economic crisis. But I do not want to dwell on this. Let me instead spell out briefly what Africans themselves have been doing to climb out of the economic trough.

The economic crisis led to a serious rethinking of the development paths which African countries had hitherto followed and which had contributed to their present predicament. It was generally agreed that these past policies and strategies had resulted in unfulfilled promises and that far from advancing Africa, they had in some cases made it even more vulnerable to external pressures. So when African leaders met at their Lagos summit in 1980, they decided that the realistic way out of their problems lay in the adoption of what they called "a far-reaching regional approach based primarily on collective self-reliance." By this they meant promoting through regional groups a greater degree of trade and economic co-operation among African countries.

Already a number of regional economic groupings had emerged: the Economic Community of West African States in West Africa (ECOWAS) in 1975, the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) in 1980; and the

Preferential Trade Area for Eastern, Central and Southern African States (PTA) in 1981. It was accordingly decided at the Lagos meeting that these regional economic organisations would form what one might call the building blocks for a pan-African common market. The next major step in this journey was taken in June 1991 at the last Summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) held in Nigeria's new capital city of Abuja. At Abuja, African leaders signed a treaty establishing an African Common Market to come into force early in the next century.

There are of course those who see precious little that is new in these emerging economic groupings. Such people point to the fact that, in colonial days, the continent was more integrated economically than it has been since. Such critics either forget or conveniently ignore the fact that the old, regional arrangements were intended to meet the needs and demands of a different epoch and a different order which invariably tied Africa's economic life to the needs of the governing European metropolis. Independence created its own needs which had to be met in new ways.

Colonialism in Africa was essentially a process that began with carving-up and dividing the continent at the 1884/85 Berlin Conference. The consequent horse-trading by the European colonial powers paid little regard to Africa's old national or ethnic loyalties. As a result of this, the pressing priority after independence was to build the political unity of the continent on the basis of the new political boundaries. It was also clear that to pursue an active policy of regional integration before Africa's new nations had experienced their newly won independence and sovereignty would have ended in chaos. In Africa as elsewhere, nationalism had to come before internationalism; independence before interdependence.

Indeed, it is because the current policy of African economic integration has been allowed to grow out of a common acknowledgement of its necessity, that we have the best assurance of its viability.

In the meantime, no less than 40 African countries are undertaking far-reaching domestic economic reforms or economic restructuring. These reforms are being pursued in the face of considerable difficulties. I have already referred to the problem of the continuing fall in commodity prices. For example, at the time of Independence a country like Tanzania needed to produce and sell 7 tons of sisal in order to buy one tractor from Europe; seven years later, the same tractor required 35 tons of sisal for its purchase. For African commodity producers — and most African countries are commodity producers — this means producing and selling more and more for less and less by way of economic return. And now these huge disadvantages are made worse by competition from Eastern and Central Europe for the available international investment capital.

Structural adjustment usually entails great hardships for the population at large but especially so for the disadvantaged and the vulnerable. To sustain structural adjustment programmes therefore calls for considerable political courage; and the fact that the great majority of African governments have nonetheless sustained the programmes shows an unwavering resolve to come to grips with their economic problems. Those who decry Africa's economic performance would do well to bear these considerations in mind.

What of the recurrent coups, wars, abuses of human rights and other afflictions which are said to threaten Africa's hopes of peace and prosperity?

The extent to which Africans are determined to realise their hopes of peace and prosperity is often not adequately reflected in the international media some of which occasionally imply that

the continent might benefit from a new round of management from abroad. We must never forget that, whatever its apparent practical benefits, colonial rule, by the nature of human history and experience, had to come to an end. The job of developing the continent had ultimately to be undertaken by Africans and on African terms. In this connection, it was always clear to all Africans of sense that making a reality of independence would be no easy task. That is why in spite of all the coups and civil conflicts, nowhere in Africa have people sought or will ever seek the return of colonial rule. Instead, the clamour was for independence and is now for multi-party democracy in which there will be genuine popular participation and effective checks against abuse of power.

In the past year alone, the cause of multi-party democracy has gained considerable ground. In more than 15 countries, including Angola, Mozambique, Nigeria, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, to name some of the more prominent examples, multi-party politics has either been restored and elections held or preparations for the return of multi-party politics have been far advanced. Some commentators have attributed this resurgence of the democratic movement in Africa to developments in Eastern and Central Europe. It is simplistic to suggest that it is the breakdown of communism in Europe that has inspired Africans to campaign for multi-party democracy. The rejection of one-party or military rule in Africa is wholly an internal African judgment on 30 years of Africa's history since independence.

