

● POLITICAL PARTIES AFTER THE JUDGEMENT ●

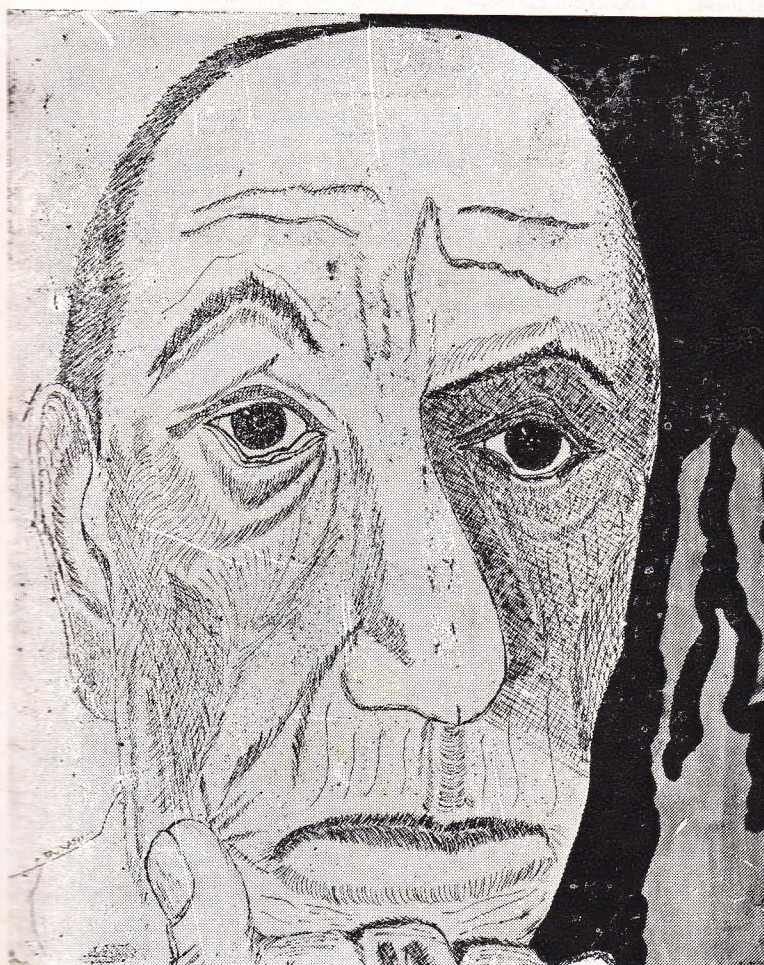
Mervyn de Silva

LANKA

GUARDIAN

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DICKY!



THE FIRST PHASE

— *A. Jeyaratnam Wilson*

THE MAN WITHIN

— *Piyal Gamage*

DHARMISTA DIKCY

— *Steven Kemper*

HUMAN RIGHTS: ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

— *Chandra Muzaffer*

DEMOCRACY UNDER PRESSURE

— *Izeth Hussain*

UNDERSTANDING COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES

— *Harsh Sethi*



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Briefly. . .

PRESSMEN MEET

Five Journalists' organisations got together to celebrate International Journalists Day with a well attended meeting at the Public Library grounds. An exhibition was followed by a seminar addressed by Messrs Ajith Samaranayake, Lucien Rajakarunayake, D. F. Kariyakarawana, Winnie Hettigoda, Kirithi Kelagama, and Apratim Mukerjee, senior office-bearers and spokesmen

for the Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association, the Foreign Correspondents' Association, the Press Association of Sri Lanka, the Free Media Movement, and the Union of Journalists. All political parties have been guilty of harassment. All major parties which held office have placed various restrictions on the free press. The journalists know what Mr. Jayewardene, the UNP President, and his deputy Mr. Premadasa has said before they assumed office. Mrs. Bandaranaike, the SLFP leader has now to restore full freedom. Journalists are not ready to accept verbal assurances. Mr. Rajakarunanayake observed.

In other democratic countries, Journalists need not need "to beg or demand" freedom of expression but in Sri Lanka it had become necessary to address public meetings, said Mr. Ajith Samaranayake, Associate editor of the Island.

PETITION COSTS

Lawyers who appeared for Mr. Premadasa in the Supreme Court case filed by Opposition and SLFP leader Mrs. Bandaranaike

are expected to ask for more than a million rupees by way of costs. While the Chief Justice, Mr. G. P. S. de Silva and three other judges award the President costs, one judge who supported the dismissal of Mrs. Bandaranaike's petition, did not award costs.

LALITH ATTACKED

Former National Security Minister, Lalith Athulathmudali, a co-leader of the newly formed DUNF, was assaulted by a gang of men armed with clubs when he and some of his party activists were on a membership drive at Kawdana, in the suburban Dehiwela-Mt. Lavinia. Mr. Athulathmudali suffered minor injuries. Two men from the neighbourhood have been arrested by the police.

TERROR HAUNTS

Corruption is a major disease. Terror still haunts parts of the island, said the Archbishop, the Most Reverend Nicholas Marcus Fernando. Thousands are getting killed and more are maimed or left homeless in Sri Lanka's tragic ethnic war, he said. And it is difficult, said the Archbishop, to find the truth in any newspaper.

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CONTENTS

News Background	3
J. R.	6
Letter	12
Ethno-Politics	13
Poem	15
The Region	16
Human Rights	17
Agrarian Change (2)	19
Books	22

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- AND NOW FOR THE PEOPLE'S VERDICT

**NEWS
BACKGROUND**

Mervyn de Silva

Conflict, clashes at the highest leadership level, factionalism and rumblings of rank-and-file discontent, seem to plague our major political parties. The only difference is that some of this friction and confusion, the common characteristic is less visible in the ruling UNP than in the main Opposition parties. In any case, these are symptoms of a system in crisis, and the signs of a political elite's increasing inability to cope with mounting challenges posed by that crisis.

In the past fortnight, the internal problems of the two main opposition parties, the SLFP and the DUNF, were far more transparent than the UNP's. A single event, in fact a single decision, explains this development — the unanimous Supreme Court order, rejecting Opposition Leader Mrs. Bandaranaike's presidential election petition. David Hume, says Maurice Duverger, makes "the shrewd observation" (Essay on parties, 1760) that the programme plays an essential part in the initial phase, when it serves to bring together scattered individuals, but later on organisation comes to the fore, and the platform becoming subordinate. Nothing could be truer", (Preface, Political parties, Duverger, 1951). That observation, I believe is more relevant to the DUNF than to the SLFP, where factionalism (HELA URAMAYA) and leadership issues appear to be more demanding. Making a distinction between bourgeois middle-class parties and proletarian organisations Duverger argues that since the support-base of the middle-class party is middle-class in origin and a large proportion will have the advantage of a secondary or even a higher education, it 'causes, considerable

competition for the posts of leadership. Renewal of their leading strata is consequently far from being ensured in any satisfactory way".

One can, I believe, apply these broad axioms to both the SLFP crisis, taking note also of the generational factor and the ideological character of HELA URAMAYA, and the problems that evidently plague the newly formed DUNF, another middle-class party. (In the case of the conservative, rightwing UNP, it is more a question of personality, with Mr. Premadasa regarded as "an outsider" to the bourgeois club. Thus, it becomes a problem of style too, or in the strictest sense, manners, meaning President Premadasa's aggressive and strident populism).

"LALITH'S QUIT OFFER ROCKS DUNF" ran the headline to the SUNDAY TIMES correspondent's weekly column which has now established itself as an exercise in investigative journalism most closely fashioned on the famous INSIGHT column that editor Harold Evans introduced to Fleet Street's quality press.

Here is a sample from this regular op-ed page feature which turn the spotlight on the week's most exciting bit of political news:

"With little likelihood of an amicable settlement, given the charged environment, Mr. Athulathmudali dropped a bombshell. Pushing back his chair, Mr. Athulathmudali got up and said 'If others are unhappy I will resign from the party and go...'. The former National Security Minister (President JR's Cabinet) and Education (President Premadasa's team) was threatening to quit the party which he helped

establish soon after the abortive impeachment plot. It was the former Mahaveli minister, we learn, who defused the crisis, Mr. Dissanayake asked Mr. Athulathmudali to sit down, while the venerable A. C. Gooneratne appealed to Athulathmudali to remain calm." Mr. Athulathmudali obliged...

The SUNDAY ISLAND's political affairs columnist chose to concentrate on the main opposition party, the SLFP. The headline read: "THE SLFP RIFT HEALS".

The Supreme Court order gives President Premadasa another two years at least. The next Presidential election could be announced in early 1995! Time therefore is the crucial factor — first for the SLFP, and then for DUNF. Both the ruling UNP itself and the Left (or whatever is left of the LEFT) need to be studied from a different angle, just like the "minority" parties, the Tamil, and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress.

Largely because of Mrs. Bandaranaike's age and health, the rejection of her polls petition had the most immediate impact on the SLFP. It is the serious setback at the Supreme Court which, paradoxically, gave Mrs. B. the strength to act firmly and decisively against Mr. Tilak Karunaratne's HELA URAMAYA. The Supreme Court, though a serious disappointment and a political setback, came as no surprise. Mrs. B. and her closest advisers were more or less certain that their once high hopes of a Presidential contest this year would be dashed. Having resigned themselves to an adverse order, their earnest prayer was a divided court — 3/2 for example. The unanimity of the judi-

cial decision, with the Chief Justice presiding, was a rude psychological - political blow that demoralised both party echelons and committed voter. A decision in Mrs. B's favour or at least a divided bench would have allowed the SLFP-led opposition to make maximum use of the Opposition's parliamentary and extra-parliamentary campaign's momentum i.e. from Udugampola and pada yatra to Kandalama, and of course the explosion of anti-UNP rage at Kanatte. [The last was at least partly provoked by a suicidally insensitive UNP's failure to declare a Day of National Mourning, in honour of General Kobekaduwe, Brigadier Wimalaratne and Commandore Asoka Jayamaha].

The "wave" that should have crested on Sept. 2, suddenly dropped.

Grand strategy has not been Mrs. B's forte. As a tactician however, she is quick-witted. Like the Maoists of old she has turned bad into good. What she could not gain from the main enemy, she extracted from the trouble-makers within the party i.e. from the challenger for party leadership, Anura, and the assorted SLFP MP's and party stalwarts who have thwarted all her efforts to bring in Chandrika to the party, and as soon as possible to a responsible party post.

True, Mrs. B. is a old-fashioned, conventional mother. But she is a political creature first and last. She has a natural "feel" for power. In adversity, there was an advantage. Since the big battle had been postponed, there was time now for some very necessary house-cleaning and urgent repairs.

This essentially domestic exercise in a family-controlled party goes of course beyond family and party. This is national politics. This is the big game - power. And it has very much to do with both policy and personality.

