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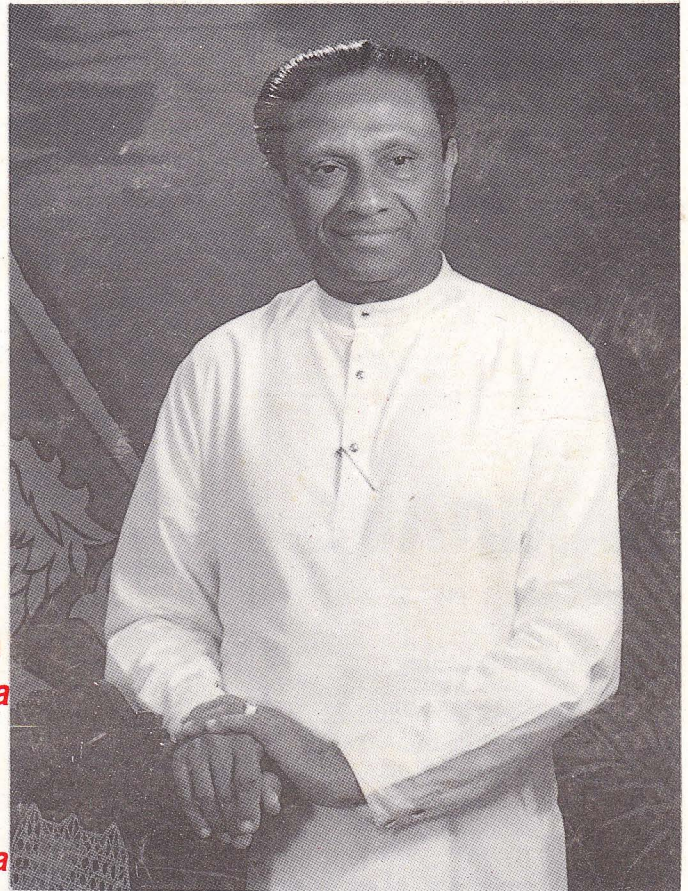
MAY DAY!

MAY DAY!

MAY DAY!

PREMADASA: The debate goes on
— *Mervyn de Silva*

SOUTH POLLS: A closer look
— *Dayalal Abeysekera*



JANE AUSTEN, REGI SIRIWARDENA AND I

— *H.L.D. Mahindapala*

CHANKA AND ZHIRINOVSKY: FACISTS AND RACISTS?

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TRENDS

No more, says Dep. Speaker

Deputy Speaker Gamini Fonseka told the *Sunday Island* that he had not campaigned at the Southern Provincial Council elections because it was no more possible to ask the people of Matara to vote for UNP when a party disciplinary inquiry was pending against him and when the government had not started development projects suggested by him.

"I did whatever I could with the assistance of private sector organisations but I still feel that the work done was not sufficient and therefore it was not possible for me to ask the people to vote for us once again. Do not forget that Matara was the home of Southern terrorism" Mr. Fonseka said.

Family will attend

The Premadasa family will attend the unveiling of the assassinated President's statue on May 1, the first anniversary of his death. The statue is to be unveiled at a site near Mr Premadasa's Colombo Central home.

Earlier the family had accused the government of down-grading the late President's role in recent history.

BRIEFLY...

'Baby Tigers' prowl in City

The LTTE has infiltrated its 'Baby Brigade' to gather information on targets in Colombo, the arrest of a 14-year old has revealed.

The boy had arrived in the city two months ago from Neerveli, Jaffna and had been living with a family in

Modera, Colombo North. The family had registered his presence with the police as required by Emergency regulations. The family has also been arrested.

15,000 projects accelerated

President Wijetunga has imposed a December deadline for the completion of the '15,000 projects scheme' to provide employment. "More than eight million people will benefit under this scheme", Janasaviya Minister Weerasinghe Mallimatchi told the *Daily News*.

The Presidential election will be held in December.

More Jap aid for TV

Information Minister Tyrone Fernando met Japan's Broadcasting Minister Takenori Kanzaki in mid-April to discuss financial assistance for a proposed new "educational" channel for Rupavahini. Japan has been funding Rupavahini from its inception in 1982.

Nerve gas in Colombo

Container loads of poisonous chemicals for the manufacture of nerve gas have been shipped through Colombo. Destination: Israel; purpose: military, investigations have revealed. Colombo has been used as a transshipment point. Israeli ships collecting the chemicals have been detained.

Four containers contained a total of 72 tons. One microgram of nerve gas can kill a man, while 10 micrograms could wipe out a village, a report said.

Bribery official sues government

Assistant Bribery Commissioner Vijaya Hettiarachchi has filed a petition in the Supreme Court alleging

that he was denied promotion to the post of Deputy Bribery Commissioner, in violation of his fundamental rights, following his investigation of the assets of a high official. He said that a high ranking member of the government had instructed the Bribery Commissioner to close the file.

Paddy production up

According to government statistics quoted by the government news agency Lankapuvath 1993 yielded the highest paddy production in ten years — an estimated 2,567,000 metric tons. The highest on record is 2,661,000 mts in 1985.

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PREMADASAISM: THE GREAT DEBATE

Mervyn de Silva

Thanks to the Liberal party leader, Dr. Chanaka Amaratunge and the state-run *SUNDAY OBSERVER*, the last issue of the *LANKA GUARDIAN* made waves. One of the main reasons for the UNP's defeat was the virtual blackout on Premadasa and his pet projects such as JANASAVIYA, the Liberal party leader argued. Though JANASAVIYA had won official recognition from SAARC and tributes from leaders like Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, Premadasa's sustained effort to cushion the poorest of the poor from the severe hardships of the IMF's "structural adjustment" had been ignored by the government's campaign leaders.

As for the election results, one fact stood out. The only parliamentary constituency won by the UNP in the South was Balapitiya, the late President Premadasa's ancestral home.

Wijetunga loyalists have reacted with anger to sections of the Lake House press carrying articles and photographs ridiculing the President. They cite in particular the op-ed page article in the *'Sunday Observer'* of April 10 by Liberal leader Chanaka Amaratunga which had severely pilloried the President's conduct at the Southern elections. Dr. Amaratunga who was one of the chief speakers at UNP meetings in the South had in this article originally written to the *'Lanka Guardian'* criticised the President's stand on the Eelam issue and said that his slogan about not giving Eelam in this 'kapa' (epoch) had created merri-ment even among UNPers. The title of the article: Premadasaism Betrayed. Under these circumstances some heads might roll at Lake House, sources say.

(Sunday Island)

Far from exploiting Premadasa's popularity with the disadvantaged groups, and focussing on his 'village re-awakening' and 'poverty alleviation' schemes, the UNP appeared to have closed the book on Premadasa populism. It was precisely this apparently deliberate "blackout" which earned Dr. Chanaka Amaratunge's regular column to the *LG*, the cover-page title **PREMADASAISM BETRAYED**. (SEE BOX items).

While the UNP Working Committee which meets on May 3 will take up these issues, the news that Mrs. Hema Premadasa and her son Sajith had been invited by the President for a friendly chit-chat, was promptly followed by a report that both mother and son would be on the party list when the Parliamentary polls are held.

Personalities apart, the news that free mid-day meal and school uniforms program of President Premadasa will be continued is a further sign that the ruling party needs "Premadasaism" in the absence of Premadasa. In fact, a cynic would say that it suits Sri Kotha perfectly.

It is in this that last week's headline-making encounter took place:

"The President had wanted them to come to Kandy but they politely declined. Subsequently Mrs. Premadasa and Sajith were asked to come to the Presidential Secretariat. The meeting was very cordial. The President was very sympathetic and said he was very sorry if there was any misunderstanding. President Wijetunge inquired about matters relating to the family during the meeting which lasted about two hours..."

DUNF FACTOR

The names of ex-Minister and former DUNF leader Mr. Gamini Dissanayake and the DUNF Vice-President Dr. Sarath Amunugama figured prominently in the press, particularly this last week. "K.G.B."

was the rather unsophisticated, instant response from the so-called "political analysts". President D.B. did visit the South and address election meetings in their company. Nobody doubts that their presence in the government — in the Cabinet, of course, in Mr. Dissanayake's case — would please the President. But there's a catch. In President JR's government, Messrs Dissanayake and Athulathmudali ranked just below Prime Minister

Westernised Elite

We live in the shadow of the IMF-World Bank, the main instruments of western dominance, particularly in a post-Cold War world where western ideas and ideology (democracy, market economics etc) have asserted a new supremacy. Though it was founded by the most Anglicised politician of the post-independence era, Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike, the Sri Lanka Freedom party became the mouthpiece of a resurgent Sinhala-Buddhist movement. S.W.R.D.'s winning slogan was "Sinhala Only" and a "rightful place" for Buddhism.

Just after the P.A.'s splendid victory in the South, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, the campaign leader, addressed a well-attended meeting at the Hilton Hotel. In his letter of resignation, Vice Chancellor G.L. Pieris wrote:

"In these circumstances I have considered in earnest the invitation extended to me by the Hon. Sirimavo Bandaranaike and by Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga to join the SLFP and to take an active part in the political life of our country..."

The role played by the government-owned Lake House newspaper group in the changing political situation has raised some eye brows. The Group has consistently propagated and safeguarded the interests of the Executive President under the regimes of J.R. Jayewardene, and Ranasinghe Premadasa. But the *Sunday Observer* of April 10, published an article written by Liberal Party Leader Chanaka Amaratunga calling for a change in the leadership.

The article by Dr. Amaratunga which was originally published in the April issue of the *Lanka Guardian* edited by former Editor of the *Ceylon Daily News*, Mervyn de Silva and headlined "A turn in the South" said:

"As the UNP General Secretary, Minister Sirisena Cooray has said in response to the results, the UNP has retained a substantial base vote at almost 44 per cent. It is by no means impossible for it to recover before the Presidential and Parliamentary elections. But for it to do so, it must re-establish the winning coalition of voters and parties which President Premadasa had so successfully established. The UNP must win back the minorities and demonstrate that while it is the party of the market economy and enterprise, it is also the party of generosity by restoring the welfare and development priorities of the Premadasa.

Welfare policies

It must demonstrate that it, and a coalition of leftists, opportunists and feudalists, will give the lead to an agenda of liberal democratic reform.

This can only be done by a radical change both of priorities and of leadership. Only if this is done can the verdict of the South on March 24, be prevented from extending itself to the whole country.

(*Sunday Times*)

Premadasa. The impeachment motion, its failure and the dismissal of the 'plotters', saw three ministers Gamini, Lalith and Premachandra form the Democratic United National Front, an open challenge to the UNP's legitimacy. What's more the DUNF did remarkably well at the first PC polls — one million votes.

The LTTE intervened on May Day, soon after Lalith was assassinated while addressing a polls rally. With these two formidable personalities out of the 'big picture', the national political scene has changed radically. Mr. Gamini Dissanayake quit the DUNF in the first necessary move to return to the UNP and the Cabinet. Dr. Amunugama, a DUNF V.P, followed suit. Since then, they have been kept waiting — a long, frustrating wait which best illustrates the balance of forces within the United National Party. **Question** : How united is the United National Party?

