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CHANGE AND CHALLENGE

AN I.M.F. POLL ?

— *Mervyn de Silva*

APPEAL TO THE WAR-WEARY

— *James Manor*

SOUTHERN PROVINCE AND AFTER

— *Marxist view*

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● KATHMANDU STATEMENT

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Black Knight
It's your move

The mood for change — the challenges ahead

Mervyn de Silva

In its pre-election reportage, the LG has tried to spotlight three factors: the generational (Sri Lankans vote at 18), the political climate and the mood for change (the UNP has been in office for 17 years) and the ethnic-economic interaction. Military spending is the nexus of these major problems — a political problem, a drain on resources and a foreign policy issue. It concerns India, the region and the donors.

They call it the 17-year itch. Millions of voters have rather vague memories of the rule by the opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), which lost power in 1977. The only government all the first-time voters — those who turned 18 this year — have known is the one by the ruling United National Party (UNP). As they cast their ballots on August 16 to choose a new parliament, Sri Lankans will decide if the time is ripe to change their rulers.

In the run-up to the polls, opinion appears to be divided over which way the voters will swing. Political analysts, who delve into the history of the country's electoral record, and others adept at judging the prevailing mass mood believe the UNP has overstayed its welcome. Yet others point to the SLFP's "proven gift for snatching defeat from the jaws of victory." But most agree that there is generational pressure for change.

More important, the choice between change and status quo will be overwhelmingly influenced by two crucial issues: the state of the economy and the decade-old civil war in the north and the east of the country dominated by Tamils.

As it happens, faster economic growth and the escalating ethnic conflict have coincided with the UNP's time in power. In addition to loss of life and property, the war against Tamil insurgents is costing the exchequer US\$1 million a day, or about one-fifth of the total national budget. Although the economy has grown at a healthy rate about 5% in recent years, inflation remains in double digits.

And how are the 1,400 candidates from 39 political parties contesting 196 parliamentary seats addressing these crucial issues? They have all been strong on rhetoric and weak on specifics. On economic issues, the manifestos of both the

opposition People's Alliance led by the SLFP and the ruling UNP are almost similar — full of vague promises and populist measures that could damage fiscal discipline.

In an election year, even the UNP, which prided itself on economic reforms, has resorted to subsidies and handouts. In his May Day speech, seven weeks before calling the snap polls, President D. B. Wijetunge announced a host of campaign goodies: lower income tax for the middle class, fertiliser subsidies to farmers, free lunches to all students, insurance schemes for farmers and the self-employed and lower electricity rates. The president failed to mention the inflationary impact of these measures.

The people's Alliance, a grouping of the SLFP and some leftist parties, is unlikely to oppose subsidies, although the SLFP has become more pro-business and is wooing the middle class.

The tub-thumping rhetoric, however, has concentrated on negative campaign speeches. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe does not tire of reminding the public that the last SLFP regime nationalised industries and ground the economy to a halt. People's Alliance leader Chandrika Kumaratunga tells businessmen: "You need not fear that we'll go back to the era of restrictions and control." Chandrika's economic advisers have proposed a two-track strategy: a continuation of freemarket policies but a "structural adjustment with a human face." And the prime minister counters: "We have yet to see this human face."

The Prime minister has an unusual ally, Chandrika's brother Anura Bandaranaike, who defected from the SLFP to become a UNP cabinet minister in April. Anura warns that if his sister's group were to win, "there would be chaos in the country."

For its part, the opposition has lambasted the UNP, charging abuse of power and rampant corruption. Chandrika says she will put an end to what she calls the UNP's "crony capitalism." UNP corruption and nepotism have led some critics to name it the "Uncle-Nephew Party." However, wags on the opposite side have re-christened the SLFP the "Sri Lanka Family Party."

Familial connections and the fight between the two major parties are part of the country's history since independence. In 1951, when S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, the deputy leader of the UNP, realised that the then-Prime Minister D. S. Senanaike was quietly grooming his son Dudley for the top spot, he founded his own SLFP.

No matter which party forms the next government, it will have to cope with the Tamil insurgency. Earlier the president had dismissed it as "only a terrorist problem," and offended the minority Tamils as well as Muslims. Alliance leader Chandrika has promised "Unconditional talks with all Tamil parties." Which of the two parties the majority Sinhalese voters support on the vital Tamil question could swing the election.