Hela Uramaya is not just a caucus with 20-25 MP's led by

Tilak Karunaratne. Yes, Mr. Karunaratne founded the movement. He has the personality, the power-drive and the money to launch such a group. However, he is not after the top job. Not yet. He will support Anura in the fight against Mrs. B. and her loyalists, and if Anura wins, Mr. Karunaratne will shoot up to the party's second-rung leadership, with free access to Anura, and a role in decision-making.

But Hela Uramaya has an ideological make-up too. In terms of the SLFP's own ideological origins, the H. U. represents one major tendency. In mounting a revolt against the Senanayake family leadership of the UNP, Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike's political calculations were fashioned by two considerations. He had been the boss of the nationalist Sinhala Maha Sabha. D. S. Senanayake, could not be challenged... for the time being, anyway. So, S. W. R. D. was willing to suppress the separate identity of his own Sinhala Maha Sabha and accept the No. 2 position in the U. N. P. on the

understanding that he would be prime minister after D. S. It is only when he realised D. S. had other ideas that S. W. R. D. established his own Sri Lanka Freedom Party. The SLFP had a more complex ideological character. First there was the Sinhala Maha Sabha thinking. There had been no anti-colonial nationalist mass struggle. The British had tutored the English-educated upper class well. Ceylon was ready for independence. Once India won its freedom, holding on to Ceylon, the model colony with an extremely dependable political elite, made no sense. What did make sense was Trinco and the Colombo air base which were retained under a gentlemen's agreement.

SWRD mobilised the Sinhala intelligentsia, the monk, the school teacher and the native physician, in a post-rather than pre-independence movement, arriving a bit late. It had enough vigour however to win him the 1956 election, romantically described as a '56 revolution'. But

SWRD was clever enough to tap the emotional resources of other "aggrieved" or "alienated" groups. Thus he added radical economic program, stealing a few ideas from his other challenger, the Marxist Left. He pledged nationalisation, and he did carry through such a program. Finally, foreign policy, - an anti-western, nonalignment, (A debt to Nehru).

The HELA URAMAYA is a throwback to the more emotional part of the '56 revolution', the Sinhala-Buddhist complexion. And if it has an appeal, the present crisis makes it so. The Tamil struggle, the battles in the north, the massacres in the ethnically mixed east, the international support for the minority Tamils and the persistent criticism of "Sinhala chauvinism" and "human rights abuses", and the overpowering presence of Tamilnadu, have together created the psychological climate for a re-assertive and militant Sinhala nationalism, best expounded by the H.U.'s ideologue-polemicist, Mr. S. L. Gunasekera, MP.

Though he really doesn't subscribe to the ideological extremism of the HU's outspoken advocates, Anura need a group, any organised group, to back him against Chandrika, who not only has the patronage of her mother but of other parties and formations, all more left-inclined than the H.U. or Anura loyalists. The dividing line is clear. As a political personality, the strongest in the Opposition outside the SLFP is Mr. Dinesh Gunawardena. He is his own boss, but he is also pro-Anura.

Numbers Game

Mr. B. wants to cobble together a 'grand coalition' in which both "the broad left" as well as the national minorities are constituent members. The national minorities matter more than the Left for 3 reasons (a) the new electoral equation that has been introduced by the presidential system which in the current context is a face-to-face UNP-SLFP confrontation. (The

DUNF's plans and calculations are made far more complex and difficult by this assumption of a UNP-SLFP face-to-face. (b) international, (mainly western) and NGO support i.e. the Human Rights lobby that expects the challenger to Mr. Premadasa to offer a "political deal" to the Tamils. (c) India, which also insists on a conciliatory approach to the Tamil problem though it does not mind a full-scale onslaught on the LTTE. Delhi

is also far more hostile to the Premadasa presidency than any western critic.

On all these basic issues Mrs. B. finds herself more comfortable with Chandrika's ideas, friends, and allies, than with Anura's.

(d) The fourth is the most important factor — the numbers game, the new arithmetic of Presidential polls. In that game, "block" votes of the religious-racial groups — Tamils, plant-

ation 'Indian' Tamils, Muslims, Christians — can decide the winner. And if that's how one goes through the pluses and minuses exercise, HELA URAMAYA could upset Mrs. B.'s calculations. Having lost at Hultsdorp, the SLFP can only wait for the ultimate verdict in the People's Court. The UNP has bought itself time. For the SLFP, time is all-important.

N. A. M. SUMMIT

NORTH-SOUTH CONFLICT and the SOUTH COMMISSION

The re-structuring of the United Nations with a view to "democratising" the institution and its decision-making process (the Security Council) sharpening North-South issues, the emergence of a new Islamic bloc in a leading role, and need for clearer, more dynamic interaction within the "South" were some of the highlights of the 10th NAM summit in Jakarta.

THE SOUTH COMMISSION, chaired by the former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, presented an "Economic Agenda" for NAM in the 90's. The South Commission consists of many

eminent 'Third World' personalities such as Michael Manley, Carlos Rafael Rodrigues, Ismail Sabri Abdulla, Sridath Ramphal, Gamini Corea, and Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie. Its Secretary-General was Manmohan Singh, now Finance Minister of India.

It was Sri Lanka's Dr. Gamani Corea, former UNCTAD Secretary-General who presented the Economic "Agenda" to the NAM Summit.

On the Challenge to the South, published two years ago John Kenneth Galbraith said: It is 40 years since I first interested myself in the economic problems

of the poor lands of the planet, called in more neutral fashion, the South. There was then almost no literature on the subject. The erstwhile colonial powers accepted the poverty of their subject people as normal. A concern for the problem of the developing lands came with the end of the colonial era. Teaching those early courses in economic development I would have greatly welcomed 'The Challenge of the South'. It is, concludes Galbraith, a splendid piece of work, the product of informed study and discussion, and a remarkable will to find agreement..'

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THE J. R. YEARS

J. R.: The man and politician

A Jeyaratnam Wilson

At a first glance there are several facets of J. R. Jayewardene that can be detected. He can be dapper, far far younger than his age. He presents a Ciceronian figure, effortlessly. He does not have to act though he might well be his country's supreme political artist. There is no will to immediate grandeur but the glimmer of an anxiety to leave his impact, peeps out without a doubt. Age however has wearied this sombre titan whose face not seldom verges on the saturnine. Mr. Jayewardene indicates an obvious desire to discern the future, forgetting almost that age has caught up.

Always thoughtful, dreadfully solitudinous even in his most relaxed moments, it is rare to glimpse a smile in that sometimes corrugated - looking spinx-like face. Only when he enjoys a postprandial smoke does a beam or two escape. The sheer pursuit of power as an end in itself is a mitigating factor in this otherwise much demonized man. With the passing of time, there could be a rehabilitation of this much criticised figure in Sri Lanka's recent history. Then the revisionist historians will make their reassessments.

In looking at former President J. R. Jayewardene, there are questions that need answers, answers which have to be divorced from accepted conventional and contemporaneous assessments of him. The former president has not been helpful or interested in disentangling fact from fiction. And this despite his hope that history will remember him. That hope was quite evident at the

start of his presidency when physically he appeared a refreshed and renewed person. Whether it persisted when he got himself embroiled in the JVP and Tamil imbroglios it is difficult to say. Because, after 1983, the odds were against him; nevertheless like all political leaders, he refused to accept that he had been foiled by the ineluctable forces of history.

In the beginning the president had grand designs. His new constitution would provide a stable executive. Proportional representation ensured proportionality for his party in Parliament. Provisions against desertion by MPs prevented the possibility of the

med had already made overtures to him. The coalition was however elitist in conception not one that was to be built from the base of the pyramid. Nor did Mr. Jayewardene think of power flowing from the pyramidal apex to the levels below. He thought of a coalition as an overarching alliance of the politically antagonistic actors. Here again he was misconceiving the political firmament. He failed to grasp that the different actors had different goals. They were all elitists no doubt but elitism itself gives rise to political differences; whereas for Mr. Jayewardene it was an invitation to all the forces that counted

... the sheer pursuit of power as an end in itself is a mitigating factor in this otherwise much demonized man. ...

government being confronted with revolt and rebellion with its destabilising consequences. The popular wisdom was that the new constitution was tailor-made for Mr. Jayewardene. Yet it escaped the public mind that Mr. Jayewardene had strenuously advocated the presidential system in 1971/72 and, had his views been accepted, Mrs. Bandaranaike would have been the island's first executive president. It is doubtful that anyone elected to the exalted office in the future will ever want to divest himself/herself of the powers of this contemporary Leviathan.

Having however arrived at power, Mr. Jayewardene did not, again contrary to the prejudice against him, seek its monopoly. Time and again, he calculated on a grand national coalition, not only of the UNP and SLFP, but also of the left-wing and the ethnic minority political groupings. The left-wing he clai-

to share office in his government. Again he mistook the obtaining of office as an end in itself which could satisfy the recipients/incumbents.

Having failed in the grand design, Mr. Jayewardene had a concourse of discordant oppositional elements that came to him with their tales of woe. Being a superb strategist, he was a master at throwing apples of discord at the appropriate moment. In the process he caused confusion in the ranks of the main SLFP opposition. Perhaps, in the end, the divided Opposition, democratically speaking, proved ruinous to his own political well-being.

J. R. Project

However, Mr. Jayewardene was not, as once described, the Pope of private enterprise *per se*. Nor was the grand alliance he was after intended for the promo-

The writer a professor at the University of New Brunswick, is the author of several books on Sri Lankan constitutional and political affairs.

tion of Thatcherite privatisation. Again he did not have either a policy or a program neatly rolled up under his arm. His philosophy had its vaguenesses and illogicalities. Broadly he believed in the government of the ruling classes and in the island's case, a combination of new and old money. At the same time he entertained the simplistic notion that the segments he wished to solder into an amalgam would, in the gladness of their minds, be naturally inclined to philanthropize. Therefore, he vainly believed that the poor will benefit. The philosophy of the rich of the 1980's and thereafter, to hoard, be greedy and avaricious, had not occurred to him. Mr. Jayewardene was in this respect even pre-Elizabeth the Second in his thinking. He was more of George the Fifth vintage.

The former President's greatest handicap was that he was advanced in years when he took office. It presented him with two insuperable difficulties. He did not have colleagues in his cabinet with whom he could freely communicate as with a peer group, with whom he might, on the same wave length discuss problems confronting his country. There was indeed a generational gap. Though two or three ministers enjoyed his confidence, there was only one minister with whom he could have had frank exchanges but unfortunately the latter suffered from mood swings. There were a few others who merely told him what he liked to hear; he was quite aware of this fact. But as in all cases of men at the helm, a certain amount of flattery was indispensable for the leader's political well-being.