There was a time when both major parties were tempted to court the Sinhala majority at the expense of minority ("block") votes. This was certainly so when Messrs L.H. Mettananda, N.Q. Dias etc and organisations like the B.J.P. were powerful lobbies. No more.

ELECTORAL EQUATION

In winning the 1977 parliamentary poll with 52% of the vote, J.R. Jayawardene worked out an equation that his deputy R. Premadasa respected — the conservative UNP's irreducible Sinhala share plus the plantation (Indian) Tamils plus the Muslims plus a fair percentage of the Tamils, (outside the north?). As a "minority" man (caste-wise) Premadasa adopted the same arithmetical approach but added another "minority". As a non-goigama, he appealed to the other disadvantaged groups to support a party that could entrust its top post to him. President D.B. is a Kandyan Goigama Buddhist. Instinctively, his approach is quite different from Premadasa's. For him, the poverty-stricken Kandyan villager is the most neglected. It is the poor, landless Kandyan that deserves special attention.

This instinctive concern runs against the island's electoral arithmetic. The Southern province polls represented the shock of recognition. Since then, it has been "structural adjustment" — item No. 1 on the domestic agenda. He was now won

over Mr. Thondaman... for now. What of the S.L.M.C. and Mr. Ashraff? The Tamils have moved too close to the Peoples Alliance for any real hope on the Tamil front.

But the P.A. also faces serious difficulties internally Who will be the candidate?

Of all the 'little journals' in Sinhala, RAVAYA was pioneer. It is no member of the hurrah-hurrah squad. It has its own independent position within the broad anti-UNP front. Last week's intervention made the news. RAVAYA made two points in presenting its case for Chandrika Kumaratunge as the stronger Peoples Alliance candidate:

(1) Mrs. B. is too feeble to present a spirited challenge to the UNP.

(2) While Chandrika has the confidence of the minorities, Mrs. B. lacks credibility in a constituency (the minorities) which is vital for a final victory.

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South Results : Another Look

Dayalal Abeysekera

Have the mavericks of southern Sri Lanka, the somewhat infamous 'DAKUNE MINISSU' delivered a severe indictment on the ruling party? If coupled with the predictive expectations voiced by the Secretary-General of the UNP, the actual haul of 23 seats is a notable come-down from the prognosticated 35. But then, electioneering is as much social engineering as it is rhetoric or brazen bravado.

Perhaps, a more severe blow to the ruling party is the fact that they could not carry more than a single electorate (Balapitiya) out of the totality of 21 electoral divisions in the Southern Province. Even Galle which had a record of carrying the UNP in 9 out of all the 10 polls since the Parliamentary Elections of March 1960 (the majority of the voters not supporting the party during the Referendum of 1982) was grabbed by the Peoples Alliance (PA). This amounts to an outright loss of 12 electorates from the 1993 Provincial Council Poll held 10 months ago.

However, the actual loss of SPC seats by the UNP between the polls of 1993 and 1994 is just two (a reduction of one seat each from Matara and Hambantota districts), from an earlier 25 to the present 23. The very mildness of this reduction which by no means could be described as a 'debacle' prompts one to wonder if this is yet another miracle engineered by the system of proportional representation vis-a-vis the 'first past the post' system of an earlier era.

A comparative study of results of the polls of '93 and '94 at the district level within the Southern Province in Table 1 reveals several interesting patterns. (Table 1 presents the results of the three main parties of UNP, PA and DUNF. The votes polled by the other minor parties have been deliberately left out in order to draw out the dominant trends. The most noticeable change is the quantum leap of the PA's gain in votes from 382,726 to 548,589, a 43.3 percent increase, the highest relative gain being in Hambantota (83.0 percent). However, one notices that 116,791 votes were polled by the DUNF in May '93 but both the UNP as well as the PA were on a head hunt for this 'abandoned' vote bank. With Mr. Gamini Dissanayake joining the UNP, the latter no doubt believed that their claim would override the claims of the PA as this being

an anti-UNP vote, the counter-claim being that this was, perhaps an anti-Premadasa vote which would not be applicable to the Premadasa-less UNP. What both parties did not, perhaps, bargain for was that this would end up more as a winner-take-all tug-of-war over which the PA prevailed.

Once the DUNF vote is coupled with the PA vote of '93, the gain of the PA in '94 is a more modest 49,072 votes. These were extracted from the higher turnout witnessed in the recently concluded poll. Within the confines of the three main parties in the two polls, this amounted to 52,774 new valid votes being cast at the second poll. This, in effect shows that the UNP actually gained 3,702 votes at the last election. In fact, it gained 9,526 votes in Galle and 2,208 in Matara but fared badly at Hambantota losing 8,032 votes due mainly to their loss of over 8,000 votes in Tissamaharama.

A few observations about the relatively higher voter turnout is not out of order here. Since the unprecedented low voter turnout at the last two nationally held elections of 1988 and 1989 due to the twin insurrections, the 1991 local authority poll and the 1993 Provincial Council poll saw the 17 districts (outside the Northeast) poll rise to 72.9 and 74.0 percent. During these two polls the districts of Galle, Matara and Hambantota polled 73.8, 68.7 and 69.5 percent respectively in 1991 and 73.6, 69.9 and 69.2 respectively in 1993. In other words, the southern districts usually have polled noticeably below the national average along with Colombo District which usually polls the lowest. This is not an accident but is precipitated by the presence of a high proportion of migrants, in-migrants in the case of Colombo and out-migrants in the case of the southern districts.

The interesting question now is why did Galle, Matara and Hambantota poll at the noticeably higher levels of 75.6, 72.8 and 72.7 percent, respectively at this isolated election for the Southern Provincial Council? It will be pertinent to refer the reader to a paper by this writer (co-authored with Dr. Indralal de Silva) appearing in the LG of 15/10/93 where it was shown that the growth of voters in Sri Lanka is much higher than that of the growth of population and that this is possible primarily because of a non-vigilant voter registration system that tolerates a high degree of dual/multiple registration. In fact, our estimates reveal that the number of voters registered

in the Southern Province at the '93 poll (which was used for the '94 poll as well) is over 110 percent of the estimated population 18 years and over. In other words, almost 150,000 out of the 1.439 million registered voters in the Southern Province are carrying dual/multiple registrations.

The most culpable in this regard are the migrants. This is not necessarily done with the intent of cheating at an election but resorted to, more as a safety precaution in order not to lose privileges arising from ones residential location that may arise from time to time in a society experiencing a high degree of flux. It is most likely that a large proportion of south originating migrants, the majority of whom work and reside in Colombo, enticed by a half day of duty leave and the possibility of spending the weekend at 'home' while catching part of the action were responsible for the larger voter turnout. The very large crowds witnessed at the Pettah bus stand on the eve of the elections making their way to the south partially corroborate the likelihood of such a turn of event.

If we leave the immediacy of the statistical results and wander into the wilderness of speculative exploration of "voter mentality" in the recent past it might be a useful exercise for the reader since there is the prospect of a Presidential and a Parliamentary election within the next 12 months.

In this exercise, a basic premise is that irrespective of the rationale and the consequences, the voter is always right (the corollary drawn from day-to-day economic activity being 'the customer is king') since the bedrock of democracy is predicated on the expression of the voter's will. Statistically, the most vehement statement of 'protest' from the south came with the total swing of the DUNF vote into the PA's camp. Although individual crossover are quite commonplace within the electoral landscape of independent Sri Lanka, these have not assumed high political currency in the melee of national level party politics. This is perhaps the first time that a political party that stood for certain ideals in '93 and registered a meteoric rise flip-flopped through its current leadership and the people declared that they were rejecting the flip-flop and thus exercised its will, disregarding the appeal of the leadership. It is true that the efficacy of the campaigning headed by Ms. Chandrika Kumaranatunge and the appearance of Ms. Srimani Atulathmudali may have swayed the DUNFers but the fact that the virulence of the swing was not envisaged

The writer is the Asst. Resident Representative of FORUT the Swedish NGO in Colombo.

Table 1 Comparative Electoral Performance of the three main political parties in the Southern Province at the polls held in 1993 & 1994

District/Province	1993				1994				Additional voters who polled in '94	No. of votes gained/lost by	
	UNP	PA	DUNF	TOTAL	UNP	PA	TOTAL	UNP		PA	
Galle	No. 190,478 % 45.5	189,114 45.2	39,036 9.3	418,628 100.0	200,004 45.6	238,770 54.4	438,774 100.0	20,146 38.2	9,526	49,656	
Percent point change between '93 - '94	-	-	-	-	+0.1	+9.2	-	-	-	-	
Matara	No. 145,093 % 45.4	129,693 40.6	44,873 14.0	319,659 100.0	147,301 43.3	192,853 56.7	340,154 100.0	20,495 38.8	2,208	63,160	
Percent point change between '93 - '94	-	-	-	-	-2.1	+16.1	-	-	-	-	
Hambantota	No. 102,841 % 51.5	63,919 32.0	32,882 16.5	199,642 100.0	94,809 44.8	116,966 55.2	211,775 100.0	12,133 23.0	8,032	53,047	
Percent point change between '93 - '94	-	-	-	-	-6.7	+23.2	-	-	-	-	
Southern province	No. 438,412 % 46.7	382,726 40.8	116,791 12.5	937,929 100.0	442,114 44.6	548,589 55.4	990,703 100.0	52,774 100.0	3,702	165,863	
Percent point change between '93 - '94	-	-	-	-	-2.1	+14.6	-	-	-	-	

even by the most ardent campaigner of the PA is ample testimony to the decisiveness of the exercise of the southern DUNF voters' political will.

From the UNP's perspective, the DUNFers were born out of anti-Premadasaism. But it was common knowledge that they were created by extracting from both the UNP and the PA at the '93 poll. In fact, Prakshepana in the LG of 01/06/93 analyzing the comparative erosion of the support bases of the two main parties and their drift to the DUNF at the '93 poll states that "in ten out of the 17 districts, the percentage loss of PA votes to the DUNF was higher than that of the UNP". From the Southern Province, both Matara and Hambantota were in this category. Thus, the UNP should not have expected much of a gain from the non-appearance of the DUNF at the hustings since a larger portion of DUNFers were originally PA supporters during the pre-93 era. Furthermore, even after the demise of President Premadasa, the UNP never attempted to woo the DUNFers; on the contrary, they were meted out the 'leper' treatment. Once again, it appears that the UNP was banking only on power play at the helm (rather than diligent work at the grassroots) to deliver a portion of the DUNFers to its fold.

While the UNP retained its voter base on the whole, Tissamaharama was very decisive in denying over 8,000, i.e., more than one fifth of its votes to the UNP. When the more urbane Galle and Matara are marginally willing to be appeased by the policies of a post-Premadasa UNP, the rural peasantry of the dry zone are disillusioned by the void left by the late President; the mass disenchantment created by the absence of a champion for their cause compels them to view the revamped PA, still in some degree of disarray, as a viable alternative to the UNP.