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STOP PRESS

PROF. PIERIS TO L.G.: THE ISSUES

The top adviser to the P.A., the former Colombo Univ. Vice Chancellor said: (a) search for national consensus to ethnic conflict (b) de-politicisation and end to confrontational politics (c) power must promote wellbeing of people (d) restoration of Social Contract.

Heading for change ?

Voters will Deliver a Verdict on their Rulers — and the War

Sri Lankans have a sense of exhaustion. Now in its eleventh year, the war between government troops and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who are fighting for a separate state in the north is slowly bleeding the country. Keeping the guerrillas at bay costs \$ 1 million a day and siphons off most of the rewards of the country's burgeoning economy. Strain on the army has taken a harsh toll. Suicide and desertion are common. Says one soldier grateful for the current respite from fighting: "A year ago we were walking skeletons, eternally in the jungle, going from one operation to another. Finally, we have a chance to rest".

But for how much longer? In Colombo, all parties agree that the war must be stopped. The question is how. As parliamentary elections loom, both the ruling United National Party (UNP) and the rival Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) avow their commitment to negotiating a settlement. But in the meantime, government forces are gathering strength and materiel for what President Dingiri Banda Wijetunge hopes will be a decisive battle for Jaffna, the rebel stronghold. Defense Secretary Hamilton Wanasinghe has made clear the government's position: "Civil administration must return to areas not yet under our control. People in Jaffna must be able to exercise their franchise". Wijetunge has another inducement: according to the Constitution, presidential polls due in November won't be valid unless they are conducted in all districts of the country. The government controls just 20% of the Jaffna area.

Wijetunge won't be able to mount a military campaign, however, unless the UNP wins its campaign for a majority in parliament. The president dissolved the assembly on June 24 and declared a general election for Aug. 16, six months before it was due. Though he hoped the

timing would improve his own poll chances in November, the vote promises to be a stern test for the UNP. The party has held power since defeating the leftist government of the SLFP led by Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike in 1977. The UNP brought a combination of free-market economies and authoritarianism that transformed the island. Growth averaged 5% a year and dependence on the state sector declined steadily.

But the UNP era also coincided with the explosion of ethnic tensions between the majority Sinhalese community, who are mainly Buddhists, and the minority Tamils, most of whom are Hindus. For years the UNP was identified with a conciliatory approach to Tamil separatists. While Wijetunge says his government is open to talks with the Tigers, he has taken a harder line. "There is no ethnic problem in Sri Lanka", he told reporters before dissolving parliament, "only a terrorist problem".

Leading the opposition charge is the SLFP's Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaranatunge, daughter of two prime ministers, Sirimavo and her late husband Solomon (see box). Though in her parents' day the core of the party were fierce nationalists opposed to making any concessions to separatists, Kumaranatunge is seen as a dove on the Tamil issue. Holding similar views cost her husband his life at the hands of Sinhalese radicals. She promises "unconditional talks with all Tamil parties". With her mother she has built a coalition called the People's Alliance comprised of leftist and ethnic minority parties.

Given the Tigers' determination, there is no guarantee that any government can deliver peace. But the candidates are offering clear alternatives that make the general election a virtual referendum on the war. Wijetunge, who had ordered the military to prepare for a major offensive

in Jaffna before calling the election, now intends to wait for the voters' verdict. If the UNP wins a majority, the army is likely to wage a vigorous Jaffna campaign before the November presidential poll. Says Rohan Gunaratne, author of *War and Peace in Sri Lanka*: "The polling will determine the future of Sri Lanka's policy on the national question — whether the government should negotiate with the LTTE or continue the war".

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Besides the Tamil question, the two parties' platforms are virtually identical. So much so, in fact, that People's Alliance general secretary G.L. Peiris accused the UNP of stealing the PA's manifesto and publishing it as its own. Both parties pledge to provide a dole for the unemployed. Kumaranatunge is wooing the middle class, for whom war-driven inflation has made life difficult, with promises of a "a safety net". Both parties have vowed to curtail the enormous powers of the president under the current constitution — the PA by eliminating the office.