Another noteworthy dimension of the new democratic movement in Africa is that it has in most cases not been driven by elite groups merely wanting their own turn to control state power. In many cases, the movement has been started by Trade Unions, as was the case

in Zambia, or by students, as happened in places like Cote d'Ivoire and Benin. In these instances the students and Trade Unions alike had no difficulty in enlisting opposition to one-party rule and support for democracy among armies of the unemployed especially in urban and industrial areas. Africa-wide, a number of grassroots organisations such as the Sudan Council of Voluntary agencies, the Ghana Federation of Business and Professional Women, the All African Conference of churches in Kenya and the Tanzania Environmental society have helped to shape the agenda of the pro-democracy movement.

In February 1990, over 500 such grassroots organisations from all over Africa met in the Tanzanian city of Arusha under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Their deliberations identified the absence of democracy in Africa as being primarily responsible for the political and socio-economic crisis of the continent and concluded that unless there was genuine popular participation in the running of society and economy, neither development nor transformation could be expected.

Whether from below or from above, there is a clear consensus in Africa on the essential need for democratisation in the interest of political stability and orderly socio-economic development. There are now clear indications that, politically, something fundamental is taking place in Africa. It involves a clear break from the recent past and, all considered, is an advance for democracy and decency. As in the case of the economic changes underway, the strength of this emerging political transformation lies in the way it has evolved — not imposed from outside but growing naturally and organically from within.

Africans are only too well aware of the enormity of the tasks before them. They

know that democracy is a desirable goal; but they also know how exceedingly difficult it is to secure, especially in countries made up of different and long-established ethnic groups. Similarly, they know that while real improvement to their economic condition must ultimately depend on their own efforts, they cannot hope to succeed if they live to contend at the same time with such hostile external factors as having to service a crippling debt burden; earning less and less from exporting the commodities on which their economies depend; and having to suffer steadily worsening terms of external trade.

But whether it is politics or economics, Africans approach their afflictions with the optimism and the conviction of a happy outcome. That is why they are eager for non-African commentators, especially those in the Eurocentric world, to interpret and project Africa's circumstances with greater objectivity and less condescension and despondency that is generally the case. Africans ask for no favours in the reporting on their affairs. They ask, for example, that civil wars and other human tragedies in Africa should not invoke vocabulary that is different from that used for similar tragedies elsewhere such as describing the casualties of European civil wars as being "killed" while those of African civil wars are being "slaughtered". To sum up, all that Africans ask for is that their strengths and weaknesses should be viewed and interpreted with the same degree of realism and understanding as is applied to other peoples and regions of the world. After all, we should not forget that all human life began some four million years ago in Africa.

Devolution and Boundaries

S. Sathananthan

A link was divined by Dr. Amarakone between "irrational" borders and retarded economic development. In effect, and without empirical evidence, a "theory" of underdevelopment was invented for Sri Lanka in which distorted development was linked primarily to supposedly inappropriate provincial borders drawn by the colonial State. As proof, the outlandish claim was made that Provincial Councils (PCs) set up under the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord have been unsuccessful on account of "wrong boundaries", even though the Central Government "devolved" (sic) about 80% of all its powers to PCs. As evidence of such extensive "devolution" (sic), it was pointed out that powers of PCs listed in the 13th Amendment to the Constitution covered almost 14 pages whilst the list of powers of Central Government in the same Amendment covered only about 6 pages! This hilarious explanation of the scope of power-sharing of course ignored the obvious difference between the **content** of a law and the **space** its text occupied on the legal document. New provincial borders must, it was argued, be determined by the distribution of natural resources instead of by that of "ethnic groups". In particular, the role of the State in controlling rivers and catchment areas was considered indispensable to avoid political problems. As examples, the speaker referred to control exercised by the Indian State over the *Ganges* and *Brahmaputra* river valleys, evidently ignorant of the fact that each of them is shared by three countries. Again, economic development in France and Germany was attributed to the control the two States exercised over the valleys of their respective rivers Seine and Rhine, oblivious of the fact that Seine and Rhine are the

respective French and German names for the **same** river that flows through both countries. Indeed, if the assertion is to be valid then the entire Rhine valley in Europe should fall within the borders of a single State which was patently **NOT** the case.

But such appalling factual errors did not deter recommendations, without a shred of evidence, for drawing new provincial borders which allegedly coincide with resource boundaries and are supposedly "resource rational". To demarcate provinces according to "ethnic groups" would, it was claimed, set out each "ethnic group" separately and lead to "permanent war" between them. Instead a seemingly lofty ideal was advocated: of creating "development-oriented" provincial borders which are "resource rational" and could incorporate within each new province segments of all "ethnic groups" for the benefit and unity of the country. To make matters worse, when Dr Amarakone recommended new borders he regressed to the early internal political division of *Pihite Rata*, *Maya Rata* and *Ruhunu Rata*, which existed almost two millennia ago and which cannot even remotely satisfy current political needs and facilitate power-sharing between the different nationalities of today. And to defend this absurd historical regression, Dr Amarakone made the mind-boggling assertion that these three ancient political divisions were and still are "resource rational"!