Without trying to eulogize the late Presi-

dent Premadasa, it would be readily granted that his was attempt to perform a very strenuous tightrope walk, balancing between the promotion of the open economy on the one hand and empowerment-oriented poverty alleviation on the other. It was not too difficult to see that either through his political pragmatism or natural inclination, his heart was with poverty alleviation since he knew that was the focus which could easily falter and fall by the wayside while the open economy had many a powerful subscriber that would generate the needed momentum to keep going. The Gam Udawas, the Janasaviya, the garment factories were the vehicles he devised to keep the poverty alleviation effort in continuous high profile.

During the past 10 months one felt that the UNP was trying hard to forget most of these efforts, let alone pursuing and profiling pro-poor development strategies. Even a cursory glance at the newspapers will reveal that the open economy as epitomized by the stock market has been anointed as the panacea for all Sri Lankan ills and the poor are left at the mercy of the trickle-down effect. This is perhaps the costliest error being committed by the post-Premadasa UNP which will need urgent remedial measures if they are to reverse further electoral setbacks.

If as we suspect the higher turnout of 52,774 voters comprised overwhelmingly of migrants in possession of dual voter registration, they have voted predominantly for the PA (the UNP collecting only 3,702 of these votes). Obviously this constitutes a very disaffected lot, the city-ward migrant originating from the hinterland, very often selected for being an over-achiever at his place of origin and trying to make the quantum leap between a near static rural economy and a vibrant city-bound economy. The migrant is unable to bridge this gap but yet is very perceptive of the bonanza that is taking place in the city, the participation in which

is denied to him by the socio-cultural and economic realities surrounding him. He is the frustration-breeder who wields the potential to ignite the country-side, given that the latter itself is caught in a stranglehold of near-zero growth.

While not trying to devalue the electoral success achieved by the PA at the last poll it needs to be pointed out that it is most unlikely that the PA could have achieved this element of success in any other province (in a one-off province situation) outside the Western Province which it already holds. This is because the UNP had gained 50 percent or more of the cast valid votes in all other districts except Kurunegala in 1993. (in contrast Galle, Matara and Hambantota gave only 44.3, 45.0 and 49.9 percent, respectively of the vote to the UNP) Thus, in a way, PA must be grateful to the UNP for having pulled 'the Fransiscu' on it and tested itself on UNP's weakest terrain.

An isolated one-off election barely 9 months before a scheduled presidential election is about the ideal time that a disgruntled majority of voters could have delivered a resounding slap on an incumbent government in power with relative impunity. (Incidentally, it is not only the government that is smarting under this pain but the stock market itself is still reeling from the blow, three weeks after the results were released.) The governing party if keen on returning to power must resort to an objective analysis followed up by implementing immediate remedial measures rather than give-in to the urge to go on a witch hunt which may be detrimental to its future ambitions. From the perspective of democracy, perhaps the southern voter needs to be complimented on judiciously voicing its opinion at an opportune moment. It will now be more interesting to monitor the build-up towards the Presidential and Parliamentary elections with the relative opening-up of the race at the hustings.

The pride and prejudice of R. Siriwardena

H L D Mahindapala

At a time when my senses were numbed with *ennui*—mainly because I had run out of targets—I was delighted to see Mr. R. Siriwardena swim into my ken, in his own mincing way, with a rejoinder to my article on **JANE AUSTEN AND HISTORY** serialised in three parts in the *Lanka Guardian*. (February 15, March 1 and March 15). He is known to have some discriminating tastes in the appreciation of good literature (when he is objective) and I was hoping, the moment I opened the *Lanka Guardian*, to lock horns with him at the level of his reputation, particularly as the coy darling of "intellectuals". Contrary to my great expectations he has decided not to confront me at the anticipated level by dealing with Jane Austen on the basis of acceptable critical norms. Instead, he has jumped into the realm of my local politics, coming down, at times, to a personal level. Which, of course, leaves him wide open to be dealt with at his own chosen level.

He takes the high moral ground by accusing me of following in the footsteps of Jane Austen and withdrawing from the horrors of the world to lead "double life" in the "little social commonwealth" of the intimate circle of my family, friends and my dog. (He has forgotten to mention my little, cuddly cat who, from time to time, goes into deep contemplation about the morality of fat cats lapping up the cream in the posh NGO mansions.) However, on this point of leading a "double life", I am willing to concede that having spent the better part of his life as "Reggie" he is supremely qualified to talk about leading a double life after he switched his identity to "Regi" in the last lap. I propose to deal with the double life of Mr. "Regi" (though I still can't get over the previous incarnation of the baby-faced "Reggie") Siriwardena later.

But for the benefit of the readers who have not followed the articles serialised in the *Lanka Guardian* let me add briefly

that I wrote exclusively on **JANE AUSTEN AND HISTORY**, deriving from her most profound novel *Mansfield Park* my interpretation of her inclination to withdraw from the boiling, Macbethic cauldron of history and build a moral enclave of her own which she located in the centre of *Mansfield Park*. Ignoring all the factors that led to the making of one of the great English fiction writers, Mr. Siriwardena focuses essentially on my involvement with Sri Lankan politics. It is obvious that he has used my article on Jane Austen as a convenient peg to hang his diatribe against me which no doubt, will be applauded by his clique in the NGO galleries. Parenthetically, I wish to add that his attack on my politics is another symptom of the bitter polarisation that divides this society. Even at the so-called high level of Mr. Siriwardena there seems to be a festering affliction of the mind which prevents him from reading a piece of literary criticism without dragging in Lankan politics that are not even remotely connected to the original theme of Jane Austen who died in 1817.

His exercise is rather farcical because he is stretching himself beyond reasonable limits to interpret my politics through my interpretation of Jane Austen. He says: "For my part, I found these articles fascinating — for the light they threw not on Austen but on Mr. Mahindapala himself." And he sets out, somewhat pompously, "to demonstrate their (the articles) profound congruence with (Mahindapala's) public and political role; to take them as a confession, perhaps unintentionally, of the convictions and motivations that sustain him in that role — self-exposure, in short, of what makes him tick."

Here Walter ("Regi") Mitty is fancying himself in the role of a Freudian witch doctor with a stupendous capacity to make pronouncements on other personalities by suppressing vital evidence. Oddly enough, researches have found among

Freud's papers that he did suppress some vital information to buttress his theories. But that apart, Mr. Siriwardena, the voodoo psychiatrist, has attempted to analyse my personality on absolutely false assumptions. He argues that I have divided my life into two parts: the public one as editor of the *Sunday Observer* and the private life where I withdraw into the quiet, moral world of Jane Austen ignoring the seedy, sordid world around me. To prove his central thesis he had to come up with a link between the time I wrote the essay on Jane Austen (the private life) and the time I wrote my attack on the gang of his intellectuals (the public life) published in the *Sunday Observer* of February 20. So he writes: "The 'profound congruence' to which I referred between Mr. Mahindapala the admirer of Austen and Mr. Mahindapala the political agent can be illustrated from just one of many examples: a column written by him in the *Sunday Observer* of 20 February — just about the time he was beginning his Austen series." Our little Walter Mitty's crooked theory would have had some validity if I began my essay on Jane Austen at the time he mentioned. But I wrote that in 1980 as a major essay when I was reading English at the Melbourne University — far, far away both in time and space. His pathetic attempt to read my essay on Jane Austen as a "confession... a self-exposure of what makes me tick" collapses because there is no link, as he assumed, between the time I wrote it and the time I returned to Sri Lanka to edit *The Observer*. The premise is wonky like his weird fancy. So how can the conclusion be right?

Besides, I would hesitate to read his adoration of W. B. Yeats, a pro-Fascist, (see *the thatched patio*, July/August 1993) and brand Mr. Siriwardena as the legitimate heir to Hitler, though it is possible to interpret his interpretation of Yeats in a perverse sort of way (as he did to my interpretation of Jane Austen) and see all manner of sado-masochistic Fascist te-

ndencies determining his split personality. Of course, I am not saying that literature is divorced from politics. Cultural materialists have leapt out of the textual horizons and expanded evaluations to include the contextual space. Literary criticism has diverged in many directions since 1917 when the study of English "as we know it today" was developed with the introduction of a Tripos (i.e. a degree) at Cambridge University. (See page 90 of *Meaning by Shakespeare — Terence Hawkes*.) *Marxism Freudianism, feminism, structuralism, post-structuralism etc., have taken over from F. R. Leavis who came out of Cambridge and led a critical movement through the Scrutiny. So we see critics, ranging from the provocative and perceptive Edward Said of Columbia University, USA, to scholarly Tony Tanner of Cambridge University, deal with some of the major political themes underlying the works of Jane Austen. To assess her politics these respected critics place Jane Austen in the historical context of her time — a turbulent time when the foundations of the ancien regime in Europe were overthrown by the French Revolution, Napoleonic wars and Napoleonic reforms. Bonapartism, which threatened England, perhaps, more than any other foreign thrust, obsessed the nation until he met his fate at Waterloo in 1815 just two years before the death of Jane Austen. And, across the Atlantic the American War of Independence was an issue that affected England directly. Nearer home she was a witness to the rise of the working class which created the "two nations" described so vividly by Dickens. By the turn of the century parliament was passing draconian laws to suppress the trade unions. There were Scarcity riots in 1800 and the Luddites, dislocated by the Industrial Revolution, rioted in 1811. There was no way she could have escaped the revolutionary fervour of the day, or the dramatic changes uprooting English society. But she chose to withdraw from the tumultuous and turbulent forces as a decisive response to the violent politics that was eroding the moral base of her time. "Jane Austen's profound concern with good manners," says Tony Tanner, "was thus not simply a reflection of the cloistered gentility: it was a form of politics — an involvement with a wide-*

spread attempt to save the nation by correction, monitoring and elevating its morals." Earlier he says: *"To put it bluntly as possible, good manners were no longer regarded merely as a seemly adjunct to the life-style of the upper classes: they became England's answer to the French Revolution."* (See Tony Tanner's excellent interpretations of her novels in his book, *Jane Austen*.)

Concerned as she was with the "odious" forces swirling around her, she withdrew into the "little social commonwealth" to restore order and stability on a moral basis. That was a proposition within manageable limits. That was pragmatic. That was realistic. She did not (like some of our bogus intellectuals) retire into imperialist — funded NGO cells to moralise and write papers on how to solve overwhelmingly complex societal problems which are totally beyond their control and I must add, their comprehension too. For these "moralists" it is a part-time luxury to sit back and sell their "morality" and punditry to the highest bidders in the Western market.

Of course, Mr. Siriwardena has his own kind of kinky logic to justify his schizophrenic thinking and judgemental postures designed to claim a monopoly of pure morals. This spurious stance makes him forget that he belongs to that band of "moralists" whose cries for human rights and democracy rise with the levels of funding received from his Western donors. The tragedy is that these hired "moralists" are now dime a dozen crawling all over the political landscape of the Third World. The globalisation of NGOs, directly linked to the funding approved by Western agencies and their governments, provides the neo-colonialist an effective and articulate network run by their pro-Western local agents in the NGOs. These NGOs, with ambitions of acting as the alternative government, emerge from their low profile role to attack Third World governments when any of these besieged states act against the Western interests. In short, the NGO operators are the born-again evangelists of the raj who are pushing a Western agenda with a fanatical commitment to their imperialist paymasters.