The rivals are devoting much of their energy to negative campaigning. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe kindles memories of the last SLFP regime nationalizing industries and even tearing up golf courses. He has some useful support. "If the PA won there'd be chaos in the country", warns Anura Bandaranaike, who bolted to the UNP after a fracas with his sister Chandrika. "The PA is comprised of leftists, centrists, and Marxists. How can they agree on a framework for policies?" The PA focuses on the corruption and abuse of power it portrays as endemic in the UNP administration. Kumaranatunge promises to end "crony capitalism" and apply market reforms "with a human touch".

The UNP is believed to command a loyal 40% of the vote, much of it in the countryside thanks to the popular poverty relief program initiated by the late UNP president Ranasinghe Premadasa. The SLFP can be assured of about 30% of the ballots from its faithful. That leaves about 30% up for grabs for a bewildering field: 1,440 candidates from 39 parties contesting 196 seats. Among them are remnants of the radical Sinhalese group the JVP, now pursuing electoral politics after a bloody confrontation with the government in the late 1980s.

Most analysts believe the UNP's long incumbency favors the SLFP. "It looks like the PA may lead the country into the 21st century", says one. Agrees Colombo businessman Ajantha de Alwis: "It's time to clean the stables." The People's Alliance

expects to win a "comfortable working majority" at the polls, according to Peiris. That would mean getting over half the votes nationwide and winning at least 115 of the National Assembly's 225 seats. A

former UNP secretary-general concedes that "It will be difficult for the UNP to obtain a majority". Clearly, a watershed election is shaping up for Sinhalese and Tamils alike.

DYNASTIES

All in the Family

The world's first female prime minister hopes to get a final taste of power next month. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, 78, won't contest the snap parliamentary polls, but if her party wins she plans to take an appointed seat and be made ceremonial president. The reason, claim the island-nation's wags: her horoscope says she will die only after holding office again.

In the political wilderness for seventeen years, the Bandaranaiques are an Asian dynasty to whom power is considered a birthright. The family entered politics when Solomon Bandaranaike, founder of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), swept into office on a radical nationalist platform in 1956. Three years later he was brutally gunned down. Into the vacuum stepped widow Sirimavo, a mother and housewife inexperienced in politics.

Although she initially won the hearts of Sri Lankans, voters soon grew weary of her dictatorial ways. They threw her out in 1965 after she tried to muzzle the press, then voted her back five years later. That time her rule was rocked by a Marxist revolt. The heavyhanded, steel-voiced widow sent troops to quash the rebellion, killing thousands.

Sirimavo was ousted by the United National Party in the 1977 general elections. In 1988 she ran for president but lost to the late Ranasinghe Premadasa. Despite ill health, the SLFP chief wants to personally lead the People's Alliance into power. At her side is her daughter and deputy, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaranatunge. Chandrika, 49, is her mother's chosen heir. Early this month Sirimavo flew to Singapore for foot surgery. Before leaving she wiped away a tear and she

ordered SLFP leaders to help Chandrika carry on the campaign. Chandrika is the party's choice for prime minister, the top power post under the party's constitutional plans.

The junior Bandaranaike's entry into politics was as brutal as her mother's. She picked up the torch after her husband, Vijay Kumaranatunge, a popular actor turned politician, was gunned down in 1988. Chandrika has proved her worth at the ballot box. In May last year she won the most votes in council elections in the Western Province to become the nation's first female chief minister.

Sirimavo's quest for power forced her son, Anura, 46, to quit the SLFP. The party's all-island organizer for many years, he fell out with mother and sister last year. Some party stalwarts have openly suggested Sirimavo should hand over leadership to him. The family feud threatened to split the party. Its public standing fell to an all-time low. Anura finally crossed over to the government benches, where he was made a minister. "I'm absolutely confident the UNP can win", says Anura. "My mother's coalition cannot beat us".

However, the UNP is in crisis following the May 1993 assassination of Premadasa. The SLFP, on the other hand, is on a winning streak. It followed up Chandrika's election victory with another in the Southern Province last month. That sparked hopes of a comeback for the SLFP. Just a year ago, its chances of a national victory would have been remote. Now the party and the Bandaranaike dynasty — or the female members of it — seem to be rising again.