These groundless formulations were repeated by Prof Madduma Bandara, who confessed to be taking a "sober" view but nevertheless declared the existing borders to be "resource irrational". Internal political divisions, it was claimed, have al-

ways been based on hydro-ecological factors and that this has been the case in almost all countries. But **no evidence was provided of even a single instance** where internal political borders coincided with resource boundaries within any country, including Sri Lanka.

Beginning on a confused note, Mr Fernando (recipient of the Eleventh Royal Asiatic Society Medal) claimed that "just because one speaks a language one does not belong to that ethnic group". Probably he wished to show that "we are all mixed", i.e., that groups of persons could not claim to be racially separate on the basis of their respective mother tongues. One can only agree and reject as a fallacy the popular belief among Sinhalese that they belong to the Aryan race merely because they speak the Sinhala language. This supposedly liberal smoke-screen was thrown up to mask the subjective nature of the assertions, that in Sri Lanka

- (a) the pre-colonial maps were based on natural endowments;
- (b) the colonial maps were based on politics; and
- (c) it was necessary to return to nature-based maps.

The rationale, steeped in patriotic rhetoric, was summarized in his one-page note, titled *Development Oriented Provincial Boundaries in the Context of the Total Area Under the Jurisdiction of Sri Lanka*, which was distributed at the seminar: "Man instead of harmonising with and following Natural boundaries, like other animals, so as to mobilise its natural resources, as it was meant to be; (sic) has attempted in his greed to go against it and create artificial boundaries in recent times for his convenience. It must be

remembered that natural resources cannot be moved, if done it would have to be done at great expence (sic) and inconvenience. Since Man is mobile he could be easily moved with the least cost and inconvenience. But instead of following nature like all animals do and harmonise with it, we build artificial barriers for our selfish motives... In fact all ancient societies in their wisdom have followed natural boundaries. It is the selfish Material MAN mainly after the colonial era, (sic) carving up countries for material benefit and to divide and rule for his selfish motives."

These rambling comments merely demonstrated an abysmal ignorance of elementary facts of history and principles of social theory. Because, it is grossly erroneous to believe that in societies before the European colonial era people preferred to migrate rather than to trade. This amounts to the farcical claim that settled societies did not exist before Europeans in-

vented trade; that the Indus Valley Civilization is a figment of our imagination. The note also revealed a lack of knowledge of the crucial distinctions between natural man and social Man: that natural man evolved into social Man precisely because human beings did **NOT** follow ways of other animals and instead organized the exploitation of nature on a social basis (Gerasimov, 1975). However, Mr Fernando evidently believed that people in Sri Lanka, for example, constructed irrigation works and built a hydraulic civilization by following examples set by animals living in the surrounding jungles! Presumably being faithful to traditions set by animals, the note proposed in the next para that the present provinces be replaced by four "Natural Regions" which, in essence, conformed to the **political** divisions of *Pihiti-Maya-Ruhunu Rata* with an adjustment to divide *Pihiti Rata* into two: *Rajarata* and *Mahaweliya*. The five new units supposedly possessed "Development Oriented

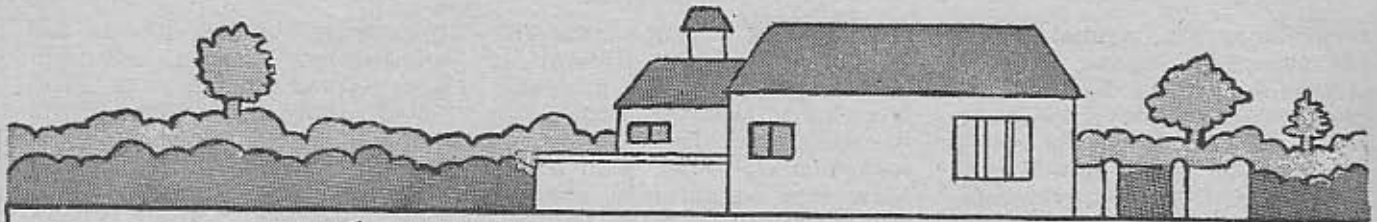
Boundaries" which, it was unconvincingly alleged, coincided with natural boundaries of water-shed areas. To incorporate political factors, each "natural region" was divided into provinces and each province into districts. The District (and **not** a "natural region" or province) was considered appropriate "if the objective is for (sic) decentralization in order that local communities could decide on local mundane matters that affect them." Evidently the history of nationality conflicts, of the failure of 1981 District Development Councils (DDCs) to deal with even "mundane matters" because they were starved of funds by the Center and the deliberate emasculation of the 1989 North-East Provincial Council (NEPC) by the transfer of restricted powers and allocation of insufficient funds, both of which revealed the inadequacy of decentralization as a solution to the nationality question, have all passed by Mr Fernando completely.