Mr. Jayewardene's problem was how to handle power. Contrary to the popular notion of arrogance, it might surprise many that he was quite unsure of the quantum of power at his disposal. *Consequently he did not exercise power constructively but merely enjoyed its possession; he pursued power as an endgame in itself.* He was not conscious of

the vast authority endowed in the office of the executive president. And it was also apparent that he preferred to share the blame with his ministers. He therefore treated his ministers as colleagues in a cabinet not as lieutenants in a Gaullist system. Thus the cabinet not as of Mr. Jayewardene made decisions as a collective entity. Some of his ministers outmanoeuvred him and he was clearly reluctant to overrule them. The late Dame Judith Hart addressed his cabinet on one occasion and having listened to the babel of voices, she said she was "sorry for the dear old man".

The institutions he set in motion under his constitution developed a life and momentum of their own.

"Consequently he did not exercise power constructively but merely enjoyed its possession; he pursued power as an end game in itself..."

The rot began when the UF constitution of 1972 concentrated all powers in a single unicameral Parliament, abolishing the Senate even before Parliament was overhauled. The referendum, for example, was intended to never permit Parliament to extend its term. The UF government's extension of Parliament by two years in the beginning and its abortive plans to continue in its last throes were too fresh in his mind. "If I can win in a referendum, I don't need to postpone a general election", he argued. He had quite an innovative mind. In 1984, he seriously considered a second chamber as a "second thought" and sobering institution which will guide a first chamber that might be intoxicated with power by a fresh mandate, judiciously. Furthermore he thought of such a body as a chamber of nationalities. Critics however dampened his interest because they used the conventional arguments against the idea... that it would be an anachronism in a democratic state, fortress of wealth, the embodiment of reaction etc. The President dropped his plan ami-

dst the clamour of all this criticism.

The power he gathered to himself in his office were by no means intended to be utilised in Hobbesian fashion. Outside academic observers remarked in this context that Mr. Jayewardene in their judgement was "a President who did not assert himself". The reason was that he was excessively attached to prime ministerial government and could not readily shake off his experience of forty odd years of parliamentarism. His virulent critics confused the powers relating to emergency rule with those of the executive presidency. For example he was uncertain of what he should do with some 40,000 strikers in the

early years of office. His better judgement, I felt, was to reinstate them with a warning. "But what am I to do?" "They keep pressuring me to dismiss them" he Hamletized in a long-distanne phone call. The advice that it would be a democratic gesture to give back to all of them their jobs went unheeded. "It would be good for the body politic if you rose above all this pettiness". In the end Cyril Mathew had his way probably with the support of other ministers.

Mr. Jayewardene was possibly aware that members of his government had a propensity to violence. An upcountry MP, overly superenthused, kept harassing him that Amirthalingam should be "hung, drawn and quartered" in the manner of punishment meted out by Sinhalese kings of yore. Mr. Jayewardene was patient with him for long hours and explained to him that these things are unheard of in contemporary times. But the MP was persistent and Amirthalingam subsequently had

a motion of no-confidence passed against him.

Supreme Court

Mr. Jayewardene did not so much interfere with the Supreme Court but wished to sift its composition from what it had become during the UF years its politically motivated appointees. He might instead have chosen President Franklin Roosevelt's Supreme Court plan of 1936 by increasing the number of judges and freezing its number at a certain level. But here again opinion was bitter among those who thought that some of Felix Dias Bandaranaike's nominees did not do any credit to the supreme judicial institution.

The former President's sins were venial compared to those of some of the heads of state of recent years. There is no need to refer to Mrs. Gandhi's role. Charles de Gaulle himself defied the pronouncements of France's supreme body of constitutional judges, the Constitutional Council, on a number of occasions. There is no denying that Mrs. Thatcher got the Secretary of her Cabinet, Sir Robin Armstrong, to cook up proceedings and decisions of her cabinet that never took place. And as for Presidents Reagan and Bush their sins are mortal. The latter's telephone diplomacy with the world's most terrible tyrants in the Middle East is only now coming to light. And his appointment of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court led to the American public being distracted by Thomas' alleged sexual harassment when the real question was that his modest qualifications were far from what was expected. While on the other hand, former President Reagan packed the U.S. Supreme Court with ultra-conservative judges.

At meetings of his cabinet, Mr. Jayewardene, as one of his senior ministers remarked, tended to sermonize in "Gladstonian style". He refrained from stating his own position clearly and then ask for confirmation. This

was what he should have done even in a prime ministerial system. But it was characteristic of him to dither, hoping for a consensus. Even Mr. Asquith attended cabinet meetings in a drunken state, wrote letters to his new found girl friends in which he revealed top secrets, doodled most of the time letting his ministers say what they wanted to and then announced the so-called consensus when there was none except what he himself thought.

Mr. Jayewardene's role was not that of a popular leader or of the hero in the crowd. Suffice it to say that he did not crave for mob worship. He was an elitist and did not strike a rapport with the electors, leave alone his own political base.

"Mr. Jayewardene was possibly aware that members of his government had a propensity to violence. An upcountry MP, overly superenthused, kept harassing him that Amirthalingam should be 'hung, drawn and quartered ...'"

He activated and energised that base and made his party's supporters conscious of the need to be always mobilised. Beyond this tenuous tie, there was no symbiotic relationship. His political base was respectful of him for his qualities as a wise statesman. There was little evidence of popular affection and/or adulation. The President in turn expected support. He did not love or woo the people in the classical democratic sense. He gave direction to his party *apparatchiks*. He was an effective manager. His style was therefore the role of elder statesman, the guide and philosopher but not the friend. Always cool and introspective he was never in search of a hysterical gathering declaring their adoration. The President was far too rational to expect the plaudits of the ordinary people.

Family Man

Where then did the President turn for sustenance? Primarily, Mrs Jayewardene was a source

of strength. Additionally, his brothers Harry and Roly had admiration for their successful sibling. They were at his Ward place residence on Sunday mornings for breakfast. Esmond Wickremasinghe too was there, just like one of his family. The President treated his son, Ravi, as an intimate friend to whom he revealed his innermost thoughts. He was more or less equal in his regard for Lalith Athulathmudali and Gamini Dissanayake. The latter however was closer to him and he often spoke of him affectionately. After 1983, I lost touch. These are my observations. I was not part of either the inner circle or the immediate outer one.

He compartmentalised his

friendships. One friend seldom if ever knew what the other told him. In this way peace reigned supreme in his inner sanctum.

How did the President exercise the powers of his office? There were some matters he wished to accomplish himself perhaps to be remembered in history. He developed the tank civilisation and claimed in a conversation with (the late) Denzil Peiris that he had restored many an irrigation system, a number, which he said exceeded that of any single Sinhalese monarch. This seemed for him a prime goal. Though it was widely rumoured that he liked to be addressed in colonial gubernatorial style, he showed no evidence of pomp and pageantry in his private life. But he liked the fuss that his office permitted. He was attached to the monarchical traditional. But he himself did not want to be a

(Continued on page 24)

Happy Birthday, JR

Piyal Gamage

On the 17th of September our JR will be 86, and let us all wish him many more years of ebullient life. However, it would in my view prudent for him to desist from public utterances on subjects on which he is personally vulnerable. The Sunday Times recently (23 August) reported that JR had said: "Democracy is cultured, it is a way of life and undoubtedly the best system of government. Violence and unseemly behaviour are abhorrent to the practice of democracy." did JR really say that? We rub our eyes in disbelief!

Almost as if it was a specific and direct reply to JR's statement, the Daily News of the very next day (24th August) reported a speech made by President Premadasa: "A section of our own party who visited Jaffna disrupted the (DDC) elections and even hijacked ballot boxes for vote rigging. They later went on the rampage and burnt down the precious Jaffna library which was a national treasure. It was on this day that a Velupillai Prabhakaran was born." On the Jaffna DDC election the Nation of 19th June 1981 commented: "At the election to the Jaffna DDC held on 4th June, 150 officials picked by the commissioner of Elections were replaced by nominees of the ruling party just before the poll. For the first time in the history of this country the conduct of an election was wrested from the control of the duly constituted authority and exercised by the ruling political party. Thus has the UNP celebrated the Jubilee of universal adult suffrage in Sri Lanka."

The Daily News of 7 September 1981 reported an interview JR granted to S. Venkat Narayan of India Today:

SVN: In Jaffna people are very upset. The police set fire to the 50-year old library and burnt 97,000 valuable books. They also set fire to a TULF MP's house.

JR: That's because they think he is in touch with the terrorists.

SVN: It seems they were trying to catch him so they could kill him.

JR: Terrorists do that too.

SVN: So it's tit for tat? This kind of situation is causing a lot of alienation. Therefore if you go there and assure them of your concern for their safety, they may feel relieved. It may go a long way to ease the tension.

JR: I want to do that but I must find the time.

In the event JR did not find the time. In this speech President Premadasa also said: "Who got hirelings to hoot at Supreme Court judges and to pelt missiles at their houses?... The fact that a section from our own party was behind this ignominious affair stunned me at the time." On this matter Paul Sieghart, Chairman of Justice (the British section of the ICJ) interviewed JR and later reported that JR's position was that "the right to peaceful protest was always available to the people of Sri Lanka." Sieghart commented: "The conclusion is inescapable that he was deliberately seeking to teach the judges a lesson, in order to make them more pliable to the executive's wishes. If that is so, these were grossly improper acts; but for the immunity from all suit which the president

enjoys under the constitution, they might well have been criminal offences under Articles 116(2)." (Sri Lanka: A Mounting Tragedy of Errors: 1984) A few days after the hooliganism outside the judges' homes, a person who said his name was Kalu Lucky turned up at the offices of the Daily News and claimed it was he who organised the demonstration, adding: "It is a democratic right to express one's views." The Daily News carried an account of this incident but the police (who came directly under JR) took no action.

In his speech President Premadasa also asked: "Who manhandled a scholar like Prof. Sarachchandra? The President was referring to some events that took place on 22nd July 1982 (the fifth anniversary of the JR government). A public meeting had been arranged at the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress Hall. Professor Sarachchandra began to address the meeting when a gang of thugs rushed the platform and beat him up and several others on the rostrum including some Buddhist monks. Later a person who said his name was Piyasena Jayaweera, made a statement to the press that he accepted responsibility for stopping Prof. Sarachchandra from "attacking government policy." The police under JR took no action against Jayaweera.

Let us hope JR will pay heed to the comments of President Premadasa and on his birthday make a resolution to remain silent on such subjects as democracy, freedom of speech, free and fair elections, independence of the judiciary, the use of violence etc., etc., etc.