Bring down the UNP regime

The United National Party (UNP) Government in Sri Lanka suffered a humiliating defeat in the Southern Provincial Council (SPC) elections held on March 24, 1994

This is the worst electoral defeat for the UNP since it took office 1977.

This regime has rigged elections, deployed goon squads, purveyed Sinhalese racism, declared war on the Tamil people in the north and east, unleashed repression against workers and peasants, and is hated by all the oppressed.

It has committed the 17 million people to pay off a huge burden of debt to the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and imperialist financiers, and has opened the country up to super-exploitation through its 'Open Economy' policy and 'Free Trade Zones'.

One

The UNP managed to win only one seat in the three districts in Southern Province and it only scraped through in this seat. As usual the UNP used goon squads and the entire media and state machine to back its campaign.

Racialism, the hallmark of UNP politics, was deployed and President D B Wijetunge utilised Sinhalese chauvinism when he spoke during the election campaign.

He told election meetings the Government's war against the Tamil people in the north and east of Sri Lanka had nothing to do with a counter-revolutionary war against the Tamil's right to national self-determination, but was a problem of 'terrorism'.

Immediately prior to the SPC election, the UNP regime sidelined Thondaman, a UNP supporter with a base amongst the Tamil plantation workers, but after having used virulent anti-Tamil racism during the election campaign, Wijetunge turned to Thondaman once again after the vote.

The defeat of the Government in the SPC elections took place as the working class and oppressed masses have begun to demonstrate their strength and opposition to the UNP regime.

This was seen clearly when more than 150,000 workers took part in the May Day march and rally organised by the Podujana Aksath Paramuna (PA), the so-called 'United Front' of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Communist Party.

This movement of the masses has provoked a crisis within the regime, which is confronting defeat in the next general election and in the Presidential elections.

Factions

Competing factions have emerged in the leadership of the UNP, with Wijetunge unable to control his Cabinet. Supporters of ex-President J. R. Jayawardene are mobilising, while the supporters of the assassinated President Premadasa appear to have suffered defeats.

Gamini Dissanayake, a virulent anti-Premadasa man, who was a key figure in attempting to impeach the former President in 1991, regained a seat in Parliament recently. Sirisena Cooray, a close associate of Premadasa has been removed as General Secretary of the UNP

Wijetunge is bringing forward a Cabinet reshuffle to oust former supporters of Premadasa.

Dissanayake, who claims to have the confidence of the imperialists and the national capitalist class, is being tipped as the next UNP Presidential candidate. Wijetunge has been discredited within the UNP by the election loss in the Southern Province.

The winners in the SPC elections were the PA, the so-called 'United Front' of the SLFP LSSP and CP.

The SLFP is the second party of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie, but engages in demagogic talk of 'national independence' and 'state support' for the economy.

Investors

A few weeks ago, Chandrika Kumaranatunga, a leader of the SLFP, held a discussion in Colombo Taj Hotel with capitalist investors. She assured foreign and domestic capitalists she would continue with the 'Open Economy' policy and the 'Free Trade Zones', which have been imposed on Sri Lanka by the UNP regime.

She said the 'Open Economy' with a 'human face' will continue.

The Stalinist CP and the LSSP renegades from Trotskyism, have completely liquidated themselves into the PA 'United Front' and are on the road to a coalition with the SLFP.

At present the supporters of Ernest Mandel's 'United Secretariat of the FI', the Nava Sama Samaja Party, have not yet joined the PA, but are heading in that direction.

An SLFP-LSSP-CP coalition ruled Sri Lanka from 1964 to 1977. It discriminated against the Tamil people and attacked the living standards of the workers and peasants in the interests of the imperialists and Sri Lankan capitalists.

It is clear that the masses are moving into direct confrontation with the UNP regime.

This ruthless administration, which has gained a reputation for corruption, has

caused huge price rises, mass unemployment and launched an onslaught on democratic rights.

The UNP regime is waging a dirty war against the Tamil people in the north and east of the island. The Tamils want their own independent state, the only answer to the endemic Sinhalese chauvinism of the Sri Lankan state.

This war has not only revealed the counter-revolutionary role of the UNP in relation to the Tamil struggle for independence, but it has recruited thousands of unemployed Sinhalese youth into the army to act as cannon fodder in its dirty war.