Next: Demography

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Muttu Coomaraswamy — from Law to Anthropology

Radhika Coomaraswamy

I had always envisioned Sir Muttu Coomaraswamy as the father of Ananda Coomaraswamy. He had no distinct identity of his own except a reflected glory; a father who sired such progeny must have, himself, been a great man. However, as I have begun to do research on the life of Sir Muttu Coomaraswamy, I find him to be an absolutely fascinating figure in his own right. The story of his life has forced me to reflect on many things, the least of which is the law.¹ Exploring his life gives us insight into a greater process with regard to our nation's experience. An analysis of his life and work is in the end linked to the formation of Sri Lankan nationalist ideology as well as the psychology of British imperialism. But more of that later...

For someone working in the field of ethnic studies in the twentieth century, there is something very special about a man, like Sir Muttu Coomaraswamy, who is trained in the law and ends up writing about comparative religion and anthropology.² If he is successful, he is considered, like Leonardo Da Vinci to be a Renaissance Man. If he fails, he may appear as a gadfly or a dandy, someone who has the capacity to mesmerise and charm with words without the depth and understanding of a great scholar. Those who were close to Sir Muttu Coomaraswamy were convinced that he was a Sri Lankan Jefferson, but his critics thought otherwise. In retrospect, one can honestly say that his early death prevents us from coming to any conclusion. He had all the qualities of brilliance required for renaissance men but his short life prevented that brilliance from reaching its ze-

nith. And so the many tributes to him, even from his own son, begin with the words... 'Had he lived...'

The family of Sir Muttu Coomaraswamy are in fact the original Colombo Tamils, if not in actual fact, then in the social sense of the word. Sir Muttu Coomaraswamy's family set the pattern for what may be said to be the process of elite formation among Colombo Tamils during the Colonial period. His father's life is in some sense the model for those who wished to be upwardly mobile and successful within the Tamil community during the British era. I think it could be said that his family was the first Sri Lankan family to set the example and for that they were rewarded with seats in the Legislative Council as unofficial members representing the Non-Christian Tamil speaking population.

What are the markers of this upwardly mobile Sri Lankan Tamil elite during the British period? Muttu Coomaraswamy's father was Arumugampillai Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar (1783-1836) who was born in Garudavil, Point Pedro. The family moved to Chekku Street, Colombo, at the turn of the nineteenth century. Arumugampillai was educated at The Academy when it was The Academy and not Royal College, a seminary established by the Governor Frederick North to educate young men from high social status for service to the new government. In 1805 he was made Mudaliyar of the Governor's Gate and had extensive dealings in this capacity with Governors, Brownrigg and Barnes, along with the Kandyan Chiefs. In April 1833 he was made the first member of the Legislative Council to represent the Tamil speaking population.

According to the London News of that period he was appointed to this distinguished post not only because of his high status but as a reward for the services rendered to government.

"In the different expeditions which the British army had to make to Kandy before the hill country was finally subjugated, in the entering into treaties with the Kandyan princes as well as in the pearl fisheries of Aripo... Coomaraswamy had shown such abilities and attachment to the English rule as to have induced the British government to present him with several gold medals and to have drawn public approbation from successive English governors of Ceylon"³

In other words, Sir Muttu Coomaraswamy's father was an unabashed collaborator and admirer of British rule. His only sign of rebellion came in his vociferous adoption of the Abolitionist cause and the prevention of the Slave trade.⁴ In addition, he never gave up his Hindu beliefs. Despite this, however, he remained an absolute admirer of British rule and actively participated in its administration.

This unabashed collaboration on the part of Sir Muttu's father is a very important fact because it explains the emotional needs of successive generations of Coomaraswamys, Ponnambalams and Ramanathans to expiate this sin by becoming more and more nationalist in their rhetoric and work. Sir Muttu led the revolt especially in the religious and cultural sphere. His work with regard to the classics was taken to the ultimate by his son Ananda Coomaraswamy and his political interests naturally blossomed in the rhetoric and fire of his nephews, Sir Ponnam-

balam Ramanathan and Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam.

And yet it is their grandfather, Sir Muttu's father, who created the material conditions which would offer them the opportunity to become national heroes. It was he, who gave the whole family "a touch of class", a belief that they were members of a Tamil aristocracy, though in actual fact their family lineage had little to do with the court of the Aryachakravartis or the so-called Jaffna Kings. Their aristocracy came from a vellallar pedigree but also depended on the grace and charity of British rulers. In the end they proved themselves to be indispensable with regard to service and professionalism, characteristics which would single out the Sri Lankan Colombo Tamil community during the period of British rule. So while Sir Muttu loved to be called the prince of Lanka, he was really the product of the new professional class which grew and flourished during the period of British rule.