J. R. righteousness and *realpolitik*

Steven Kemper

Sinhala people look back on an extraordinary civilization that began with the establishment of Buddhism in the Island some 2500 years ago. They know quite a lot about that civilization because people they regard as their ancestors have written things down—donations of property, astrological and Ayurvedic treatises, poetry and works on poetics, monastic rules, stories of the Lord Buddha, and historical accounts. Historical writing stands out for several reasons. First, there has been quite a lot of it—some three dozen histories in all—and the writing begins at a precocious moment in the south Asian past. The most important of these histories, the Mahavamsa, constitutes 'the only early historical literature in the realm of South Asian culture'. Second, historical writing plays an epistemological role to which other forms of writing do not aspire. Histories (*vamsas*) stand behind the authenticity of knowledge, relationships, and practices. As a result writing has always had genuine political importance. In what follows I want to concentrate on the political uses of historical writing, and more particularly on the politics of commissioning a new extension of the Mahavamsa. The practice culminates in J. R. Jayewardene's decision to compile the *Mahavamsa Nuwara Yugaya* soon after his election in 1977.

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The idea that a historical account can legitimate the authenticity of knowledge, relationships, practices, and sacred places derives from the way higher knowledge was traditionally preserved in south Asia. Knowledge did not survive from age to age through the unembodied transmission of ideas and values. It was passed between one generation and the next along lines of teachers and students. The root *vamsa* of the word Mahavamsa has several primary senses—generation, descent—which lead naturally to another of its senses—history. Knowledge survives because human relationships are organized to guarantee its protection and exclusivity. In the Hindu tradition, the most reliable kind of knowledge is so regarded because it is 'that which is heard' (Skt *śruti*), as opposed to less reliable traditions preserved in *śruti* literature, 'that which is remembered.' The relationship between persons exists to make hearing a certain kind of knowledge possible, not as independent of that knowledge and not as an open channel to relay any of knowledge. The Buddhist *dharmas* (teaching) has been preserved for twenty-five centuries along lines that run from teacher to student. Knowledge gained from a monk who has himself gained it from the Buddha. But the Buddha is gone, and relying on a descent line which begins with someone who has heard it directly is the best one can expect in diminished circumstances.

Historical accounts have come to do quite a lot more than

warrant knowledge. *Vamsas* also serve to glorify and casigate, to point a moral, and to explain a present-day relationship or practice. Taken at their own words, *vamsas* want to edify. Here the epistemological function of historical writing is linked to its political importance. Historiography in Sri Lanka has always done something besides simply recording the past, to call such traditions Whiggish or ideological puts contemporary conceptions of historical writing on materials that share few of our intentions. The point is not that the ancient histories are unreliable—although the extent of their reliability is always at issue but that they demonstrate a characteristic way of legitimating present-day arrangements. In some cases the historical accounts that warrant and the ritual or texts that are warranted meld into one another. A fourteenth-century work on the Tooth Relic, the *Dalada-sirita*, begins with the history of the relic—its sojourn in India after the death of the Lord Buddha, its journey to Sri Lanka and its growing significance in the medieval Sinhala state. The last chapter presents the rites to be observed for the Tooth Relic. 'If the title of the work is an indication of its nature and contents, one may reasonably infer that it is both a history of the Tooth Relic and an account of the rites to be observed in its worship. The word *sirita* means both "life history", "life story", and "rite".

The Mahavamsa guarantees the authenticity of a certain kind of Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism,

by tracing out the human connections that link the monks of the sixth century AD to the Buddha himself. The descent of the Theravada monks is intertwined with the history of the Sri Lankan state. It records not two histories but one, for the Mahavamsa assumes the mutual necessity of kings and clerics, as well as society need for both. Kings patronize the religion and observe its ceremonies; clerics educate kings and bend their policies in the direction of wisdom. Until the eighteenth century—which is to say of an ancient tradition until the recent past—the chronicle has concentrated exclusively on the doings both pious and impious, of these two groups of actors. Kings rush by, dynasties rise and are eclipsed by others, south Indian armies advance and withdraw. Before it is done the Mahavamsa recounts over 150 kingly reigns and 25 centuries of Buddhist history. Mahanama who compiled the first part of the Mahavamsa in the sixth century, made these episodes sound distinctly religious themes, emplotting the narrative in ways that point a moral. Each chapter concludes with a moral reflection that puts the political, economic and religious contents of the chapter in a doctrinal context—the flux of worldly affairs is unending and without exception.

The chronicling has never stopped because the Mahavamsa has been periodically updated. Last things quickly become the last things before the last, the chronicle falls behind events—often by centuries—and a new generation of monks picks up the task of recording events on palm-leaf manuscripts. The updating has neither regular nor

very frequent; but it requires only a single king and a scholarly monk to undertake an extension. The act of updating the chronicle often comes at moments of reform of the *sangha* (monkhood), although there have been several reformations of the religion without a corresponding extension of the chronicle. Scholarly monks have extended the chronicle five times since its first compilation in the sixth century. When the Kandyan kingdom fell in 1815, the circumstances that supported the chronicling changed forever. The Mahavamsa tradition, strictly understood, ends with the abolition of the Sinhala monarchy.

In another sense nothing at all changed. The British monarch simply replaced the local one. Large portions of the Sinhala aristocracy held on to their privileged positions. The monkhood declined in Kandyan areas, but it survived in the Low Country, Sinhala castes, previously excluded from ordination, established new monastic groups of their own and the religious life blossomed. Some monks clearly saw their interests in opposition to British rule, especially because of the identification between colonial rule and aggressive Christian missionary activity. But other monks and perhaps even those monks who were in principle hostile to the government looked to the Crown as a plausible source of authority and patronage—perhaps not as reliable and certainly not as righteous as the traditional monarch but the best one could find. For its part the colonial government took on some of the traditional responsibilities and prerogatives of the monarch. At its initiative the Ven. Hikkaduwe

Sri Sumangala the outstanding monk of his day, and a learned pandit. Devarakkhita Batuyantudawe, translated the Mahavamsa from Pali into Sinhala in 1877 and added a supplement which brought mathern up to 1815. That supplement added a 101st chapter to the text. Counting this extension as the fourth, the fifth was more eccentric. In 1935 Ven. Yagirala Pannananda advanced the narrative from the fall of Kandy to the period just before Independence. He called his work the Mahavamsa Part III (the first two parts being the Mahavamsa proper and its extensions which Gerger edited as the Culavamsa) and undertook the task at his own initiative. After the fact it has become a piece of the tradition.

The updating of the chronicle has occurred under a variety of circumstances, but most often it has happened during a time of reformation or resurgence. Mahavamsa compiled the first part of the Mahavamsa after Theravada Buddhism and the monks who espoused it had been returned to a position of privilege in Anuradhapura. Buddhist revivals in the twelfth and sixteenth centuries gave rise to the first two extensions that came during a moment of great religious enthusiasm in the Kandyan kingdom when proper ordination had been brought from Thailand and the *sangha* reformed. Even under British rule, the late nineteenth century extension of the Mahavamsa coincided with the resurgence of Buddhism. The pattern is clear. In the traditional scheme of things, updating the chronicle is more than putting the record straight. It is itself part of the act of reform. Anyone familiar with the gradual

but inexorable return of Buddhism to political life in independent Sri Lanka has to suspect that Jayewardene's interest in extending the Mahavamsa is in some way a return to the traditional scheme.

In reforming the monkhood, the king finds himself in a curious position. He must believe that the monks have fallen into corruption or heresy, but he is himself a layperson and no authority on either proper behaviour for monks or orthodox belief. The king needs an up-right monk to put things right. In practice, the monk designs and guides the reformation, writes a new code of regulations (*can-kavata*) for the reformed life of the monkhood and the king backs him up. The political issue of course is which monk the king chooses to reform the monkhood and why he chooses him. The choice puts a single

monk at the top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, favours the monks who are tied to the reformist monk, and drives off the monks who fall under suspicion. What becomes of the property of monks who are expelled from the order is unclear, but it undoubtedly gave the king material means to make friends. The political potential of reform is not its most salient characteristic, but an inescapable part of the process. The king brings credit on himself by showing respect for the dispensation of the Buddha. But he does so at a price because reform makes enemies as well as friends. The Mahavamsa speaks of some thirteen reformations before the British conquest, usually offering no details about the repercussions of reform.

When a king and monk reform the monkhood, the act of reform and the code of regula-

tions it produces are self-conscious appropriations of Buddhist tradition. Latter-day kings in Sri Lanka and south-east Asia have looked to the Indian emperor Asoka as a paradigm of a righteous king who unifies and reforms the monkhood. When the king and his cleric reform the monkhood, they enjoy the reflected glow of Asoka *kankavatas* themselves have a self-conscious way of following in the tradition, presuming the existence and force of previous *kankavatas* even though the need for reform assumes that those codes are not being followed. So it is with the initiative to update the Mahavamsa. The act puts the leader in a noble tradition. When the eighteenth-century king Kirti Sri Rajasingha resolved to 'fulfil the duties of a king', as the Mahavamsa puts it, he thought of the Mahavamsa and decided to update it.

(To be Continued)

LETTER

Tamil military caste

D. P. Sivaram's claim that Bishop Caldwell's writing served to "demilitarize Tamil society" (Aug. 1) discloses a fixation on Tamil martial prowess and warrior bravery. The fixation is more explicit in Mr. Sivaram's account of the "Tamil military castes" (May 1 - July 1). The account cannot however be taken as an accurate reading of Tamil history. It may be better understood as a charter, providing historiographical legitimacy for the present-day glorification of warrior-heroes who earn fame and honour through gruesome deeds.

Crucial to his argument is the assertion that the pre-British society was dominated by martial values and only subsequently "under active British patronage the vellala caste established its dominance, and its culture became representative and hegemonic in Tamil society" (May, 15, p. 18). Against this view it may be pointed out that centuries before the Bishop launch-

ed his so-called pacification programme, the brahmins and their vellala allies initiated a process of agrarian expansion that not only brought large tracts of land under cultivation but its people under the sway of brahmanical values (B. Stein, 1980, B. Beck, 1979). Kallar and maravar during Cola times progressively converted their lands to peasant agriculture and also adopted vellala titles. This process has been described as "vellalization" or "brahmanization" and gave rise to the Tamil proverb, "Kallar, Marvar and Agambadiyar becoming fat, turn into Vellalar." The caste society as we know it today began to emerge from this process in the tenth century, with its left-hand and right-hand structural divisions.

It would then follow that the dominant values of the Tamil society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are typically caste values that is, "hierarchy"

and "consensus" — in opposition to "conflict", (M. Moffat, *An Untouchable Community in South India*, 1979). In this context the kallar and maravar who continued to inhabit the remaining marginal or peripheral tracts at this time, may be seen to represent a classical ethos that was receding into oblivion.