It has also been used as pretext for mass repression directed against the Sinhalese masses and working-class political movements, done in the name of fighting 'terrorism'.

There have been spontaneous strikes in the 'Free Trade Zones' against super-exploitation and there is unrest amongst farmers.

Recently 15 farmers in Polonnaruwa took part in a mass suicide pact because they could not pay off their debts.

The regime has abolished the fertiliser subsidy and increased the prices of pesticides and fertiliser. Farmers production costs have risen while the price of rice has fallen. The farmers are forming groups to protest against the UNP Government.

Campuses

Unrest on the university campuses is also escalating. The regime failed to address the crisis in hostel accommodation for students at Peradeniya University and closed the university down.

Students have launched a mass protest campaign to get the University re-opened.

This growing tide of unrest amongst workers, peasants and students has led to a rapid political radicalisation.

The decisive task before the Sri Lankan masses today is the building of a revolutionary Trotskyist party, the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, to throw off the treacherous leaders of the SLFP, LSSP, CP and NSSP.

The Sri Lankan section of the ICFI, the Workers Marxist League, is building a revolutionary party to lead the working class and peasant masses to power.

- Bring down the UNP regime!
- Full support to the struggle for Tamil Eelam!
- No backing to the bourgeois SLFP!
- For workers' and peasants' governments!
- Forward to a federation of socialist states in Sri Lanka!

In Sri Lanka, the majority may have had enough of civil war

James Manor

For more than a decade, Sri Lankan politics has alternated between horror and misery. There has been war between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority, terrorism by the state and both ethnic groups, pogroms, death squads, massacres, assassinations and many other abuses.

Sri Lanka's democratic traditions have been flouted. Elections since 1982 have been marked by fraud, thuggery, flagrant persecution of opposition parties and intimidation of voters.

To make matters worse, every important political force has long been locked into a position that discouraged any hope of change. The government and the Tamil Tiger guerrillas have stubbornly bled each other to a standstill in an unwinnable war. Leaders of the governing United National Party have taken an extreme anti-Tamil line, believing their Sinhalese constituents to be such committed chauvinists that they would always prefer war to accommodation.

For a long time, there were few signs to the contrary from the majority community. Politicians of the ruling party have diverted government resources into their own pockets and developed gangs of toughs who commandeer property and bully opponents. Opposition parties have been fragmented and ineffectual. There

seemed no way out of this situation — until recently.

In March, the governing party faced an alliance of opposition parties in a regional council election in the Southern Province. The opposition was led by Chandrika Kumaranatunga, who was representing her ailing mother, former Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Mrs. Kumaranatunga ran as the representative of a new generation of politicians, eager to overturn the corrupt, brutish ways of the ruling party.

She appealed to the war-weariness of Sinhalese voters and argued that compromises with the Tamil minority and an end to armed conflict were essential. She was opposed by an aging president who clung to the time-honored tactic of Tamil-bashing.

To the astonishment of many, the opposition won handily.

Its success needs to be kept in perspective. The Southern Province harbors special grievances against the government. It was there in the late 1980s that security forces and death squads were most flagrantly indiscriminate in their slaughter of young people suspected, often wrongly, of favoring the anti-government insurrection. Nonetheless, Mrs. Kumaranatunga's victory suggests that Sinhalese extremism, which the government has long used to maintain popularity, may have lost its appeal.

President D.B. Wijetunga, who could wield immense power in Sri Lanka's

French-style political system, has responded by calling a parliamentary election for Aug. 16, six months ahead of schedule. Many observers believe that if this election is fair, the opposition alliance, which Mrs. Kumaranatunga continues to lead while her mother recovers from surgery, could gain a majority.

Resentment at the government's sorry record is compounded by depressed prices for tea and food crops. This has created widespread anger among small farmers, a sizable group of voters.

The desperation of the governing party and its willingness to engage in chicanery should not be underestimated. But there are good reasons to think that the election may be largely fair.

President Wijetunga appears to lack the organizational skill to coordinate an effective operation to intimidate opposition parties and voters, or to rig the result. His predecessor, Ransinghe Premadasa, assassinated in May 1993, was a master at this game, but he chose Mr. Wijetunga as his No. 2 because he was too ineffectual to become a threat.