In most lectures there is much written about the fathers of legal personalities but very little about their mothers — this has to be corrected. Not only because of a feminist insistence, but because a personality's relationship with his or her mother is a central influencing feature of that life. If one reads between the lines with regard to many biographies,⁵ one immediately notices the important role that mothers play in creating a sense of nationalism and ethnic identity. In that sense Sir Muttu was no exception. His mother Visalakshmi lived till she was 77. She came from an important Jaffna family linked closely to Tamil culture, the Hindu religion and karnatic music.⁶ Sir Muttu's interest in the classics and his translations of important Tamil and Pali works must have been influenced by his mother's love for these subjects and his awareness from a young age of their centrality in her life. His father may have given Sir Muttu the opportunities but it was his mother who gave

him the awareness which allowed him to make a distinct contribution, especially in the world of classics. It is also said that Sir Muttu's mother had made the Padeyatra on foot from Jaffna to Kataragama in the early part of the nineteenth century. This commitment to Asian religion must have had a profound influence on Sir Muttu.⁷

Sir Muttu was born on January 23rd 1824. In the tradition of the Mudaliyar families of that era, so beautifully described by Yasmin Gooneratne in her book *Relative Merits*⁸, he was initially educated by tutors at home. He attended the Colombo Academy, which was Royal College, and studied languages and the classics. He won the Tournour prize for his excellence in Greek, Latin and English and at the age of 18 gave his first toast to the British Governor of that period.

Very soon after that, Sir Muttu at the age of 18, was made an Assistant Government Agent at Mullaitivu but he returned home after a few months. The British Civil Service was an extremely prestigious vocation but Sir Muttu threw it up in favour of a life of an advocate.⁹

The question has to be asked why? What insights do we get into a personality which at that time of our history, prior to world Bank benefits, gave up the civil service for the bar. I think the decision reflects two aspects of Sir Muttu's personality which will characterise his life in later years. Firstly, he always valued a measure of independence. He wanted a relationship with the British whereby he gave them assistance while at the same time retained his distinct personality. The Ceylon Review of October 1894 in their tribute to him states "Of few Ceylonese, living or dead, can it be said that "such and such a one was truly independent."¹⁰

The quality of this independence is also very revealing. There is no doubt that Sir Muttu wanted to be admired by the

British, he wanted to "belong" but at the same time he wanted to be distant from the political taskmasters; to become a part of the civil service was to serve without reservation, to suppress personal ambition for public benefit. Sir Muttu was not one who could unabashedly serve a master. In that sense he was one generation removed from his father. Nor was he inclined to repress his personality in the interests of a large bureaucracy. His life, as we will see later, was truly the triumph of personal will over the social and political attitudes of the times. The civil service would have denied such a personality its full expression.

The second aspect relating to Sir Muttu's decision to leave the prestigious civil service was that Sir Muttu, in the end, wanted to be a cosmopolitan personality. Mullaitivu was not his idea of paradise. He wanted to be at the centre of power, magic and excitement. He did not want to serve or experience the real life of his countryman. He was in the process of constructing a fable — he was the prince and the east was a fairyland. Mullaitivu and the life of the GA set reality against these fables. For people like Sir Muttu, the East lived in its classics, in the Pali, Sanskrit and Tamil texts. What was outside their window was an aberration.

While his son would sit bare-foot with Sinhala craftsman and write down in detail every aspect of their work, the father shied away from the grassroots. Sir Muttu lived off the pages of the Classics that he translated. Through that imagery, he wanted to assert his personality and his culture in the heartland of British civilisation, not at its periphery. And to a greater extent than others, he succeeded.

Sir Muttu gave up the civil service for the bar. The Bar was in fact an important career choice in that it allowed for several avenues of advancement.

One could engage in a lucrative practice, especially in that era where English speaking lawyers were few and far between. One could use the Bar as a stepping stone to a career in the Legislature or be appointed to the High Court. Sir Muttu followed the second route of using the bar to gain access to the Legislative Council.

Sir Muttu was articled under Sir Richard Morgan (Q. C. and Puisine Justice of the Supreme Court). In 1856, he was called to the Bar as an advocate. He had a very successful career but it lasted only ten years. However, Sir Muttu's contribution to the legal profession cannot be ascertained in the substance of his practice of his influence with regard to important judgements. His main contribution was in breaking racial barriers and gaining access to the Bar of England and Madras. When he went to England, he fought hard to open the Bar of England to all Eastern subjects of the British empire. He was called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn and was the first person who was neither Christian nor Jew to secure the privilege of getting his name registered in the Rolls of the Inns of Court.¹¹ Later he was admitted to the Madras Bar after some resistance from local Englishmen. In this regard, then Sir Muttu did make a major contribution for members of the Sri Lankan Legal profession, fighting racial prejudice at the centre so as to allow for greater mobility and access within the pillars of the British legal establishment. This perhaps is the primary contribution to his career at the Bar, for in Sri Lanka at least he was better known as a legislator.