There is no doubt that the *kallar* and *maravar* remained an irritant to the British Raj, as they had been to the Cola and Pandya overlords. On the other hand because they existed outside the larger caste society, neither a *kallan* nor a *maravan* could during the time become a paradigmatic figure worthy of imitation by the vast majority of the Tamils. In short, Mr. Sivaram has exaggerated their influence on the Tamil Society during that period.

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Ethnopolitics and the erosion of democracy

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An important factor in our political life from as far back as the late nineteenth century has been ethnicity, and it has indubitably been the most important factor in structuring our politics after 1956, so that it makes sense to regard Sri Lankan politics as essentially ethnopolitics. It can be argued, as the writer has done (LG of 15 July 1 August 1991 LG), that Sri Lanka's liberal democracy broke down because of our ethnic problems. The basic argument was that the Sinhalese Buddhists perceived themselves as peculiarly underprivileged in a land in which they were in the majority, a land furthermore which has a special relationship to Buddhism, and that led to the State behaving undemocratically to facilitate the upward mobility of the majority. No one need take umbrage over this argument because it is a commonplace, after all, that democratic politics tend to break down under ethnic pressure. For instance Thomas Sowell writes in his book *The Economics and Politics of Race*, "Racial and ethnic differences have made stable governments difficult to achieve in many countries, and free stable governments all but impossible."

Since ethnicity structures our politics it is reasonable to argue that the ethnic factor can explain both the breakdown of democracy and also the opposition failure to function in Parliament, after 1960, in the manner that is usual among oppositions in properly functioning democracies. Of course a multiplicity of causes can be evoked to explain both those developments. But such explanations are never quite satisfactory. E.H. Carr, in his brilliant book *What is History*, argued that satisfactory explanations always invoke a hierarchy of causes in which primary importance is given to one cause, and that great historians explain his-

torical developments in terms of "a cause of causes."

There could be several explanations of a peculiar feature of the opposition performance in Parliament. We remarked earlier that the opposition parties fail to deal with the concrete, the particular, the individual cases, confining themselves for the most part though not always to generalities. This is astounding because the merest political tyro should know that it is the particular case that can galvanize public opinion. For instance, the opposition alleges that vast numbers, ranging from 40,000 to 100,000, have been brutally done to death as part of a programme to save the Sri Lankan people by killing them. But the one single case of Richard de Zoysa galvanized opinion, both here and abroad, in a way that no statistics could ever have done.

The eccentric opposition passion generalities requires explanation. Some readers might invoke the judgement of that great English poet Blake, "*He who would do good to others must do it in minute particulars; general good is the plea of the hypocrite and the scoundrel.*" Other may use the language of the DUNF columnist we quoted earlier, and say that the opposition Parliamentarians are a lackadaisical lot who are not really bothered about anything except getting privileges. Yet others may resort to fanciful explanations, such as charmed oil on opposition chairs. We agree that most such explanations, excluding the fanciful ones, could make sense and have some sort of relevance, but insist that the satisfactory explanation has to be in terms of a hierarchy of causes, or a cause of causes, in the present case the ethnic factor. The explanation we offer for the grand consuming passion for generalities is that the opposition sees no

point in bothering about Blake's "minute particulars" as long as they do not involve the ethnic factor, because the politics that has really mattered in Sri Lanka is ethnopolitics and little else.

Before providing some details in support of that explanation, we must make a couple of observations. Debates in the State Council in the old days, and in Parliament until after 1960, were famous for their vigour and thrust, with the opposition raking up everything that could conceivably embarrass the Government. It was a democratic no-holds-barred legislature that we had in those days. The opposition strategy of sleeping the sleep of the just came sometime after 1960, that is, after our democratic politics became transformed into ethno-politics.

The second observation is that, as everyone knows, the one issue on which our Governments can be toppled is the ethnic issue. S.W.R.D. and Dudley Senanayake beat hasty retreats from their pacts with Chelvanayagam, and our Governments have had an unconscionable record in renegeing on commitments on the ethnic issue, not really dishonourable perhaps and indeed quite understandable as every single government everywhere in the world will do everything possible to avoid being toppled. In the present ethnic imbroglio neither the Government nor the SLFP are making proposals for a solution. We are working for a consensus, which can only be reached by establishing common ground on the basis of alternative proposals, without either of the major parties daring to make their proposals. It is a bizarre imbroglio. So great is the power of the ethnic issue to topple a government or prejudice the chances of the opposition coming to power. It is not really surprising that the opposition has for so long ignored

so many potentially explosive issues because they do not involve the ethnic factor.

We come now to some details in support of our argument, beginning with the familiar problem of corruption. While the Bofors scandal was raging in 1988, an SLFP member proclaimed that his party had a lorry load of documents to prove corruption in the transport sector, which would be brought out as soon as the SLFP came to power. Evidently it had not occurred to the SLFP that V.P. Singh in India was not awaiting coming to power to make his exposures on the Bofors scandal. On the contrary, he used it to come to power. Sometime ago we had the Chairman of a state bank speaking out on corruption and more recently, just after the Colombo floods, we had an SLFP business man who declared in a letter to the Editor that he had "hard evidence" to prove corruption. The Government itself complained that defalcators practically sank two State banks, the defalcators in question being crony capitalists according to the opposition. Will the opposition get hold of names and details about corruption and bring them up in Parliament availing of Parliamentary privilege, as happens in India, Japan, the U.S. etc? Its virtual silence on corruption since 1977 has been reverberating around the island like a thunderclap. This fits into our paradigm perfectly. The opposition confines itself to generalized charges of corruption, without taking up the concrete, the particular, the individual cases which alone can galvanize the public as shown by the Bofors scandal. The issue of corruption does not involve the ethnic problem, but there seems to be an ethnic dimension to it. It is a safe guess that the major beneficiaries of State and State-condoned corruption have been members of the majority community, though of course the Muslims could have contributed some distinguished gem-smugglers. The question has to be asked whether if the major, or

even a fairly sizeable, proportion of the beneficiaries had been minority members the opposition's thunder clap silence would continue.

We consider next abuse of power in the State sector, over which successive Government have had an appalling record, particularly after the 1977 Government arrogated to itself the Constitutional right to appoint whomever it liked to any post it liked. The present Government boasts incessantly that it has established a meritocracy in which all appointments are made on merit and nothing else. One hears too often that the reality is different from the rhetoric. Some weeks ago PLOTE complained that 35 persons had been recruited to the Wannu Provincial administration despite their having scored low marks in a competitive examination, allegedly because of intervention by a politician.

Let us be fairminded about this. The President cannot be expected to end well-entrenched abuse overnight, and not even in three years. For one thing he cannot control everything that happens in our vast state sector. The more important point is that there have been powerful socio-economic forces operating behind state sector abuse. The most important determinants in state sector appointments, transfers, and promotions, more particularly in the higher positions, have been family, political, and caste affiliations, and not merit. Caste discrimination in state sector appointments was a major determinant in the JVP rebellion. The Government is not going to establish a full merit system all that easily and quickly. Nor will the opposition expose the State sector abuses, apart that is from the familiar generalized charges. The reason, in terms of our ethnic paradigm, is that while members of the majority community have been victims of state sector abuse, they have also been its major beneficiaries. The majority community which constitutes 74% of the population

came to hold 85% of the state sector jobs.

The abuse of power in the Foreign Service sector under the 1977 Government was out of the world. The writer will go into some detail at this point because he is thoroughly well-acquainted with all that happened in that sector, having himself been in the Foreign Service for thirty five years.

Sri Lankan Governments became notorious for appointing thoroughly unsuitable political favourites as Ambassadors with some rare exceptions of course. The appointment of career officers as Ambassadors was disgracefully belated, a sorry record even by Third World standards, probably because there were too many Tamils in the first few batches. They tended to drop out, and the 1970 Government straightaway appointed five career Ambassadors, one Burgher and four Sinhalese. A breakthrough had been effected but it took five years for the next career Ambassador to be appointed, a Sinhalese, and there were no more under that Government. Apparently the explanation is that the next few career men were minority members, it was of course, unthinkable in terms of our argument, that the UNP opposition of the time would raise any questions.

Until 1977 our Governments, more particularly the SLFP, valued professionalism at non Ambassador levels. After 1977 political appointments were made at every level. Two ladies, who did not even have the basic G.C.E. qualifications for recruitment as clerical officers, were sent as First Secretaries to our Embassies in Washington and London where their children were being educated. A young lady, who was sent to Canada for studies, was given a diplomatic appointment and provided a full salary and allowances and accommodation at Government expense. The Canadian Government refused to accord her diplomatic status and privileges. So she was sent to our mission in the UN, where the question of her acceptability

could not arise. A chauffeur was given a diplomatic post in Canada. The Ambassadors chosen were not for the most part famous for their diplomatic skills, but some showed a spirit of enterprise. One ran a lucrative employment agency. Another offered to sell eggs to his diplomatic colleagues. Diplomatic appointments under the 1977 Government had a notably Caligulist character, the reference being to the Roman Emperor Caligula who went quite mad and appointed his horse as a Senator. The comparison may be unfair to Caligula. The horse, after all, is a graceful and noble animal, figuring in the "sport of kings", that is in horse-racing, as well as in other royal pastimes such as hunting and polo. Caligula appointed a horse. He did not appoint buffaloes.

The SLFP did take occasional notice of the misdeeds that were being perpetrated, of which we have given only a very few examples. For instance, on the occasion of the appointment of those First Secretary Ladies, a written question was asked in Parliament. On what basis were they appointed? Reply, on a temporary basis. Case closed. At least on the occasion of one budget debate, Anura Bandaranaike gave an excellent performance in exposing some of the misdeeds. But occasional exposure was surely not enough over the 11-year abuse, which was certainly among the worst in the world. The ethnic paradigm provides the explanation. The writer can attest that the major beneficiaries, not all of them but the major ones, were Sinhalese.

On one occasion, however, vigorous protest was raised not by the opposition but by the Sinhala Bala Mandalaya. The UNP has traditionally preferred non-Buddhists in its elite system, excluding also the Muslims except for a few show-piece politicians. The 1977 Government began by observing the proper ethno-religious mix in its first batch of Ambassador appointments, but after 1979 it displayed an outrageous anti-Buddhist orientation.

It was found that in the majority of the more desirable and important Ambassador posts the occupants were non-Buddhists. It was alleged that in such posts there were only three Buddhists, two of them connected by marriage to very powerful political families, while the third was in Delhi which has always been reserved for Buddhists. In late 1981 the Sinhala Bala Mandalaya raised its voice in outraged, and perfectly understandable, protest and thereafter the Buddhists were quietly given their due place as Ambassadors in the better posts. It showed that any amount of abuse was tolerable in the Foreign Service sector provi-

ded that no group of Sinhalese were at the receiving end.