This gives no option to the Siriwardenas in the NGO belt: they all must sing for their supper. They know that the day they stop singing the funding ceases. For instance, Mr. Siriwardena's romantic thatched patio in the backyard of his NGO provides him the ideal stage for him to play his dual role: the "Reggie" who refuses to see any redeeming feature in Sri Lankan politics (it's not a paying proposition) and the "Regi" who turns a Nelsonian eye to the sullied and bloodied sources of his funding, part of which comes from the exploitation of the poor in Third World countries and another part from the military-industrial complex which thrives on the deadly weapons and personnel mines that kill millions. The double standards with which he is very comfortable would, no doubt, make him feel that his "morality" is as pure as the filthy lucre on which he and his coterie feed.

This may, perhaps, remind him of the great novel that is closest to his heart: *Great Expectations*. At this point I would like to develop an argument (a la "Regi") to expose the fallacy of his methodology. Following his example, what would he say if I project him as the reincarnation of Pip who thrives on the earnings of the convict, Abel Magwitch, transported to Australia? This comparison comes out best in the words of Edward W. Said who has analysed it succinctly in his book *Culture and Imperialism*: *"Let me say a little here about what I have in mind, using two well-known and very great novels. Dickens's Great Expectations (1861) is primarily a novel about self-delusion, (See any similarity to you, "Regi"?) about Pip's vain attempts to become a gentleman with neither hard work nor the aristocratic source of income required for such a role. (Rings a familiar bell, "Regi"?) Early in the life he helps a condemned convict, Abel Magwitch, who, after being transported to Australia, pays back his young benefactor with large sums of money..."* (Well, aren't those in the NGO belt helped by the rehabilitated criminals of Europe whose generosity was exposed by Bernard Shaw in *Major Barbara*?)

As shown above, it is easy for me to use this far-fetched methodology to scorn on Mr. Siriwardena. But then I would

have to come down to Mr. Siriwardena's level if I resort to such cheap tricks. Nor is it my intention to psychoanalyse him through the text of his literary criticism. I'd rather deal with him head-on. The honest thing for him to do was to separate my politics from my literary criticism. For instance, he should have dealt directly with my article in the *Sunday Observer* of February 20, 1994 which must have irked him no end because I had exposed his holy cows — Thmbiah-Lal-Kumari Jayewardene etc., who were projecting, in the name of research and scholarship, a warped view of our times. Mr. Siriwardena says that I "love to hate" these intellectuals. He is wrong. Absolutely wrong. I do not hate them. I have only contempt for any intellectual who under the haughty and fictitious presumption of omniscience that is supposed to reside in the groves of prestigious academia trot out perverted perspectives, distorted or irrelevant theories and carefully selected facts to promote their kind of partisan politics. I maintain that such intellectuals are not only dishonest but also dangerous to a society that is desperately seeking a common ground to meet and sink their differences. Instead of preparing a ground for common understanding these "intellectuals" mislead not only this nation but other distinguished scholars (e.g Francis Fukuyama) who could contribute substantially to a debate about the creation of a new society which hopefully may escape history — at least the violent history which this generation yearns to escape.

One of Mr. Siriwardena's main complaints is that I tried to escape history like Jane Austen and hide in a Swiss enclave established in *Mansfield Park*. The undying dream of mankind has been to live in a Swiss enclave, another Eden, free from violence. T.S. Eliot too went in search of the "still point of the turning world", which is another way of describing *Mansfield Park*. Political philosophers from Plato to Marx created their own ideal states. Maybe, as stated by Eliot, mankind cannot "bear too much reality". That may be also why Mr. Siriwardena, who pretends to be an *engage* intellectual, hides in his NGO bunker at the ICES (Internatio-

nal Centre for Ethnic Studies), spending his time writing reviews or critical pieces that may well appear in a *feuilleton* of Sunday papers. It would have been commendable if he stuck to that groove and not rushed into places where angels fear to tread.

Going by his "morality" and literary tastes, I am not surprised that Mr. Siriwardena should object to my politics. In fact, his objections to the politics of *The Observer* (which I edit) is something that was waiting to happen. It must have been unbearable for him to see me taking up the cause of his *bete noires*. He proclaims that Yeats is the greatest poet of this century. I say T.S. Eliot is superior. He loathes Jane Austen. I rank her as on one of the great English novelists. He censures Edward W. Said, one of the world's leading anti-imperialist intellectuals. I agree with Said wholeheartedly. He thrives on the NGOs. I don't. He seems to accept the NGOs as the last refuge of "intellectuals". I accept the NGOs as the last refuge of "...the hollow men/ ...the stuffed men/ *Leaning together/ Head piece filled with straw. Alas !*" He portrays Sri Lanka as a political black hole. I see it as a viable democracy that has triumphed over the facism of the desperadoes of the left and the right — wing militarism and is now poised to take off on a promising journey, if the mindless violence of terrorists can be contained. The polarities are crystal clear. So, in a sense, it was inevitable that when the *Lanka Guardian* published my article on Jane Austen, Mr. Siriwardena reached the outer limits of his endurance and snapped.

Consider, for instance, how he condemns Jane Austen's novels. He says that "one page of *Wuthering Heights*" etc is "worth more than Austen's six novels put together". It would be hard to find a another mature man in control of his faculties passing a sentence like that. It is not literary criticism. It's plain prejudice. It is a banal statement not worthy of a product that descended from the Ludowykian heights at Peradeniya. The last time I heard that type of comment was in the Pettah market when one fishmonger was telling the other: "*Machang*, let me tell you

— and I am telling you because I know for sure — my man's little finger is worth more than all their ten men put together!"

Mr. Siriwardena's bazaar talk doesn't disappoint me in the least. Mr. Siriwardena's gay dismissal of Jane Austen reveals only his queer tastes. He is the man who made a desperate bid once to elevate *Golu Hadawatha* to the withering heights of a classic. In his role as a critic, he wrote vigorously in defence of the film *GOLU HADAWATHA* after, mark you, writing the script for it. So it is understandable that Mr. Siriwardena should rise to the defence of his script with, of course, one sharp eye overseeing the box office collection. Also he could not let the intellectuals and critics get away with their frontal attack on him saying that he had written a script for a soppy Denise Robins novel. He had a reputation (not to mention a box office) to protect. In his defence he first berated the intellectuals for not reading the novel, and second (taking on those who had read it) for rating it as a sentimental tear-jerker. But he failed to win over the intellectuals and the critics. While *The Observer* columnist, Contact, quite correctly, ridiculed him for claiming that "Shakespeare was no doubt the Karunasena Jayalath of his day" critics in the *Daily News* exposed his tastes in romanticising "*the hackneyed prose... and cliches*" in *Golu Hadawatha*. Blasting Mr. Siriwardena's vain attempts to boost his script and novel, one critic wrote in the *Daily News*: "Mr. Siriwardena seems to nurse a grudge against the intellectuals and the critics for having ignored *Golu Hadawatha*". By then (1968) *Golu Hadawatha* had sold 25,000 copies and the film version was a commercial success. It had become a part of the pop culture — and the critics accused him of wallowing in the melodrama of a boy-meets-girl story. Whatever argument Mr. Siriwardena adduced in defence of (1) the novel, (2) the script, and (3) the film it did not rise above the level of a slick stock broker's sales talk in the market place defending his vested interests. Judging by the ferocity with which he fought to save the sales of *GOLU HADAWATHA* it is plain that Mr. Siriwardena is not averse to peddling his self-interest as high moral

and aesthetic principles. Which serious student of literature will now debate as to whether he/she should accept his unqualified praise of *Golu Hadawatha* or his downright condemnation of Jane Austen?

Forget for a moment his maudlin literary tastes and consider his basic ability to comprehend and represent facts. This is what he says about my essay on Jane Austen: "Mr. Mahindapala's fundamental praise of Jane Austen is that she realised that the true moral centre was to be found in "the little social commonwealth" of family, friends and intimate associates". Either Mr. Siriwardena is slipping, slowly but surely, into a state of senile decay or he is deliberately misrepresenting my "fundamental" position outlined in the essay. The main thrust of my essay was not to claim that "the true moral centre was to be found" in the little circles created by Jane Austen. If so I would have paid equal attention to the inner circles in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma* and *Persuasion* — to mention only three of her six novels. The main theme of my essay was that the true moral centre was to be found only in *Mansfield Park* which was the spiritual home of Fanny Price. Poor Mr. Siriwardena! Isn't it time that he did a revision course not only in practical criticism but also a basic course in how to understand and react to an English script of someone with whom he disagrees?

If this was the only basic error one could dismiss it as saying that the air-conditioner at the ICES had packed up and not cooled his overheated cerebral barrels when he got all excited and fired that misguided missile at me. I have already exposed his prejudiced mind which attempted in vain to link my "public" life in the 1990s through an essay on Jane Austen which I wrote in 1980 in Melbourne. Forget that, for a moment, and consider this: "Mr. Mahindapala claimed that Sri Lanka was actually a success story. Contrasting the Sri Lanka record of democracy with the one-party regimes and military dictatorships in several other Asian countries, Mr. Mahindapala went on to say: 'In Sri Lanka, however, the UNP and SLFP have been alternating regularly, as most democracies do, until 1977; The intellectual dishonesty

of this is evident from the fact that Mr. Mahindapala didn't mention that respectable democratic record was breached first in 1982 by a blatantly manipulated and illegally conducted referendum — a rape of democracy that had a great deal to do with the disillusionment with the democratic process that enabled the JVP to get the degree of support it did in 1988-89".

Come, come Mr. Siriwardena. I know Prof. Ludowyk didn't teach you arithmetic but at Royal College you must have learnt that 1977 does not include, or stretch as far as 1982. And contrary to your misrepresentation it is not "odious" for me to deal with the "guilt and misery" of "1982". To quote the line (a favourite of Marx, I believe) which graces *the thatched patio* edited by you: "I am human and I consider nothing human is alien to me". Not even your blinkered vision that inhibits you from seeing hard facts staring in your face. It was very convenient for your mendacious purposes to ignore the fact that I had attacked the "1982" regime of President Jayewardene repeatedly in *The Observer* and, consequently, he sued me. Can you remember that, Mr. Siriwardena? Clearly, you did not care to remember that because selective amnesia suits your line of misrepresenting my politics. If you admitted that fact, then you could not have sustained your lie that I "served, not merely with fidelity but with fervour, two successive regimes that have not been particularly distinguished by their morality..." President Jayewardene and I belong to two different camps of politics — *vive la difference!* — and we diverged long before Mr. Siriwardena discovered him in "1982".