In 1861, Sir Muttu's brother in law, Ederamanasingham, retired from his seat in the Legislative Council to make way for Sir Muttu. Sir Muttu's career in the Legislative Council appears to have been an interesting one though one finally remains ambivalent with regard to his final contribution. There was

no doubt that as with regard to legislative skill at oratory and preparation for debate, he was a superb legislator. Writer after writer comment on his diction, his fluency of speech, the fact that he had no accent, the fact that he covered every aspect of subject and did painstaking research into the areas of controversy etc. .¹² The Mock Christmas Debates show this side of Coomaraswamy perfectly, the use of words, the instant ditties, the flash of wit, etc. .¹³ But this praise of style over substance is worrisome and in a later section we will try and analyse his stance on various issues with regard to a nationalist vision.

It is sufficient to say here that he seemed to project the rights of indigenous religions and languages both in the school system and in the establishment of places of worship. He also pushed for the introduction of science into the curriculum. Beyond these concerns, he was not really ready to challenge British authority and British rule. He was not one for boycotts and Reform League confrontation, preferring instead to argue a point and use persuasion to achieve his means. He was not cut in the mould of a Garibaldi, his style was really that of Cavour.

Another aspect of his career as a member of the legislative council was a neglect that was often felt by fellow members of the council. Sir Muttu's love-affair with the British and his extraordinary influence in England was such that he spent many years away from Sri Lanka. James De Alwis in his biography points out that when Sir Muttu was away, his place was filled by a Burgher who was asked to represent the interests of the Tamil speaking people. James de Alwis was determined that this should not happen to the Sinhalese.¹⁴ I, for one, will not claim that a Burgher would not be able to represent the interests of Tamil speaking people. But in terms of the principles

of the era it does reflect a certain irresponsibility. Therefore, while Sir Muttu was fighting for the rights of all Easterners in London, one could argue that he somewhat neglected his responsibilities at the periphery and that the Tamil speaking people were without a representative for quite a few years during his absence.

Sir Muttu was the first Sri Lankan Tamil to visit England. He made an extraordinary impact on British civic society and on August 4th 1874 was awarded the knight Bachelor, the highest award a colonial subject in those days could receive. He received it in Osborne at the Isle of Wight, the summer residence of the Queen. Disraeli who had recommended the citation was also present and appears to have travelled with him to attain the honour.¹⁵

On his second trip to England, Sir Muttu eschewed racial prejudice of the era and married Elizabeth Clay Bæby from an old Kentish family. Sir Muttu in his forties while Elizabeth was in her late twenties. She bore him a son, Ananda.

Notes

- 1 I would like to begin this lecture by putting on record my gratitude to Professor Nadaraja for lending me important documents and for his time and guidance; Mr. S. Durai Raja Singham for his comprehensive biography of Sir Muttu Coomaraswamy, Mr. Sam Wijesinha for material on the legislative council of the period, Mr. Ian Goonetilleke for his letter containing important pieces of information and Dr. N. Tiruchelvam for valuable articles on the life of Sir Muttu Coomaraswamy and for having been kind enough to invite me to give this presentation. I have been a lucky scholar, in that the data has been literally served to me on a platter. If I stake any claim for originality, it would be in the interpretation of Sir Muttu Coomaraswamy's life-style and life work. But none of that would have been possible without the initial raw material.

(Continued on page 24)

Another look at the National Press

A. M. Marcan Markar

Most of those, I failed to do in my report on the death of Mr. Navaratnarajah. And reading through newspapers these days, I find that not much has changed.

In a broad sense, journalists are story-tellers. However, the conventions that shape this narrative form are different from that of a fiction writer. For example, when writing a news story, the reporter attempts to answer the following questions in the first two paragraphs: who did or said what, where, when, and how? Of course the order of the four Ws and H may vary according to the news. And the body of the text will answer why this story made it in the media.

To a large extent, the prevailing conventions that influence and guide journalists are shaped by the editor and the publisher of a newspaper. While each publication takes on a philosophy and character by the content of coverage, one can place a publication as having broad, national focus or a limited, selective perspective. In Sri Lanka, the daily newspapers and Sunday editions that attempt to be national are published by the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited, Upali Newspapers, Wijeya Publications, and Express Newspapers. In addition, there is a flourishing mini-press, which supplies special interest magazines, religious publications, partisan papers, and occasional pamphlets that are available in Sinhala, Tamil, and English.

Today, I shall limit my observations to the national press, which should reflect the social and political climate of the country. If one surveys this medium, one would recognize the framework that defines its journalism. Often, whatever appears will indicate the news value of the

paper. Further, in the presentation of information, a newspaper reveals its biases the way stories are organized on the pages. A similar trend may be detected when analysing the entire content of a publication, for which one should identify the regular sources of news, the group that the news benefits, the events that are covered regularly, the direction that the information flows, and the subjects frequently covered.