The writer has no precise or detailed information on what has been happening after 1988, but a recent newspaper report suggested that all is not well. It stated that an officer in our Ottawa mission had returned, but his wife had decamped at an airport on the way back to stay on in Canada. For long years under the last Government no Foreign Service officers were sent to Canada, the posts there being reserved for political favourites who after about a couple of years service resigned and sought immigrant status.

NO — GROWTH SYNDROME

*The Growth they knew was palms unfolding
Tall fronds to the sun
And the sun flaring crown and trunk to reach
The surge beneath,
That was their world.
Music, the steel clatter of leaves
Deep fall of nuts in the plucking
Voices hooing the gather of tree gold nuggets
Not husking noises, Copra smoke and smells,
Through the mornings the wooden ring
Of batons beating husks in the weaving shade
Where wooden mills creak out the fragrant oil,
Creaking carts saunter sweet, heaped thatch
And in the noon dusk beneath fresh cadjan roofs
The After glow with all lure sated.*

*Such the life of the palm glades till the No-Growth Verdict.
With simpleton experts hissing, Devalue,
Cancel food subsidies, close the Co-ops
Make it pay or perish
Who perish? whose work illpaid won
Unsubsidized hard currency to bring
The Coconut Baron and the Fibre King
Their ranch Pajeros and dread hirelings?*

*Inflation filching workers meal and want
To release dollars for each exotic jaunt
Subsidize exports the Experts say
(And Trust the Boys to keep Bolshies at bay)
Recycle Exchange for Free Market Fun
When Markets crash unleash the Fascist scum.*

U. Karunatilake

Bangla Govt in deep trouble

Atiqur Rahman

The no-confidence motion against the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Government of Begum Khaleda Zia on charges of failure to check terrorism and prevent the attack on Workers' Party Secretary General and Parliament member Rashed Khan Menon both shocked the nation and shook the Government.

Following the attack, the entire nation erupted in anger against the Government, against the politics of killing and the virtual break down of law and order. The success of the country-wide hartal on August 20 called by all the Opposition political parties except the Jamaate Islami and the Jatiya Party was proof of disapproval of the Government.

While the Government was busy in crisis management, Mr. Menon's political allies have been vocal in their criticism of fundamentalist outfits. The Opposition parties, led by the Awami League, alleged that the murder of Communist Party of Bangladesh leader Ratan Sen last month and the attempt on Mr. Menon's life were part of a Jamaate Islami and its recently-formed front organ, the Jatiya Jubo Command, plan to physically liquidate the leaders of "pro-liberation" and "leftist" forces. This was said to be the fall-out of a people's court trying the Jamaate Islami, the Jubo Command and their ally, the Freedom Party.

The demand for a ban on these has divided the nation into three camps. All pro-liberation forces, led by the Awami League are opposed to the Jamaate Islami, its front organs and allies. The Government, though it has a large number of MPs who participated in the liberation war, was in a tight corner and did not take sides.

RUMOURS

Mr. Menon was shot at the door of his Topkhana Road office on the evening of August 17 by three assailants armed

with a rifle. They managed to escape through a dark alley. He was operated on at the Combined Military Hospital in the Dhaka cantonment the same evening. He is still now fighting for survival.

The following morning a rumour that Mr. Menon had died at the hospital spread like wildfire. In the capital, Dhaka, and all district headquarter towns people took to the streets and set ablaze hundreds of cars and buses to express their anger. The 12 Opposition political parties at a joint rally the same evening in Dhaka called for a hartal on August 20. The Government managed to restore calm by broadcasting a health bulletin on Radio Bangladesh.

Seven opposition parties in Parliament had earlier moved a no-confidence motion against the Government. The main charges against the Government were failure to check the deterioration in the law and order situation, the killing of Mr. Ratan Sen and illegal toll collection. They also demanded a ban on the Jamaate Islami.

The motion was defeated because the BNP enjoyed a comfortable majority and because 20 Jamaate Islami members abstained from voting. Ironically, Mr. Menon, one of the initiators of the no-confidence motion, in his speech during the discussion on the motion on August 12 in Parliament said that he or any of his colleagues could well be the next targets of assailants.

The Jatiya Jubo Command and the Bharatiya Dalal Protirodh Committee (Committee to resist Indian agents) were two front organs of the Freedom Party while the Jamaate Islami came into being after its leader, Mr. Golamozam, was tried by a people's court on March 26 this year.

CHARGE

However, the Jamaate Islami soon managed to wrest take con-

trol of the two organisations. The Jatiya Jubo Command and the Bharatiya Dalal Protirodh Committee alleged that the ban on the Jamaate had been prompted by India to subjugate the nation through her agents in Bangladesh.

They published a list of 31 persons, including the president of the Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee, Professor Begum Jahanara Imam, and declared openly that they would be liquidated if the Government failed to stop them. The names of Mr. Menon and Mr. Ratan Sen topped the list in Khulna district. Mr. Ratan Sen was killed in broad daylight on July 31, the day the Jubo Command fixed as the last for heading their demand.

The Opposition united over the attempt on the life of Mr. Menon and launched a week-long programme of demonstrations. They were considering intensifying the campaign to press their demands but the Jatiya Party of ousted President General H. M. Ershad remained on the fence though it had joined in condemning the attack.

The Opposition is not satisfied with the arrest of a former Jatiya Party MP and his brother for alleged complicity in the attempt on Mr. Menon's life. These two were from the area where Mr. Menon was elected and they allegedly have connections with the outlawed Sarbahara Party. The 12 Opposition parties at a recent meeting viewed this as an attempt to let the real culprits get away.

The Government was seriously considering the removal of the present Home Minister to satisfy the Opposition. He is now not likely to be dropped. But his portfolio may be changed at a later date so that it would not look as if the Government succumbed to Opposition pressure. None in the cabinet is also willing to take on the responsibility of the Home portfolio because he would have to have a tough time.

Human Rights Re-Examined

Dr. Chandra Muzaffar

The concept of human rights is dominated by the Western-inspired notion of individual liberties. But for the South, social and economic rights are just as important. Moreover the monopoly of global power by a few elite countries also violates the human rights of large parts of humanity. Malaysian social activist and political scientist Chandra Muzaffar, a former political detainee himself, calls for a reconceptualisation of human rights in this lecture he gave to an Amnesty International meeting.

I speak as one of Amnesty's former prisoners of conscience. For 52 days in 1987 I was detained without trial under Malaysia's Internal Security Act (ISA). It was a short period in prison considering that many others have been detained for much longer stretches of time.

There are tens of thousands of such men and women in this planet of ours. Amnesty's newsletters and annual reports faithfully document their triumphs and tragedies.

Amnesty, in its 30 years of struggle, has helped to secure the freedom of thousands and thousands of individuals whose non-violent advocacy of some cause or other had earned them the wrath of those in authority. It is good to know that every day in some corner of the globe an Amnesty letter lights a candle of hope for some forlorn human being behind some prison wall.

Dr Chandra Muzaffar is a well-known Malaysian political scientist and president of the social organisation Aliran.

As a person who cares for human dignity and social justice, I am beginning to wonder whether Amnesty's high profile international role has, unwittingly, created in the public mind a certain image of what human rights is all about, which, in an indirect sense, may have hampered the growth of a more holistic understanding of human dignity and social justice. This needs some explanation.

Because Amnesty is often equated with the world wide human rights struggle, a significant segment of the intelligentsia in both Western and non-Western societies have begun to believe that what Amnesty fights for or fights against is the sum total of the human family's human rights agenda.

In other words, detention without trial, disappearances, torture, extra-judicial executions, capital punishment—this is what human rights is mostly about. Sometimes one may choose to place all these violations within the larger context of the struggle to protect political and civil rights.

In fact, human rights, as the intelligentsia, and the middle and upper classes, as a whole, understand them, is synonymous with political and civil rights. Now and then, certain cultural rights, like the right to speak one's language or practise one's religion, would also be included in their definition of human rights.

It would be wrong, of course, to put the whole blame for this narrow understanding of human rights upon Amnesty. The universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 shows overwhelming concern for political and civil rights and gives meagre attention to economic, social or cultural rights.

Though the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1976, largely through the insistence of Third World countries, seeks to rectify this imbalance, human rights continues to be equated with political and civil rights.

Western governments with their liberal-democratic ideologies have also, via pronouncements, policies and practices, helped create the erroneous belief that human rights is essentially political freedoms and civil liberties. Given their overwhelming economic, technological, cultural and political power at this juncture in history they have succeeded in convincing people everywhere that human rights equals political and civil rights and nothing more.

In the evolution of human rights within European civilisation since the 17th century, the dominant characteristic was the emerging middle-class's quest for political and civil liberties.

Amnesty International, in that respect, is rooted firmly in the European intellectual and political tradition. More than that, its concept of, and approach to, human rights parallels that of most contemporary Western governments. What this means is that Amnesty, like most Western governments, emphasises human rights practices and human rights violations which come within the ambit of political and civil liberties.

Needless to say, this has had some negative consequences for other equally legitimate dimensions of human rights. Economic and social rights have received much less emphasis than they deserve. The human right to food, to clothing, to shelter, to education, to health, to employment is fundamental to the very survival of the human being. For the vast majority of the human race in Asia, Africa and Latin America, it is these rights that matter most.

Of what use is the human rights struggle to the poverty-stricken billions of the South if it does not liberate them from hunger, from homelessness, from ignorance, from disease? Human rights interpreted mainly in terms of political and civil rights will not satisfy the quest of the poor for human dignity and social justice. Life and liberty, food and freedom should go hand in hand if we want to develop a more holistic, integrated vision of human rights.

It is a pity that even in the South there are very few groups operating as human rights organisations which are committed to a comprehensive view of human rights that embraces the different facets of human life. Most of them seek to defend political and civil rights, as they are conventionally understood.

Thus, freedom of expression, freedom of association, the right of dissent, the rule of law, the

independence of the judiciary are among their main, sometimes sole, concerns. It reflects the powerful psychological influence and impact of Western human rights groups upon their counterparts in the South.

If there are groups which do take up issues connected with poverty or illiteracy, they would be seen as development NGOs or alternative movements. Even the groups concerned would perceive themselves as pursuing goals which are not really linked to human rights.

This widely prevalent perception of human rights is inimical to the interests of the people of the South in yet another way. Unlike Western governments which see human rights as rights revolving around the individual, there is in Asia and Africa in particular a strong notion of the rights of the collectivity, the community, the nation.

This has a lot to do with the colonial experience of Asian and African states. Subjected to alien, colonial rule for centuries, fighting for freedom whole generations of Asians and Africans come to mean fighting for the freedom of their people. There is, therefore, a concept of collective freedom and the rights that go with that freedom in the historical baggage of the Asian and African.