In my career as a journalist I have backed only two leaders — Dudley Senanayake and Ranasinghe Premadasa — and, in doing so, I never pulled my punches. What is more I am very proud of it. I do not have to dwell on Dudley Senanayake now because he has earned his due place in the memories of our time and the time to come. However, in his day Dudley Senanayake was attacked by the so-called intelligentsia, which consisted mainly of Trotskyites like "Reggie" (note the spelling) Siriwardena, as a bourgeois reactionary protecting the interests of a

ruling comprador class. In his day he was also called a murderer after a stray bullet that ricocheted and killed a Buddhist monk who was in a march shouting racist slogans like: *Dudleyge badey masala wadai*. They were protesting against the Dudley - Chelvanayakam Pact. Today the same Dudley Senanayake is praised by the last remaining Trotskyites as a champion of the liberal state and civil society. Unlike the intellectuals who scoffed at him, I am now in a privileged position to sit back and have the last laugh because even then (during Dudley's time) I was criticised for defending him "with the devotion and vigour of a true believer".

President Premadasa's turn to receive his due recognition is about to begin. Of course, it will take some time for his full stature to be restored. It will have to wait till his blind haters pass into the dustbins of history and a new generation takes over to look at our times dispassionately and objectively. The realisation that no other ruler in our time — or for that matter in our entire history — had committed himself to redeem the poor is beginning to dawn, particularly on those who were bent on wiping him out of the history books. Those who blamed him for every death in this and other lands — Upali Wijewardene, Ranjan Wijeratne, Rajiv Gandhi, Generals Kobbekaduwa and Wijaya Wimalaratne, Lalith Athulathmudali and even his own death — will see, if they live long enough, their malicious judgement reversed by the higher court of history.

Besides, history has always been just by the nation builders, particularly if they had to fight insurmountable forces that stood in their path to achieve higher goals. History has a way of dumping the Siriwardena's and going up the high road of imaginative and pragmatic nationalist leaders like President Premadasa. Taking the safe back seat and criticising the drivers of the state all the time will not give the Siriwardenas of our time any recognisable space in the chapters of history either as superior beings with unsurpassing knowledge or as moralists endowed with exceedingly high values to signpost the way out. Nor does taking the anti-government line make them intellectuals,

though it is very fashionable to think that the primary qualification to be an intellectual is to be anti-establishment. The essential flaw is that their public postures and self-righteous tones of being the moral guardians of all the noble values that can put this society right do not stem from a balanced and accurate vision of the past or a promising future. Because they cannot see anything right they will always be wrong. Their partisan stances are as outmoded and as irrelevant as their borrowed theoretical feathers which, no doubt, make them shine only among their own naive and limited claue.

Take, for instance, the severe judgement passed on President Premadasa by the pseudo-intellectuals of our time. To evaluate him it is necessary to place him in the grim historical context. He assumed power at the tail end of the dark period that began in 1970. The SLFP-Marxist coalition established a "quasi-fascist regime" (quotes from Lalith Athulathmudali) which deliberately turned away from the course set by liberals like Dudley Senanayake. Mr. Siriwardena acknowledges this political deviation when he says: "*Acts that were once thought an unthinkable misuse of power have become legitimised once they have been practised by one regime (Mrs. B-Dr. N.M.'s) and then become a precedent for the next (JR's), and thus the frontiers of what is permissible in the State's illegal use of authority have period by period, year by year, been steadily advanced*".

The task of President Premadasa was to halt this advance. It was a Herculean task given the fact that he was left with three massive problems on his hands: 1. the JVP uprising in the south; 2. the IPKF force threatening to play a role of their own in local politics and 3. the Tiger terrorists in the north. When he assumed office in 1990 all three factors had converged to make it the most turbulent — in fact unmanageable-time in the post-independent era. In the midst of this turmoil he was also expected to protect and maintain the parliamentary system, the independence of the judiciary, an executive dedicated to the restoration of law, order, stability and economic growth and regain the so-

vereignty lost to India's "Indira doctrine". No South Asian leader in living memory faced such a gigantic task. Some political analysts claim that President Jayewardene, the tough man of Sri Lankan politics, gave up the reins of power because he could not manage the inexorable descent to political hell. President Premadasa's greatness is in the undeniable fact that he faced the intractable challenges of his time courageously and achieved all the expected objectives, eventually leaving behind a nation where parents could send their children to school, where house dwellers were not terrorised by chits, where workers could go to work and return home in the evening etc. In short, he restored relative peace and a stable democracy with economic growth gathering momentum. He did not achieve this by offering flowers to the fascist terrorists. He used all the power at his command to beat the terror of the 'left'. The choice was between the saving civil society and democracy in the long run and handing over the state to a bunch of fascists whose atrocities would have equalled, if not exceeded, those of Pol Pot.

The moral choice between these two is obvious. However, in the process of restoring law and order there were, no doubt, errant excesses committed by the forces employed to quell the violent fascists of the 'left'. Incidentally, we should not forget that some members in the opposition who parade prominently in the so-called human rights campaigns were sending secret hit lists to the forces. It was the worst of times. It was a time of maddening insecurity when society dropped all moral pretences and went for the jugular. The intervention of the state on behalf of the minimal societal norms and values was inevitable. In an escalating spiral of violence which civilised or legitimate state will sit back and allow the Sri Lankan space to be a mass grave for all those above the age of 35 — a prioritised political item in the agenda of the Sinhala Pol Potists? It was, indeed, a tragic situation in which killing becomes the only means of stopping killings. Terror had to be met with counter-terror. How does one moralise on a situation like that? The moral dilemmas of the human family divided into

two warring camps rose to spiritual heights in the *Baghavad Gita*, though it did not come up with definitive answers except to pronounce on the duties that must be fulfilled by man under all circumstances.

The moral dilemma of those hopeless, helpless, uncertain and terrifying times is exploited by lay-back arm-chair critics like Mr. Siriwardena, partly to pose as morally superior pundits and partly to serve their NGO politics. They have banded together to express protest against the violence of the state which was given no choice in its struggle against southern terrorism. Their abject failure to present a credible alternative to the suppression of fascist violence by the state makes them look a rag-bag of professional beggars who do not want their wounds to heal. Any mug could join the bandwagon of habitual protesters. But their failure to present another way to deal with the mindless violence exposes their moral bankruptcy. It was a time when a democratically elected government (the Supreme Court confirmed this) was teetering on the brink of total collapse. Could it have been resolved and law and order restored by the communiqués and the protest notes issued by CRM, SSM and ICES pundits? How did the SLFP — Marxist coalition deal with it in 1971? Mr. Siriwardena's moral claim would be valid only if he could have shown an alternative way to deal with the JVP without using violence. I personally hate to be judgemental about the role of the state in such a situation. I could easily acquire their smug satisfaction and join hands with those who feel superior by being professional protesters crowding the NGO corridors. But that would only make me a hypocrite. My sympathies are with all Third World leaders who do not fall into the categories of either Pol Pots and Idi Amins, or those who deliberately deviate from an established course of democracy to establish regimes like those that existed from 1970-1990.

Besides, history is a dismal and sad record of ideals yielding invariably to the harsh realities of the day. I am also inclined to think that the Sisyphean absurdity will never cease to haunt history. That is why leaders who had struggled mightily to

rescue society from declining precipitously into the hell hole of chaos and, in the process, eased the burden of their people, deserve to be honoured. Leaving aside the unrealistic idealists and the revolutionary Marxists who believe that man can easily skip the progressive phases and make giant leaps into the future, serious students of history would agree that leaders cannot do anything more than putting their shoulder to the wheels trundling the juggernaut of history and move it just one wee bit at a time. President Premadasa is one leader who took that mission seriously and threw in his full weight not only to halt the juggernaut crushing everybody in its wake but also to push it a bit forward. He addressed the discontents of his time with a comprehensive vision and a commitment filled with all his creative energies. His endeavour was to bring back the nation from the path it deviated to the traditional course and carry it forward to a new horizon. His respect for the judiciary (endorsed by leading legal luminaries like Mr. Desmond Fernando), his respect for parliamentary traditions (endorsed by the people in all elections that he contested debunking the issues of legitimacy of his rule raised by hired assassins of character), his devout concern for the poor (justified by his unique programmes for shelter and poverty alleviation), his commitment for economic growth (proved by the expanding economy and rising graphs), his resounding victories in defending the sovereignty and dignity of the nation (by sending back the IPKF, David Gladstone and later by refusing to bow down to India when it decided to humiliate him by sabotaging the sixth SAARC summit), his principled anti-Zionism (by voting against the Bush-sponsored move to rescind the UN resolution of 1975 equating Zionism with racism) are achievements which revisionists in the NGO belt would try to gloss over and rewrite a history from a pen dipped in their moral hypocrisy. Though it may take time, no rational or objective historian will deny him his rightful place as a leader who steered the nation away the brink of chaos to restore sanity, democracy, and the general well-being of all layers of society.

(To be Continued)

FILM

“NOMIYENA MINISUN”

Vicharaka

Gamini Fonseka's Sinhala film "Nomi-yena Minisun" ('The Undying'), currently doing brisk business at the box office, has received a fair amount of critical attention and much general discussion in newspaper columns. The response, favourable in most instances despite one severe mauling, brings up a non-cinematic issue that impinges directly upon the country's long-running conflict in the 'North-East'.

The film opened on a controversial note. It was given an earlier release date than was originally assigned to it. This Ministerial fiat, which briefly raised some heat and dust, was justified on the basis of the film's subject matter. The thematic content of "Nomi-yena Minisun," it was argued, was so timely that film should be made available to the public without the usual delays entailed in the film "queue."

What is the film about? The short answer is that it is the story of an admirable soldier. But of course the film intends to be rather more than that. "Nomi-yena Minisun" is not a "combat movie" in the traditional Hollywood sense. While there are some well-staged battle sequences (more spectacular than anything so far achieved on the Sinhala screen), "Nomi-yena Minisun" does not focus on the fighting as such.

In a manner typical of Gamini Fonseka, the film engages with several thematic fronts at more or less the same time. Among these constantly interweaving concerns, the soldier's professional ethic receives pride of place. The professional soldier is bound by a strict code of ethics. He is a man of honour who fights for "king and country," or, as we would say today, for nation and state. On duty, he performs to the best of his ability the tasks assigned to him. He allows no room for personal rancour, ambition or hatred.

The ideal values associated with soldie-

ring are embodied in the character played (needless to say) by Gamini Fonseka himself. A senior officer, he is however the victim of certain domestic travails. His wife, an Indian national, has returned to her native country taking their only son with her. A deeply disappointed man, he drowns his sorrows in drink. His military career suffers a decline. Finally, however, he gets the opportunity to prove his mettle. He makes his way into enemy camp to negotiate for the release of a group of soldiers including a young officer who has become his surrogate son. His true calibre now becomes evident — he is trusted by the enemy. But tragedy ensues — he is among those killed in the skirmish caused by fire from unexpected (and unidentified) quarters.

Such is the main story. Attaching to it are several subsidiary episodes — the young officer's tender romance and its consequences on the style of the central figure; the Tamil doctor who tends to the wounded irrespective of race and affiliation; the enemy captain who is revealed to be human, and so on. Much of this is predictable and conventionally talkative in the treatment of character and situation. "Nomi-yena Minisun" is, in many ways, a mainstream Sinhala film.

But one thing stands out and this needs to be singled out for praise. There are no out and out villains in this film. It does not confirm or consolidate the typical attitudes of antagonism and hatred towards the people on the other side of the racial divide. Despite its ornate flourishes and heavy oratory, its idealizations and sentimentalizations, the film does suggest with some conviction the futility of armed conflict between segments of the same large society. Gamini Fonseka is to be commended for departing from popular ideology that nourishes the ruinous and suicidal discords of our day.