The language used by reporters in their coverage of events is relevant, too; newspapers can be classified accordingly. Those that choose sensationalism in their headlines and in the exposition of the story place a higher premium on the emotional content of the event than the actual facts. Such reporting is considered tabloid journalism. On the other hand, there are newspapers of record, which take on the role of instant historians, attempting to collect and present facts seriously. And when comparing the two, the latter is more credible.

Unfortunately, the Sri Lankan press does not have this distinction clearly demarcated. And what the public reads in the mainstream press is an amalgam of the two styles. Here are examples of a national newspaper choosing emotive language in its editorial. The two quotes are taken from an English publication:

- a) "(The Country's) freedom has been sanctified by the blood of some of the brave security forces and the peace-loving law-abiding citizens who have been murdered by the treacherous attack of the terrorists."
- b) "There is not the slightest doubt that all patriotic, law-abiding citizens, and they are by far the

largest majority in the country, will be solidly behind the government now engaged in putting down terrorism and violence that a minority has unleashed upon the country."

Both opinions have no bearing on the Tamil militancy. They appeared in the *Times of Ceylon* on the first page on April 6th and 7th, 1971. That this paper was aligning itself with the status quo against the JVP-led insurgency is clearly evident by the abuse it heaps on the insurgents. The choice of language identifies one group as bad, while the other group, in this case the State and its representatives, as good. This Manichean obsession to cover domestic political disturbances was replicated when the Tamil militancy emerged.

To elaborate, let me cite from a report by the Council For Communal Harmony Through The Media. This organization studied the coverage of events in all three language newspapers around the time of the August 1981 communal violence. Here is what it said in its concluding comments of the Sinhala language press, which included the *Dinamina*, *Silumina*, *Davasa*, *Rivirasa*, *Lankadeepa*, and *Sri Lanka-deepa*:

"It is well known that each paper has an opinion of its own, which determines the content of its editorials, news selection, etc. But when these opinions became extremely rigid, it inhibits the function of communicating accurate information. It is a situation of this nature that we have observed in the Sinhala dailies... in their reporting of news related to the Sinhala-Tamil issue. In their opinion, there is no basis for Tamil grievances... What is com-

municated rather is anti-TULF, anti-Tamil propaganda...When the June violence was discussed in Parliament, it was reported in such a way to keep the vital information out, and give the impression that the TULF was responsible.... Sometimes for the same purpose of pushing their own opinion, the newspapers even delete sections from the statements of the Head of the State... In early June they attempted to keep the Sinhala public ignorant of what really happened in Jaffna from May 31st to June 3rd."

A few years after the 1958 riots, Martin Wickramasinghe, the doyen of Sri Lankan literature, wrote an essay, titled "Our Cultural Problems and Anthropology", where he argued that "Politics encourages us to exploit differences." He went on to add, "In many countries there are peoples of different races and communities speaking language unintelligible to each other and following divergent religions. One of the difficult tasks of the modern world

is to get these people to live in unity inspite of the seeming irreconcilable differences....I find it difficult to persuade myself to believe that the two major communities of Ceylon are influenced by racial and religious prejudice."

Mr. Wickramasinghe's observation provides me with an illustration of the dual level that multi-ethnicity needs to be perceived. When one refers to Sri Lanka as a multi-ethnic society, it is prudent to qualify such a classification according to the social and political realities.

The social dimension stems out of the human act of associating with fellow humans in various capacities, rather than living in isolation. Invariably, such an association generates a bond, a sense of community, a common culture. Within the geographic entity of Sri Lanka, one can identify, at the social level, a variety of cultures and communities: linguistic, religious, economic, etc.

In such a heterogeneous social climate, the political ideology

that guides the government has to be accommodative. It requires a balancing act between the divisive nature of politics and the cohesive chord at the social level. And the triumph of statecraft would be to create a political model that will be appropriate for a multi-ethnic society. Unfortunately, the three models that have tried to establish a political identity for Sri Lanka have not been internalized by all the peoples of this land. In this case, I am referring to the Soulbury Constitution, the First Republican Constitution and the Second Republican Constitution.

Ethnic Issue

From the offerings in the press, there is ample evidence that the ethnic issue is reported within a political confine. No doubt, there is some validity to such accounts. But it is one-dimensional. It would be in the interest of the public, I feel, if coverage is expanded to report about ethnic groups at the social level and at the existential level. Besides adding another dimension, such breadth

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will reveal common human problems that transcend all groups.

An example that comes to mind is the refugee crisis. Today, we have over a million men, women, and children in refugee camps. This traumatic condition is not limited to one ethnic group. As I see it, there is a human interest story in each victim of social dislocation, which would bring out the poignancy about this large multi-ethnic group. Somehow, Journalists do not cover this sharp plight. If they do, reporters may also discover what a writer in an issue of *Pravada* disclosed: the refugees serve as a potential group for reconciliation and peace.