This explains why freedom for most post-colonial societies has been more than a litany of personal liberties. It is a collective ideal inextricably intertwined with the quest of whole communities, of entire nations for human dignity and social justice. Today, we are witnessing such a quest for collective freedom in the valiant struggles of the South African and Palestinian people.

It is a matter of some regret that this idea of freedom so important to the South has not been accorded any emphasis in

the West's concept of human rights. Here again, if the inherent rights of communities were given prominence, human rights movements would become more complete and comprehensive in their outlook.

For the South, however, asserting the rights of the collectivity is not just a matter of developing a more complete perspective on human rights. It is a question of survival. In a situation where a handful of powerful nations in the North dominate and control the political, cultural, intellectual, economic, scientific and technological resources of the world for their own benefit, it becomes imperative for the people of the South to insist upon their right of access to justice.

It is seldom realised that this control and dominance by a clique in the North has a direct bearing upon a whole range of human rights in the South.

Economic control, for instance, exercised through bilateral ties, regional economic groupings, international trade pacts and international financial institutions, has in a number of cases forced countries in the South to adjust their economic policies to the interests of the North to such an extent that they have no choice but to neglect the basic needs of their poor.

This is one of the reasons why in various parts of Latin America and Africa, in particular, food production, health care and low-cost housing—needs which are related to fundamental economic and social rights—have been subordinated to export crops, tourism and hotels!

Likewise, the North's suffocating control over the production and dissemination of news and information has, in a sense, curbed and curtailed authentic voices in the South capable of articulating

its joys and sorrows, its hopes and fears.

What is the meaning of freedom of expression, of free flow of information in such a situation? How can we talk of the right to practise and propagate one's culture when the overwhelming power of values and attitudes, tastes and symbols, associated with the North threatens to thwart the growth of indigenous art and literature, dance and music?

Even the right to life—the most fundamental of all human rights—is repudiated by the perpetual danger of death in various parts of the South where proxy wars manipulated by the North have in the last 45 years killed at least 22 million men, women and children.

There is no denying that what has emerged in the course of the decades is an international system in which the poor and powerless who constitute the overwhelming majority of the human race have very little say over their own destiny. A system which virtually disenfranchises the majority cannot be democratic. It cannot claim to protect human rights or human dignity.

The disenfranchisement of the poor and powerless majority is most vividly illustrated in the concentration of effective power in the hands of a few nation-states through the United Nations Security Council.

Some would even argue that with the end of the Cold War and the demise of bipolar politics, it is just one military superpower which controls the Security Council and the UN. The dominance of that superpower over global political processes implies a form of authoritarianism in international relations which has no precedence in history.

While most human rights groups are concerned about authoritarianism at the national level, they

seldom react to the control and dominance of world politics by a clique from the North. And yet authoritarianism at the international level, as we have shown, displays striking similarities to authoritarianism in national politics. At both levels, for instance, there is media manipulation and the abuse of political institutions and legal processes to serve the interests of those at the levers of power.

In both national and international politics, elite control and dominance has resulted in the decline and denial of human rights. One wonders, therefore, why authoritarianism at the international level has escaped censure from conventional human rights groups in both the North and the South.

In the case of certain human rights groups like Amnesty, their mandate may dissuade them from examining the impact of authoritarian trends in international politics upon various types of human rights. There may also be human rights groups which are ideologically disinclined to scrutinise the dominance of the North since they are committed to the preservation of the status quo. Others may be just ignorant of how the present international system oppresses and exploits the overwhelming majority of humanity.

But sooner or later human rights groups in the North as well as the South will have to come to grips with the question of the international system and its impact upon human rights. For the oneness of humanity is becoming a reality in all sorts of ways. The environmental crisis, more than perhaps any other challenge confronting contemporary Man, compels us to seek remedies from a global perspective. There is no national solution to the environmental crisis. We have to think, feel and act universal in the truest sense of the word.

The environmental crisis, it seems to me, is just the first of a series of global crises which

will demand genuinely global remedies. There is increasing realisation now that issues such as AIDS, drugs, migration and refugees require international solutions. It is just a question of time before we concede that the eradication of poverty, disease and illiteracy is not possible unless there are massive efforts at the global level.

By the same token, it is unlikely that we will be able to curb ethnic discrimination or racial violence or check political oppression or authoritarian trends through the instrument of the nation-state—which is sometimes the real culprit. Some sort of global endeavour would be necessary.

Once the importance of such an endeavour is understood, we will have to learn to view the whole of humanity as one single family. This is quite different from seeing human beings as citizens of different states in the international system. This is the approach adopted by human rights groups today.

When we begin to appreciate the real meaning of this idea of 'humanity as a single family' we will find it intolerable that such a huge segment of the same human family does not enjoy basic economic, social, cultural, political and civil rights. We will want to find out what the underlying causes are of this terrible injustice done to our own brothers and sisters, to our own flesh and blood.

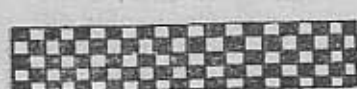
We will seek to change social structures in such a way that a more just and equal world emerges in which each and every humane being exercises her rights and executes her responsibilities in consonance with her inherent human dignity.

That world awaits us. That world beckons to us. It is a world that we will not live to see. But it is a world that we must work to achieve. For it is a duty that we who live in the present owe to those who will inherit the future. — *Third World Network Features.*

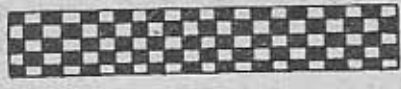
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Price Incentives

Kumudu Kusum Kumara

The establishment of paddy as a cash crop through the Guaranteed Price Scheme (GPS) led to the commercialization of the paddy economy on an unprecedented scale resulting in the expansion of the area of paddy and the share of the marketable proportion of paddy. Notwithstanding the administrative weaknesses, operational rigidity and inefficiencies which deprived large numbers of farmers well-intended benefits of the GPS (Snodgrass, 1966: 160-163; Hameed et al, 1977:26), the GPS undoubtedly induced the growth of the paddy economy. Snodgrass (1966: 160), referring to the period 1950-60, correctly argued that the GPS was 'by far the most important reason for the increase in (paddy) acreage and yield' between 1950 and 1960. This argument is equally applicable for the entire period from 1949 to 1977 during which time the GPS price was higher (except in 1968 and 1974 than the import price of paddy. During this period, in the absence of the ability of the peasants to compete with the lower world market prices, the local paddy production would not have improved if not for the price support provided by the GPS. The GPS, with an element of subsidy, especially when it was maintained above the market price, has undoubtedly supported the paddy producers and this has been an incentive to paddy production in the country by stabilising paddy price. The subsidy was approximately 50 percent over world market price until 1967. The GPS for paddy (and certain other subsidiary food crop operating at times) resulted in the progressive increase of price of paddy under all policy regimes from 7 rupees per bushel in 1948 to 80 rupees in 1988. The GPS which acted as a ceiling price slightly above

the market price from 1948 to 1966, thus inducing the paddy producers to sell their produce to the State at the GPS price, has since 1966 operated as a floor price usually below the market price, protecting producers from being subjected to extremely low prices for their products.

Growth Under Different Policy Regimes

However, despite the commonalities in the commitment of the government under different regimes to promote domestic agriculture, compared to the other regimes, a much higher rate of paddy has been observed during the 1965-70 and post-1977 Market Oriented regimes of the UNP (Thorbecke and Svejnar, 1987; World Bank, 1987). The growth of the paddy sector in the post colonial period arises mainly from two factors area growth and yield growth. The higher growth rate during the latter two regimes are very clearly due to yield growth rather than the area growth which was the dynamism behind the growth in the other periods. The higher yield growth during the above two regimes is due to a number of factors, a combination of external circumstances as well as conscious policy decisions. The introduction of two generations of improved seed varieties, one in the 1950's and the other in the 1960's, given the required time lag for their spread taken into account, coincided with the turnaround of accelerated growth in late 60's, and late 70's and early 80's respectively (Gunaratne and Karunasena, 1988: 10). High levels of fertilizer application which are necessary for the use of HYVs were facilitated during the two periods, by relatively favourable international prices compared to the experience of the other regimes as well as by

much enhanced foreign aid for fertilizer purchases. Favourable weather conditions was another factor which contributed to the yield growth in these two periods, over the others which suffered from unfavourable weather conditions (Gunaratna and Karunasena, *ibid*)

A more conscious policy decision, as opposed to the influence of the above external factors contributing to the growth in the paddy sector, is changes made in the subsidised rice ration under both the governments. It is interesting to note that, the support price of paddy under the GPS was determined by the amount of paddy the government needed to procure locally to be distributed under the ration scheme operated by the government, rather than the growth of the paddy economy. The rice thus needed was procured through the GPS, given the country's foreign reserves which would determine the amount of rice which could be imported at the prevailing world market price. Under the subsidy scheme, successive governments since 1959 up to 1973 distributed to the entire electorate, and since 1973 to all the non-income taxpayers, a free ration of rice from 1959 to 1970 (in combination with subsidized wheat ration during 1973-74); since 1970, it became a combination of free and subsidized ration. Under the ration scheme, 4 pounds of rice per person per week was distributed initially with reduction of the ration to 3 and 2 pounds in between. Thus the ration scheme acted as a constraint on the growth of paddy agriculture by limiting the market demand for rice. In 1978, the ration scheme was confined to households earning less than Rs. 300 per month,

(Continued on page 24)

A new education order

Fr. Mervyn Fernando, Subodhi Institute of Integral Education, Piliyandala, 1991

This publication commences by emphasizing the need for well thought out reforms in our system of education and proceeds to propose in outline a new educational system. The author also maintains that much of the educational reforms in the past few decades have been unsatisfactory and that rapid socio-cultural changes leading to a new social order and also the impact of science and technology have made corresponding changes in the educational system imperative.

The philosophical basis that should form the guideline in effecting reforms is discussed next. 'To awaken the child to the full reality of himself and his world in a relatively conscious way, to liberate him from inner enslavement and external domination to actualise his potential and talents for constructive, creative work and to enable him to enter into a network of freely chosen relationships which will constitute his world' is accepted as the ultimate goal of education. The author laments, not without reason to some extent, that our present school system is not conducive to the realization of this goal for it is 'tailor-made for packaged knowledge, uncritical conformity, enforced discipline, mechanical and memory learning and patterned behaviour'. This is another reason why drastic reforms are urgently needed — reforms which do not constitute just 'adjusting and refurbishing the present system, but changing perspectives, vision and mentality.