Separatist Movements in South Asia

Lynn Ockersz

In 1919, the non-Brahmins grouped under the Justice Party, made a case for the reservation of seats in the Madras legislature for non-Brahmins before the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reform in London. This demand was granted in the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919. Urmila Phadnis, in her illuminating work entitled *Ethnicity and Nation-Building in South Asia*, says that: 'Such a concession not only offered a special recognition to the category of non-Brahmin, but, what is more, a majority was provided special protection normally given to a minority community'. This measure was believed to have been carried out for two reasons: First, the attitude of the Brahmin elements in the Madras administration had time and again irritated the British. Second, the Brahmins were dominant in the Indian National Congress — the organisation spearheading the movement for independence.

Among the crucial constitutional development that eventually led to the break-up of India, the 'communal award' contained in the Government of India Act of 1935 was of the utmost importance. Provincial self-government encouraged communalism and separatism by catering to interests rather than numbers. Thus Moslems were given the majority of seats in the legislatures of Punjab, Sind, the North-West Frontier Province and Bengal.

Nor were the remotest corners of India spared the ill-effects of 'divide and rule'. The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), today the scene of a protracted guerilla war, suffered 'divide and rule' in some of its crudest forms. Slash and burn or 'jhum' cultivation was the mainstay of the CHT tribes, sometimes referred to as 'the highlanders'. Slash and burn cultivation fitted in well with the tribes' nomadic way of life but it rendered the British administration's task of assessing and collecting revenue rather difficult. In view of these problems, the British attempted to popularise 'settled' or plough cultivation. The latter technique had turned the Indian plains into a rich source of revenue. There-

fore, the British were hoping for a similar 'success story' in the CHT.

By the 1890s some 3000 hectares in the CHT had been cultivated with the aid of the plough but over half the plots were being handled by Bengali settlers or 'lowlanders'. It seemed to be British policy to encourage these Bengali immigrants. Today, the Shanthi Bahini guerillas are fighting, among other things, for the eviction of these immigrants.

So, British colonial policy left behind a deeply-divided, if not fatally fractured South Asia. No exploration into the root causes of this region's separatist conflicts would be complete without a long hard look at the policy of 'divide and rule' and its consequences.

True Face of the 'Liberators'

Secessionist movements in South Asia have very often been described as 'movements for national liberation', by their sympathisers and apologists. Is this really so? Do the leaders of these movements live up to their ideals or are they merely pursuing individual interests or those of their own social class? In other words, are the interests of the relevant communities served by these, very often self-proclaimed, liberators?

It should be stated right away that most of the leaders of the secessionist movements, which will be in focus here, are **not** members of the more disadvantaged sections of society. A good number of them are of middle-class or lower middle-class origins - strata which are characterised by upward social mobility. The question then arises: *What is the real nature of these secessionist movements?*

We could begin the process of answering this vital question by listening to what Asghar Ali Engineer, a reputed Indian political scientist, has to say about communalism. In a paper contained in a selection of essays edited by him under the title, *Communal Riots in Post Independence India*, Engineer says:

'The communal phenomenon is political in genesis. Communal tension arises as a result of the skilful manipulation of the religious sentiments and the cultural ethos of a people by its elite which aims to realise its political, economic and cultural aspirations by identifying these aspirations as those of the entire community.'

Communities with a very low literacy level, but very high political awareness are particularly vulnerable in the face of these elite machinations. When their interests are threatened the elites mobilize their communities by making them believe that their faith or race for instance is in danger. Ignorance and religious orthodoxy combine to bring about mass hysteria. The communities thus manipulated little realise that they are only pawns in the hands of their elites.

In this connection, the Sikh rebellion in the Punjab is most revealing. The Akoli Dal, which was in the forefront of the autonomy movement, was dominated by the rich 'Jat' peasantry. Punjab is the virtual 'bread basket' of India. Increasing wealth made the Sikh farmer more and more assertive politically. He realised he was playing a major role in keeping India 'alive'. Thus, he also realised that he was enjoying a degree of leverage vis-a-vis the Centre. Very soon, the Akoli Dal decided to utilize its position to extract costly political concessions from the Centre.

But then the concessions were slow in coming and the Akoli Dal was growing impatient. It decided that it should press for secession. The Onandapur Sahib Resolution passed by the Dal in 1973, among other things, calls for the establishment of a theocracy in Punjab.

The rich 'Jat' peasantry want a state of their own because they have amassed vast amounts of wealth which could be invested in trade and industry. They can't do this now because the Hindus are dominant in these sectors in the Punjab. Ideally, from the Sikh hardliners' point of view, Punjab should be free of the Hindu presence. Hence the attempts at 'ethnic

cleansing'. However, in a state of their own the Sikhs will be their own masters. Calls for a theocracy, therefore, are perfectly in order.

What is important from the point of view of this study is that the Akoli Dal - the rich peasants' party - enjoyed popular backing. It could rally the masses who wouldn't have had much to gain in a theocracy dominated by the clergy and the rich landlords and peasants.

How could this come about? The answer lies in the ability of the Akoli Dal to mobilize the Sikh populace by kindling their religious passions. The increasing Hindu presence was projected as a threat to Sikhism. Therefore only a theocracy could save Sikhism.

Orthodox religion is an important means of social communication and a vital instrument of group mobilization. The Akoli Dal made full use of it.

Another important Indian State which has valuable lessons for us in this regard is Tamil Nadu. It was one of the earliest states to raise the secessionist cry. This slogan was taken up by the radical DMK party in the 1950s; but then the DMK began to dabble in parliamentary politics and even came to power in Tamil Nadu.

The DMK then made a volte face. It claimed that parliamentary politics was only a means to an end - the end being a separate Tamil state. With time secession was played down. It was apparently only used as a bargaining ploy by the DMK to extract concessions from the Centre.

The DMK leadership seemed to be quite satisfied with the power they enjoyed as 'respectable' parliamentarian politicians. They now had command over power resources and this is all that they needed, apparently. The secessionist slogan was dropped completely when the Centre outlawed secessionism in 1963.

The Tamil Movement was betrayed by the DMK leadership which was apparently only hankering after power. The threat of secessionism is, therefore, raised in most cases with a view to pressurising the Centre and extracting political concessions. However, once the aspirations of the secessionist leadership are met separatism is allowed to die 'a natural death'. A separatist movement headed by a middle-class leadership is, therefore,

bound to grind to a halt. In the Indian context, in most cases, separatism has been nothing more than a tactical ploy.

Secessionist Movements in the Post-Indira Gandhi Era

(i) Punjab

Since early 1992, separatist inspired violence has been on the wane in India's Punjab state. Today, except for sporadic violence, one hardly hears of gory massacres carried out by Sikh extremists or prolonged clashes between the law enforcement authorities and the militants. On the contrary, there has been a vast improvement in the law and order situation. The law enforcers to be finally holding the whip hand.

Occasionally, one hears of the arrest or the killing of extremist leaders from terror outfits like the Khalistan Commando Force and the Bhindranwale Tigers. The tide has definitely turned against the extremists. The anti-terror strategy launched by Punjab's police chief, K P S Gill, seems to have worked. So the question could be raised: Has the military option worked in Punjab?

It is the position of this writer that this question cannot be answered in the affirmative right now. Only time will tell whether the military campaign has proved successful. However, one must face up to the fact that the military option has never produced permanent peace in this part of the world. Military crackdowns or a solution that is enforced by the force of arms only generate more hostility among the targets of such actions. Resentment builds up in the affected community and explodes into the open when the authorities least expect it.

The ideal approach to defusing separatist rebellions is the use of negotiations and other peaceful means of conflict management which should have as their objective the redressing of genuine grievances of the party that is up in arms, so to speak. So it is too early to wax eloquent about the virtues of the military option vis-a-vis Punjab.

However, it should be noted that the lull in Punjab also came in the wake of attempts to restore the democratic process in that conflict-ridden state. First, elections to the state legislature were held in early 1993 and a Congress (I) Ministry was sworn in. Subsequently, local govern-

ment elections were successfully conducted. Today these political institutions are fully operational. Perhaps this has also something to do with the restoration of normalcy in Punjab.

Returning to the history of the Sikh rebellion, one of the most important developments in the post-Indira Gandhi era was the killing of some 5000 Sikhs in Northern India in October 1984. This was the Hindu hardliners' reaction to the assassination of Premier Indira Gandhi.

This was a veritable gift to the Sikh extremists. They fought back with increasing ferocity. The anti-Sikh riots also had the effect of further alienating the moderate Sikh populace from the Centre. For it was rumoured that Congress (I) elements had had a hand in the massacre. One of the chief demands of the Sikhs in the post-massacre period was that the Hindu backlash should be probed and the culprits brought to book speedily.

Premier Rajiv Gandhi, who succeeded his mother, thought it wise to adopt a conciliatory approach in the face of spiralling violence in the Punjab and opened talks with the Akoli Dal, this time headed by Hachand Singh Longowal. In the meantime, the Centre promised to carry out a series of measures to calm the situation. Some of these were:

- the holding of an inquiry into the anti-Sikh riots;
- release of Sikh detainees who were not charged with specific crimes;
- the disbanding of special military tribunals and a pledge to raise investments in Punjab's industrialisation.

The Gandhi-Longowal talks proved successful. In one of the most significant developments in the history of the troubled state, the protagonists to the talks agreed on a peace plan that had the potential of bringing normalcy to Punjab. This historic accord was signed by Gandhi and Longowal on 24 July 1985. Among other things, the Centre promised to set up numerous commissions and tribunals to probe Sikh grievances. The Onandapur Sahib Resolution was referred to the Sakaria Commission which was examining Centre-state relations. Under the terms of the Accord, Chandigarh, which was the capital of the neighbouring, Hindu-dominated Haryana state, was to be transferred to Punjab.

Longowal had the Accord ratified by the Akoli Dal and paved the way for the ending of what Sikhs called the 'Righteous War', which had been raging since 1982.

However, even this peace had its sworn enemies. In one of the most serious setbacks to peace, Sikh extremists gunned down Longowal on 20 August 1985. The peace process seemed to be shattered.

The Centre, nevertheless, remained undeterred. In the face of this and many other obstacles to peace, it succeeded in conducting elections in Punjab. The Akoli Dal emerged victorious and a ministry headed by Surjit Singh Barnola was sworn in.

Then things began to go wrong. The Centre began to backslide and go back on its promises. The Centre suddenly seemed to lack the will to implement the principal provisions of the Accord.

Commissions and tribunals were not set up, nor were grievances redressed. Chandigarh was not transferred to Punjab in the face of protests from Hindu hardliners in Haryana, including the Chief Minister, Bhajan Lal. Barnola was seen as ineffective by the Sikh populace. Violence continued to spiral.

It would have been possible to salvage the peace Accord if the Centre had acted in a spirit of statesmanship and delivered on its promises. Instead, it chose to placate the Hindu hardliners. Punjab was falling apart.