Presently, I have time only to dwell on political reporting in the national press. What about its quality? Unfortunately, it is abysmal, since sloganeering and propaganda are pervasive. The fault is two-fold. There is the government's responsibility. However much the regime, and such political columnists like Lanka Putra and Anurudha Tilakasiri, argue that there is an environment of freedom for journalists to work, there is among reporters, particularly those writing politics, a sense of fear. This condition leads to a "chilling" effect, minimizing the extent of coverage.

But for reporters to vilify the government for the sorry condition of political journalism is unconscionable. I have already disclosed the social responsibility that Article 19 places on the media. A more serious problem is the prevailing method to report politics. It has become an exercise in dictation.

Presently, the ubiquitous political speech made at public rallies is the predominant form through which the press reports ethnic issues. This approach makes the reporter appear more like a glorified stenographer. What is required, instead is an effort by the journalist who covers a speech to locate a story based on the issues articulated. Reporters need to make their own decisions on what is newsworthy in the text of the address. Such

a choice may be guided by the novelty of what was said, the prominence of the person saying it, its relevancy to the prevailing political climate, and the contradictions, if any, between the words and deeds of the speaker or between the words and reality.

In addition, the journalist is in a position to challenge or assess the central theme of the speech by seeking reactions from people who hold opposing points of view. By eliciting many points of view on a particular subject, the reporter would have broadened the story.

Simply to offer the pages of a newspaper for the text of a political speech to be reproduced will result in abuse. There are ample examples of this "free advertising" within the realm of ethnic issues. Now and again, we read speeches made by a few exhibitionists of hate and malice. At such times, I always wonder why the journalist, who meticulously took down the speech, forfeited his ability of critical thinking by not asking the speaker how much was fact and how much was fiction. In this situation, the reporter is at the frontier of information. And it is he or she who decides the content and the form the news will take as it transcends from a limited focus to a mass audience.

(To be continued)

Muttu Coomaraswamy. . .

(Continued from page 21)

- 2 See Sir. Muttu Coomaraswamy, "On the Ethnology of Ceylon Referring especially to its Sinhalese and Tamil inhabitants", *Anthropological Review*, (London) No 3 (1863) 444-445
- 3 *London News*, April 25 1833
- 4 Arumugampillai Coomaraswamy's name appears among those who petitioned the Prince Regent for the Emancipation of Slaves of Ceylon in 1816 (see Annex to Regulation No 9, of 5th August 1818)
- 5 For example, K. M. De Siva, *J. R. Jayewardene of Sri Lanka*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1988 or G. Obeyesekere, "vicissitudes of Sinhala Buddhist Identity, in Michael Roberts ed. *Collective Identities, Nationalisms and Protest*, Colombo, Marga 1979

- 6 Singham, p. 7
- 7 Mr Ian Goonetilleke in a letter to the author dated 22nd June 1991
- 8 Y. Gooneratne *Relative Merits*, London, C. Hurst and Co. 1986
- 9 Singham p. 9
- 10 Ceylon Review of October 1894, Also see Singham 23
- 11 Singham p. 8-15
- 12 See A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, "The Contribution of Some Leading Ceylon Tamils to the Constitutional and Political Development of Ceylon During the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries", Proceedings of the 5th International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies, Vol 1, p. 657
- 13 Singham 97-108
- 14 See A. C. Seneviratne ed. *Memoirs and Desultory Writings of the Late James D'Alwis*, The Ceylon Observer Press, 1939 p. 94
- 15 Singham p. 28

Bishop Caldwell. . .

(Continued from page 12)

hope that the 'Dravidian' Tamils would remain the faithful among the faithless, the bedrock of the Raj for a long time to come — the events of the great mutiny and the rise of the Dravidian movement proved them correct.

(To be continued)

Note

I am thankful to Mr. Joganathan of Wellawatte for drawing my attention to the fact that the Panivar Clan of Myliddy is also connected to Ramnad. My information however was based on a) Place Name Studies — Kankesanturai Circuit by Dr. E. Balasunderam of the Jaffna University, 1988, p. 5-6. The book was published for the Mani Vila of S. Appadurai of Myliddy. b) An interview with Mr. Ratnalingam of Myliddy-Politburo member of a Tamil militant group who I believe is a relative of Mr. Joganathan. The footnotes could not appear due to an unavoidable circumstance.

Briefly. . .

(Continued from page 2)

thereby foreclosing all debate and discussion as happens now even when we merely sniff a Court case in the air."

No abductions, says Ranil

Government spokesman, Industries Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe, said that there was no truth in allegations that young girls were being abducted. There had been no complaints to the police, he said.

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There is laughter and light banter amongst these rural damsels who are busy sorting out tobacco leaf in a barn. It is one of the hundreds of such barns spread out in the mid and upcountry intermediate zone where the arable land remains fallow during the off season.

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Tobacco is the industry that brings employment to the second highest number of people. And these people are the tobacco barn owners, the tobacco growers and those who work for them, on the land and in the barns.

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