Next, the author gives a brief survey of educational developments in the country during the post-independence period and refers to many noteworthy achievements

in this sphere such as the wide diffusion of educational facilities to all strata of the society and the high literacy rate. This is followed by an innumeration of a number of deficiencies of the present system of education and a list of basic postulates which are considered essential in a 'comprehensive, national system of integral education.' The deficiencies mentioned are prevalent in various degrees, but at least some of them are common to many countries and it is difficult to eliminate them completely. The wide disparity of the quality of education and of educational facilities between urban and rural areas is one such deficiency. However, those such as the use of teaching profession by the government as an avenue of employment for unemployed persons could be eradicated if a genuine effort is made.

After the preliminary discussions which include the above and two other sections, one 'Education and Society' and the other 'Objectives of Education', the author goes on to describe the type of educational system that he recommends. In the chapter titled 'Formal Education' he presents his proposals for primary and secondary education. He also emphasises the importance of pre-school education. Teachers and teacher training, curriculum, syllabus, time-table, examinations, tertiary education, technical and vocational education and administration of education are discussed in subsequent chapters. Thus a comprehensive plan for an efficient system of education is presented and many valuable suggestions to improve our present system are brought to our notice. To mention a few of these, the author describes the importance

of the school having a close connection with the child's home and parents, the value of having good counselling and vocational guidance services in the school, the desirability of public institutions like the museums, the zoos, and the Archaeological Department playing a more active role in education and the duties of the mass media in relation to education. Thus this publication constitutes a very valuable contribution especially at a time when reforms in our educational system are under consideration. However, it should not be forgotten here that a certain effort has been already made almost continuously for some time to implement at least some of the proposals put forward by the present author, though the progress achieved may not be to our satisfaction. The author also makes a very valuable and relevant observation that educational reforms should be introduced 'in consultation with people' and the accepted system should not 'be tampered with by the Party/Minister in power' except on the recommendations of a knowledgeable and responsible body such as a National Commission on Education.' This should maintain the stability of educational policy and practice

Many of the proposals made by Fr. Mervyn Fernando show that he has made a serious study of our educational problems and his contribution amply deserves the attention of the Presidential Commission now inquiring into our system of education.

Dr. D. D. De Saram

Exploring Group Identities

Harsh Sethi

To take a set of essays written at different periods, slightly revise them, update and add connecting paras, and string them into a coherent book is a formidable task. And to successfully do this with issues of ethnicity and nationalism, where formulations and prognosis get out-dated daily, does demonstrate a keen mind. Not that any less was expected of Paul Brass whose writings on Indian politics, particularly on UP, are more than well regarded.

Best known for his earlier work, *Language, Religion And Politics In North India*, this latest offering too is likely to find favour, not just with students of political sociology but also with the interested reader keen to make sense of the virtual explosion of primordiality all around.

Though the decade of the '80s with Assam, Punjab, Kashmir assuming serious proportions, competition between the votaries of Hindu nationalism and Muslim Indians reached points of explosion leading to serious tension and riots in dozens of locations. With mounting apprehension that competitive radicalism would don the mantle of social justice via higher dosages of caste-based reservations — most commentators are now convinced that the project of consolidating the Indian nation state has been seriously derailed.

And regular spots of, *Mera Bharat Mahan* notwithstanding, many now even wonder whether the British were not quite correct — that in the absence of an authoritarian state, we are likely to fall apart. Just recollect the recent lamentations of the Indian communists on the break-up of the Soviet empire.

To his merit, Paul Brass would argue to the contrary. The nine

chapters divided over three sections explore both the theoretical literature as also comparative experiences across space and time to make a case that ethnicity and nationalism are not 'givens' but social and political constructions, modern phenomena inseparably connected with the activities of the modern centralising state.

Differentiating himself from both those who seek the root of identities in a hoary and misty past and others who view individuals as a clean slate on whom new preoccupations can be written, Brass argues that the conversion of cultural differences into bases for political differentiation amongst people arises only during special circumstances.

Central to this is a theory of elite competition as a basic dynamic accompanied by the differential impacts of specific state policies not just on language and culture but equally on resources and opportunity distribution.

He thus puts the focus squarely on the process by which problems are articulated and handled rather than on initial conditions. As such it is political management that comes to the fore. The chapter on 'Elite Groups, Symbol Manipulation and Ethnic Identity among the Muslims of South Asia presents a powerful critique of the 'primordialists' — be they the followers of Jinnah or Savarkar.

Equally steering away from the 'instrumentalists' who only see culture as part of a bargaining process, Brass, by examining the conflicts around the 'sacred cow', Muslim Personal Law, and Urdu, demonstrates that each became an issue at different times and only for a time, depending upon

the confluence of the actors and the social environment.

As such there was nothing irreducibly antagonistic to what were presented as different communities requiring their own states. One only wishes that the current votaries of Hindu nationalism realise that on the Indian sub-continent there exist a multiplicity of Muslim ethnic groups, communities and potential nationalities, congruent in both religion and language, but nowhere defined by descent.

The chapters on Punjab form part of Brass's thesis on Indian federalism. As against those who argue that the dominant tendency in the Indian polity, is towards centralisation, Brass through a detailed analysis of institutions (Planning Commission, Finance Commission) and policy areas would argue that the underlying patterns are towards pluralism, regionalism and decentralisation.

Many of the problems that we confront today have arisen precisely because, particularly from Mrs Gandhi onwards, the attempt has been towards centralising political authority. As against strong states and a stable centre, the continuous attempt to weaken the state regimes has paradoxically led to a weak centre.

Punjab, thus, for Paul Brass was not, to begin with, a Hindu-Sikh communal problem, maybe still is not so, but remains primarily a consequence of ill-advised and self-centred politics which has slowly consumed the healthier possibilities. One only wishes that Brass had made some use of the writings on memory, hate, and violence which can, over time, acquire an autonomy that politicosociological corrections cannot manage.

The final section, thorough a comparative analysis of the Soviet/East European and Indian experiences, attempts to refute the proposition that multi-ethnic states and societies carry within them the inevitability of balkanisation. As earlier, the emphasis is on state policies and their consequences for patterns of elite competition within and between elite groups.

Here the imposition during colonial times, of the process of identifying, counting, classifying and defining the boundaries of groups, and the later belief amongst national elites that the only viable state form is the one of European nation-state has wreaked havoc.

The logical culmination of such a 'pluralist' view is that either each nationality requires its own state or that the model should be one of 'consociationalism' — a system of communal group representation on the lines of what de Klerk is proposing for South Africa. Not only does such a view reify ethnicity, it puts paid to any possibility of intra-ethnic equality.

Brass serves a useful purpose in restoring the primacy of 'agency' and 'political process' when dealing with issues like ethnicity and nationalism. One does however wish that he had taken greater account of the recent works of Gyan Pandey, Sandria Freitag and Veena Das, or drawn upon more literary sources to obtain a richer idea of the nature of cultural capital that different actors can and do draw upon.

Possibly then the bias towards political management, though of greater interest to policy makers, could have been corrected. Nevertheless, this book is likely to enrich the ongoing debate in this country. Maybe, even the politicians will read and learn from it.

Price . . .

(Continued from page 21)

to be replaced by a food-stamp scheme in 1979, for the same target group (Thorbecke and Svejnar, 1987). Later with the inflation, Rs. 300 limit was raised to Rs. 700.

Notwithstanding the GPS procurement, about 35 to 40 million bushels, an amount equal to 80 to 100 percent of the total paddy output had to be imported annually between 1960 and 1966. In this context, with the cost of supporting the scheme on the increase, the government since 1967 have reduced the ration in various degrees. Reducing the rice ration in 1967 under the 1965-70 United National Party (UNP) regime by half with the consequent reduction in import and GPS procurement led to an immediate increase in the demand for rice in the open market and increase in the market price of paddy to a level significantly higher than the GPS price for the first time since the inception of the scheme, encouraging local paddy production. The GPS procurement as a percentage of production which rose to 64 in 1965 has been reduced to 4 percent in 1982; the share of paddy imports as a percentage of production which rose to 109 in 1965 has been reduced to 11 in 1982. Liberalisation of internal trade of rice and allowing the market price of rice to remain much higher than the GPS in the post-1977 period combined with the dismantling of the rice ration has led to unprecedented demand for rice in the open market and expansion of the grain trade by private merchants altering the character of the rice market beyond recognition thus encouraging local paddy production (Thorbecke and Svejnar, 1987: 54; Gunasinghe, 1986: 42). In the context of the state policies agricultural production in the peasant economy has made significant advances in the post-colonial period as we discuss below.

Thus on both occasions, food imports were considerably reduced, and market demand for

rice increased, more in the post-1977 period with the added impact of complete liberalization of the rice trade, and the internal and the exchange trade as a whole (Thorbecke and Svejnar, 1987). The decision of the UNP regimes, first to reduce and then to abolish the subsidised rice ration, is in keeping in line with the advice of agencies such as the World Bank at least partly under whose influence the UNP regimes placed emphasis on import substitution and export oriented agricultural development, as opposed to the development policies of the SLFP regimes which laid emphasis on state-led import substitution industrialisation.

Next: State's Role

J. R.

(Continued from page 8)

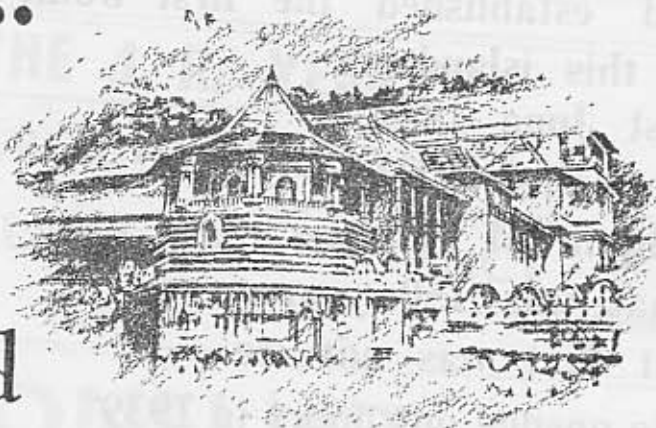
monarch. He was always conscious that the people placed him in office expecting him to reciprocate with good works.

Misfortune however visited him in the second half of his second term of office. He could have avoided it but he misjudged completely the goals of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). At first, he was absolutely right in his concept of the DDCS. This is just what "the Jaffna man wants" he remarked. He meant that the institutions afforded an opportunity for the economic development of the Tamil areas. He told a good friend that once Amirthalingam and his friend got involved in the DDC exercise, they would become part of the power game (whatever that meant). But he failed to convert this objective into reality, in large measure, because he was not, as it was said of Gladstone in his last term as prime minister "an old man in a hurry"; instead Mr Jayewardene bided his time till events overtook him. His sense of timing, therefore, especially on some urgent matters of state left much to be desired. "Let it simmer" was a much used phrase in his vocabulary.

Next: The Presidency: 2 Phases

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Bank of Ceylon

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