Short-term political gain figures prominently in the thinking of the Centre. It preferred to let the chance for peace in Punjab go abegging rather than fall out of favour with its support bases. Survival at the Centre was more important for the Congress (I) administration than peace in one of its most troubled states.

As should have been expected, chaos mounted in Punjab. Very soon the state was ungovernable. In May 1987, the Barnola administration was dismissed and Governor's rule was introduced. Punjab was thus ruled by the Centre until fresh state elections were held a few years later.

(ii) Kashmir

India's Jammu and Kashmir state - its only Moslem majority one - has been a bone of contention between India and Pakistan since the partition of the subcontinent in 1947. In fact, India and Pakistan have already waged two wars over it, each claiming ownership to the strategically located, idyllic, Himalayan state. At present, Pakistan governs one third of Jammu and Kashmir while the rest is remaining within the Indian fold.

In terms of the 1947 rationale, on the basis of which the subcontinent split into two on religious lines, Jammu and Kashmir should have been part of Pakistan. After all, it is a Moslem majority region. However, the National Conference Party which governed Kashmir from the time of independence until the early eighties, under the leadership of Mohamed Abdullah and later by his son, Farouk Abdullah, preferred to be within the Indian Union, albeit enjoying a special status.

The current insurrection which has made Jammu and Kashmir almost ungovernable, has its roots in former Indian Premier Indira Gandhi's attempts to destabilize the state administration and bring it under the control of the Congress (I). She engineered the collapse of the Farouk Abdullah-led National Conference administration and ensured the installation of a coalition government, which included the Congress (I). These events transpired in mid-1983 when an incipient secessionist movement in the state was being spearheaded by the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF).

As this writer sees it, much of the current turbulence in Kashmir could have been averted if a representative government had remained in power in the state. Premier Indira Gandhi did not apparently calculate that her cynical machinations to subvert the democratic process in the state would some day backfire on the Centre and unleash forces that would relentlessly take Kashmir on the secessionist path and impose more and more strains on India's relations with Pakistan. Here, then, is another example of how short-term political gain or political myopia could bring dangerous repercussions for a state.

Rising political violence in Kashmir necessitated the imposition of 'direct rule' or Governor's rule. For the past four years the state has not experienced democratic government. Nor has there been a serious attempt on the part of the Centre to reintroduce the democratic process, initiate a dialogue with the proliferating extremist

groups and introduce a measure of normalcy into the state.

Instead, the Centre has attempted to use its military muscle to quell the Moslem insurrection. This has led to a spiral of violence, increasing deaths among civilians, apparently caught up in the cross fire, devastation and damage to property, displacement of civilians and allegations that the security forces are committing human rights violations.

There are two broad divisions within the armed groups that are fighting the security forces. One section prefers total independence for Jammu and Kashmir while the other opts for union with Pakistan.

Kashmir hit the headlines recently when Indian troops surrounded the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar with the aim of overpowering scores of militants who took refuge there. The shrine was believed to contain a strand of Prophet Mohamed's beard - a relic which is revered by the Moslem world. This siege was looked upon as a flashpoint for another round of Hindu-Moslem clashes in India.

Meanwhile, Kashmir's main anti-Indian groups got their act together and formed what is called the Kashmir Freedom Front, under the leadership of Moulavi Omar Farooq, teenage son of Mullah Mirevaiz Farooq, who was assassinated in May 1990. The Front consists of some 30 groups and is not part of the clandestine underground network which is fighting the security forces.

Latest reports indicate that Indian Premier Narasimha Rao has appointed a new special minister for internal security Rajesh Pilot, and a new Governor for Kashmir in the person of retired army general K V Krishna Rao, to launch talks with the dissident groups.

However, the possibilities of holding, a political dialogue are slim because the extremists are in the process of eliminating the 'doves' among the rebels. In April they killed one such personality, Abdul Ahad Gaunu, an adviser to the JKLF.

Moreover, it is unlikely that talks could be held in an atmosphere of continuing violence and bloodshed. Among the more recent atrocities were the massacre by Indian paramilitary forces of 53 people in Sopore, the setting ablaze of Lal Chourk district in Srinagar and the murder of a family.

(To be Continued)

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The Moscow route

Thirty Six Tamil refugees set afloat in three dinghies from a ship in the narrow Oresund Strait between Sweden and Denmark were rescued by Danish authorities on 4 February — Sri Lanka's Independence Day — after spending twelve hours at sea. The Danish sea rescue service was alerted after one of the dinghies landed at Koge, twenty miles south of Copenhagen.

Observers believe that the Tamils came through Moscow which is now favoured as a transit point for asylum-seekers. There are currently around 5,000 Sri Lankans in Moscow living in difficult conditions and awaiting transport to other Western countries. Moscow police are usually satisfied by the claim that they are Indians arriving in Russia to enrol in language classes. The Russian immigration service has recently begun registration of the Sri Lankans.

According to reports refugees arrive in Moscow from Colombo with false travel documents provided by travel agents in the Sri Lankan capital. Many travel agencies are run by Tamil militant groups which control the refugee market. The cost for each refugee is around Rs 400,000 (\$8,000), a life-time's salary for some Sri Lankans. The continuing arrests of Tamils, long detention and fear of torture at the hands of the security forces keep the refugee market alive. Many refugees borrow from money-lenders or relatives in desperation and if returned from the West before paying back the loans, they would be indebted for life.

The false travel document trade extends beyond the shores of Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan refugee Loganathan Sabanayagam was jailed for 15 months in Toronto, Canada for involvement in turning out false Canadian and Sri Lankan passports. Reports say at least 15 centres run by Sri Lankans produced false travel documents of high quality and the Canadian government has been forced to issue new passports with additional security features.

An eight-member foreign delegation, including Director General of Canadian Immigration Ministry Hallan Johnston, German Border Police Director Helmut Sipple and Netherlands Justice Ministry Regional Director Harke Heida arrived in Sri Lanka to work with airline and government officials to prevent the use of false travel documents. According to the delegation 18% of passengers to Canada without documents were from Sri Lanka. Around 11,000 Sri Lankans had entered Germany illegally and 950 are said to have arrived in the Netherlands without proper documents.

V. Tissaiveerasingham who was informed in mid-February by the Swedish authorities that he would be taken into custody to be deported to Sri Lanka, poured petrol and burned himself on 2 March in Uppsala.

Inspector General of Police Frank de Silva who met the delegation said Sri Lanka was keen to prevent illegal entry of its citizens into other countries. Reports say the foreign governments would introduce tough new measures to combat the 'human trafficking trade'. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) would organise a special training programme for Sri Lankans in the detection of false and forged travel documents.

It is clear that the Western governments intend to continue their tough stand on immigration and refugee issues and may move to deport rejected Sri Lankan asylum-seekers. The agreement between Switzerland and Sri Lanka for repatriation of Tamil refugees could be a trigger for return from other countries.

PR Segar who was deported from Denmark on 8 February was arrested by Colombo police two days later. He was released after a week on the intervention of a local politician and fled to

Singapore where he has applied for asylum at the Danish embassy. No decision has yet been taken by the Danish authorities. The Danish government continues to insist that any refugee camp on south Sri Lanka is appropriate for returned asylum-seekers. Three senior Scandinavian officials led by Hans Kofoed from the Danish Foreign Ministry arrived in Colombo on 27 February to observe the situation.

Sri Lankan Tamil Vinash who was deported from Sweden on 25 February was detained at the Colombo airport because he had only an identity card. While in Stockholm he had refused to go into the Sri Lankan embassy to obtain a Sri Lankan passport.

Vickramaraja Tissaiveerasingham who was informed in mid-February by the Swedish immigration authorities that he would be taken into custody to be deported to Sri Lanka, poured petrol and burned himself on 2 March in Uppsala. He suffered severe burn injuries and lies unconscious in a hospital. Swedish government continues to maintain that conditions in south Sri Lanka are conducive for returns.

Refugee workers believe many refugees in the West will go underground rather than be deported to Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan refugee organisations say their experience with Indian refugee returnees indicates that the Sri Lankan government is not committed or able to attend to the needs of the refugees and employment, education, accommodation and security will not be accessible to returnees from the West.

Observers are convinced that refugees will be free to return only when comprehensive measures have been taken to ensure a just settlement to the Sri Lankan conflict. Tough action by Western and Sri Lankan governments will only complicate an increasingly complex situation and guarantee further human misery.

(S. L. Monitor)

Chanaka : Another Fascist ?

I read Dr Chanaka Amaratunga's article in the *Lanka Guardian* of 1st April with a shock of recognition. In Russia the party headed by Zhirinovsky, the Hitlerite racist and fascist, is called the Liberal Democratic Party. In Sri Lanka the Liberal party is in alliance with the racist and fascist UNP. I recognized suddenly that liberalism in the late twentieth century can accommodate racism and fascism, at least in Russia and Sri Lanka.

But probably Dr Amaratunga will hold that my characterization of the UNP as racist and fascist is far-fetched. I have established, convincingly enough I am sure, in a lengthy letter in the *Island* of 15th February that the UNP has always been blatantly racist towards Muslims. In this comment I cannot go into detail to establish a further charge, which is that the UNP has been pre-eminently the party of the Westernized Sinhalese who have always included a hard core of both anti-Muslim and anti-Tamil racists. They under the 1977 Government, far more than the so-called Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists, were responsible for driving the Eelam movement into armed militancy.

As for Fascism, I am referring to that term in the popular sense of addiction to totally unprincipled brute power. The UNP merits being called fascist because of its unrelenting State terrorism for seventeen years. The first startling manifestation of State terrorism was the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1977 and the latest was seen at the Eastern Provincial Council elections. It was not so apparent in the South only because the Ruhunuputras withstood it, which led to spectacular election results calling into question the validity of all the State terrorist elections held after 1977.

Perhaps it might be argued that since tolerance is of the essence of liberalism, the tolerance extended even to racism and fascism by Zhirinovsky and Dr Amara-

tunga makes them the two greatest liberals of all time. I rather regret, however, that their liberalism is so remote from that of John Stuart Mill and Acton and all the others who made liberal democracy something we can admire. I think of the courageous liberal spirit to be found in the writings of E.M. Forster. The achievements of the UNP, with which our Liberal Party is in alliance, would have made him retch.

I must pose two questions to Dr Amaratunga, arising out of his advocacy of the Premadasa policies in his article. His answers will help clarify the kind of liberal democracy he is offering Sri Lanka.

I myself have argued in an article published in the *Island* of 8th April 1994 that the best strategy for the UNP would be to make a sensible adaptation of the Premadasa policies. But, I argued further it is not possible to dissociate the Premadasa policies from the Premadasa image, and that means that the question of his assets will inevitably come to the forefront of public consciousness. It will be remembered that the publication of the details of those assets shocked an indignant public, and it has to be expected that unless their provenance is cleared up they will have an adverse impact on the fortunes of the UNP at forthcoming elections. I therefore suggested the appointment of an independent commission to investigate the Premadasa assets.

Could Dr Amaratunga make a statement on behalf of the Liberal Party proposing the appointment of such a commission? In the alternative, could he explain how his position might be reconciled with the understanding of liberalism among the foreign donors who have been funding the Council for Liberal Democracy? In other words, with the understanding of liberalism prevalent in the West.

Izeth Hussain

What a descent !

It is a matter for regret that Arden who was forthright in his criticism to expose the hypocritical manner in which the first President under the 1978 Constitution conducted the affairs of the so-called Dhamista Government and the destinies of this country should himself fall a victim to his own criticism as seen in the postscript he contributed to the *L.G.* to justify an anti-India and anti-Tamil stance, forgetting our common heritage.

T.S. Kumaresan

Jaffna

A Hindu Perspective on Bosnia

You have published a commentary by Izeth Hussain entitled, "A Muslim perspective on Bosnia" (*LG*, March 15). Fine. Will you, now permit me some space to provide a Hindu perspective on Bosnia?

As a Hindu, who believe in (a) **Brahman**, the creator, preserver or transformer and reabsorber of everything; and (b) theory of **karma**, it is my belief that the current fate of Muslims in Bosnia is related to the historical plundering of the Serb land by the Ottoman Turks (read as, Muslims), which began in 1389 at the Battle of Kosvo and continued for almost five centuries following that. In 1459, "Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II achieves complete annexation of Serbia. The Turks rule for the next 400 years, often ruthlessly. They impress Serbian youth into military service, exterminate the nobles, burden the people with heavy taxes and subject the Serbian Orthodox Church to the control of hated Greek patriarchs", according to the historical synopsis, published in the *Newsweek* of April 19, 1993.

In the Hollywood western movies, the heroes wore white and rode in white horses. The villains had to wear the black and ride on black horses. In the current Bosnian conflict, Muslims are being portrayed by Izeth Hussain as pitiable heroes. But, history shows they also acted as villains for centuries in the same battlegrounds. So, the theory of **karma** holds that the current generation of Muslims are reaping what their forefathers sowed.

Sachi Sri Kantha

Osaka BioScience Institute,
Japan.

Sri Lanka's man of all seasons

In the troubled cricket of a troubled nation, one man who has seen it all is Arjuna Ranatunga. In fact, he has been in the thick of it, having played all but four of Sri Lanka's 50 Tests since he was blooded as a cherubic 18-year-old in the island nation's inaugural Test in 1982.

Among the ones who made that first XI in the Test against Keith Fletcher's Englishmen, and a few who didn't even manage that, Ranatunga was the most fortuitous. For the likes of Anura Tenekoon and Sunil Wettimuny, a duo which lent as able shoulders as any other to the wheels of Sri Lankan cricket, Test recognition had come too late. For others like Bandula Warnapura, Tony Opatha or Lalith Kalupperuma, it came as a dying flame would.

Being born at the right time was never so important to success.

Ranatunga is already Sri Lanka's most capped player with 46 Tests and their highest scorer as well. Short and squat, Ranatunga is a left-hander in the mould of Allan Border rather than David Gower and the small mountain of 2622 runs is testimony enough of his effectiveness.

As an unknowing lad of 10, Ranatunga ventured unlikely enough into bowling right-arm medium pace. In his first season at Ananda School in Colombo, he succeeded in fair measure but even to the humble school coach, it was rather easy to see where his greater, and explosive, talent lay.

Ranatunga made the switch delightfully. Given his strained athleticism and growing signs of a roly-polly figure it was a wise decision too. In any case, his development as a batsman was both swift and spectacular, especially after Sir Garfield Sobers showed him the way.

In the buzz days of Lankan cricket, before Test baptism, he made the most of the domestic matches. A free-flowing batsman, at his best when attacking, Ranatunga was, unlike the more established players, free of pressure. "I think I just played my natural game and I kept getting a lot of runs", says Ranatunga pecking pleasurably at his memory. But his quick to concede that it even that may not have been enough. "I think what tilted the scales was the fact of my being a left-hander. Unlike now, there were few left-handers in Lankan cricket", he said. Ranatunga scored an impressive 54 in the first knock of that exciting Test which, surprisi-

ngly enough, the Lankans came close to victory and also launched Lankan cricket's most durable career.

He is the only one left from that side. Duleep Mendis, Roy Dias and Asantha De Mel had their moments before father time's slow march caught up; the elegant Ranjan Madugalle suffered first from a lack of international cricket and then a slump, apparently due to the pressures of captaincy leaving the job to Ranatunga.

Ranatunga's career has risen from the day Sri Lanka gained Test status

Unlike Madugalle, Ranatunga was young enough to pass through a phase where Sri Lankans had little of international cricket, and none at all at home due to turmoil in the Island. The other day Bandula Warnapara, Sri Lanka's first captain and now the cricket manager, unerringly hit the nail, and authorities, on the head when he said domestic cricket in Sri Lanka helped neither one-day nor Test batting, because the matches were two-day affairs. That apart, the Lankan batting order, especially in Tests, looks puzzled and even in the case of a generous talent as Ranatunga, it is not hard to see.

Ranatunga was a joyous batsman with a known pack punch in his bat. It was the way he played the game a long time. It was the way many of the Lankan Batsmen liked to play too, a particularly successful one being Aravinda De Silva who, ironically, has emerged the best suited now to Test matches as well.

Ranatunga played a classic one-day innings, he himself has never matched, in the Australasia Cup in Sharjah three years ago, India bearing the brunt of it.

Lankan hopes appeared doomed against the chase of 242 against India before the stocky batsman struck an explosive 85 not out off a mere 77 balls and guided them to an amazing victory. In the four years since, Ranatunga hasn't played any knock resembling that. Contrarily, cares of captaincy have come to rein his batting and as if the seriousness of Test match cricket has only now dawned on them, the Lankan cricketers have made batting a rather difficult task, even difficult to watch.

Sobers' reading of Lankan cricket early in the '80s of a cavalier side that would, largely through its batting and fielding, bring to the game great joy. In hindsight, it has proved only partially true. For it is no more a great fielding side, and its batting character has changed considerably. In fact, so much so the Lankans are often thought to be adopting a negative approach to the game, especially when they realise early that their chances of a victory are less than remote.

It is a criticism Ranatunga denies stoutly. "I don't think we play negative cricket. To the contrary, we have tried to be very positive, but you need a lot of luck to win games," he said. He also denies fielding standards have plummeted, again not with great conviction.

The job Ranatunga holds is, though, not easy and not many aspire for in Lanka. In fact, he lost the job briefly after an adverse report on him during the tour of New Zealand a couple of years back, during which he pushed the case of his younger brother, Dhammika, too far. Ranatunga now believes it marked the worst point of his career. "I and the team did well in New Zealand. Of the 15 days' Test cricket, we dominated 13", he recalled ruefully.

Aravinda De Silva stood in as captain in the World Cup but soon enough sanity and Ranatunga returned to the helm of Sri Lankan cricket. But what can be exasperating is the dealings with the administration which has been known to betray both a lack of sympathy and an understanding of the game. Cricket manager Duleep Mendis got the short shrift despite Ranatunga's apparent comfort with him after Lanka lost to India and South Africa at home. After an unsung soul held the job during the Hero Cup to no consequence, Bandula Warnapura, a one-time rebel who toured South Africa, has finally gained partial acceptance.

Even if Lankan cricket is not at its brightest phase now, it surely is at its busiest, so much so the Lankans, unwittingly, complained of it. "I think we are now getting used to it, including the travelling part," he says as the 30-year-old looks hopefully ahead to another five years' cricket.

Caught in the Act

Sakuntala Narasimhan

WOMEN & THE LAW:

By Lina Gonsalves.
Lancer International,
NEW DELHI

In theory our country has several laws on the statute books to offer women protection on par with men, and our constitution too forbids discrimination on grounds of sex. In practice, however, those who are in charge of enforcing these laws — the judges, the police force, and public prosecutors — often betray a gender bias that nullifies the legal guarantees. This book gives some examples of cases from recent legal records, to make this point.

There are two aspects of this question — one is the gender discrimination built into the law itself, and the other is the discrimination imposed during the interpretation of the law. The acts governing succession and matrimony, for instance, place woman at a handicap compared to men. In the absence of a uniform civil code applicable to all Indians regardless of their faith, women continue to be governed by their respective religious laws, and in every one of these, whether it is Hindu, Muslim or Christian, the patriarchal perspective dominates in varying degrees, to the detriment of women.

If a man is displeased with a woman and thinks that she is not subservient enough, his rights to default on his matrimonial obligations are stronger than hers.

The constitution guarantees the right to an individual's dignity, right to faith and freedom to work, but a Delhi High Court

judge has said in a ruling of 1984 that "Introduction of constitutional law in the home is most inappropriate... and will be a ruthless destroyer of the marriage institution. In the privacy of the home neither Article 21 nor Article 14 have any place."

A woman can, in other words, be beaten and starved, but she cannot claim relief because it is important to "preserve the institution of marriage"! A Christian woman cannot seek divorce, a married Hindu woman cannot adopt (even with the consent of the husband) and cannot demand partition of inherited property. Mothering is extolled and sought as an obligation, but mothers are 'dispensable' — in a 1981 judgment from Punjab, the court ruled that "the son no longer needs the tender and affection of the mother (who was seeking custody, after raising him all through his childhood) because he has passed that age."

Custody was awarded to the father though he was having illicit relations with another woman.

Similarly, in one dowry death case, the accused was acquitted because the FIR (first information report) by the woman's family was not given promptly, but in another case, a similar delay in filing a FIR by the husband was condoned as "understandable" since he was "a respectable man of the town and did not want to act in a hurry lest his reputation may suffer, and naturally required some time to reflect before taking action"!

A few points made by the author are worth noting — A working woman can claim a share in the items of the matrimonial home only if she can actually prove that she paid for them. If her earnings have paid for food, clothing etc., while the wife cannot claim any beneficial interest, as the courts insist on documentary proof; othe-

wise, the woman is not considered the legal owner.

Under the Hindu marriage Act 1955, a woman has no right to a share in the income and assets after a divorce unless it stands in the joint names, or was gifted to her before marriage or at the time of marriage. Among Christians, a deserted or judicially separated wife must explicitly apply for a court order, to prevent her husband (or his creditors) from claiming a right over her property acquired after desertion/separation (because by law the husband is still considered to have control over her property).

We pat ourselves on our backs over the progressive legislation regarding widow remarriage, but under the law, as soon as a widow remarries, she "ceases to be a mother" (to her progeny by the first marriage); "her son ceases to be her son" (because that son is supposed to be for 'the spiritual benefit' of the deceased husband).

Such anomalies still remain, although a few liberal judges have, doubtless, given judgments that set a precedent in terms of a more equitable interpretation of woman's entitlement vis-a-vis the male. (One judge, for instance, has condemned the law regarding compulsory restitution of conjugal rights, to force a woman to cohabit with her estranged husband, while another judge upheld a woman's right to give importance to her decision to work outside the home).

The author is herself an advocate, but she makes some careless slip-ups; the amount awarded to Shah Bano as maintenance is mentioned as Rs. 174 in one place and as Rs. 179 in the very next page! However, we need such documentation, to sensitise both the public and the law enforcers, to the spirit of the law.

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