The security forces, and most crucially the police, seem unwilling to permit the ruling party to use strong-arm tactics this time. Opposition parties have assured them that they will not be victimized after the election for the misdeeds of the old regime. Such promises in the recent Southern Province poll secured the neutrality of the police.

Finally, the election commissioner who

The writer, director of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at the University of London, contributed this comment to the International Herald Tribune.

oversees the process has a reputation as an effective, responsible civil servant. He has assembled an international team of observers that includes people who will not be easily hoodwinked. This is an important change from the last election.

Even if the election this month is fair and the opposition prevails, uncertainties will remain. The strong executive presidency and Parliament will be controlled by rival parties, at least until a presidential election in November. This could prove dangerous, although the apparent willingness of

both major parties to reduce the powers of the presidency may ease things.

Opposition activists, who have taken a frightful pounding from the governing party for 17 years, will want retribution. The last time a government changed, in 1977, the victors took savage revenge. Mrs. Bandaranaike was hounded through the courts and stripped of her civil rights. Restraint this time will be hard.

Negotiating a durable peace with the obdurate Tamil Tigers is likely to be even

more difficult. The day will come when major concessions to Hindu Tamils have to be sold to the Sinhalese majority. When it does, their belief that Buddha charged them with the task of maintaining the island as a sacred redoubt for the faith may impede reconciliation.

Sri Lanka's troubles are not over. But for the first time in more than a decade there is hope that the island may return to its democratic traditions and that terror, hate and war will no longer dominate its politics.

Mark of all seasons

Mark Tully, who has been the BBC's man in India for nearly 30 years and resigned recently, spoke to Sreerupa Mitra Chaudhury about Indian journalists and their obsession with criticism, the limitations of censorship and the changes in the BBC

How would you rate quality/presentation of news on Doordarshan. Do you have any suggestions to make?

One should sensationalise news. The line between news and current affairs is too hard and fast now. The emphasis should be on much more stories, much more films and less newsreaders. Once when Bhaskar Ghosh was DG he trained a whole lot of bright people in Pune for newsreading. They are not seen much now. Once people are trained, I am sure the presentation will improve.

Over the past few years, there has been mushrooming of private channels for Indian viewers. Do you think increasing number of channels would bring healthy competition or increasing trend to beam cheap programmes soaked with sex/violence?

The scenario of competition is exce-

llent. In competition the results are generally good. Cultural invasion is welcome as long as it works in breaking the monopoly. The role of the broadcaster, however, becomes very important in such a situation and more importantly, today a satellite broadcaster is considered better for it is essentially efficient in services.

However, I feel the role and importance of an Indian broadcaster is much more important for they can actually talk the best of the Indian experiences. But the BBC broadcast is considered important because the Indian broadcaster is not free. It broadcasts with lots of bureaucratic limitations. Had AIR been a free organization I am sure it would have gained more audience than what it has today. I am glad to say that BBC in India is popular for its Hindi service than any other language broadcasts. You can't hear those voices which are critical or argumentative on AIR. Can you? That is the limitation.

Censorship is a stupid bureaucratic idea. It is much better idea to rely on the good sense of broadcaster. Censorship is totally counterproductive. It is better to set guidelines.

It is alleged that Indian journalists have no professional integrity and newspapers are dominated by political or religious interference or some other interests. Would you dismiss these allegations as totally devoid of truth or would you describe them as realities in the context of Indian socio-political system.

I think quite a few of Indian journalists are honest and at times extraordinarily diligent. They are hardworking too. But there are some problems. There is a common perception that anti-stories are good stories. A journalist has to be perpetually critical, should be suspicious of Govt to prove his worth. But that's not the right

approach. The views of the Govt and the ministers are very important. A journalist should understand this. Only criticism makes bad news. If you realise this, the questions of interference can be better understood. Also there is a tendency to exaggerate among many of them which is not healthy journalism. In the Ayodhya case many stories were written in an exaggerated manner which in all cases may not be intentional but certainly showed a lack of perception.

Why did you quit BBC?

It's not a hasty decision. It all happened a year back when I was delivering a speech in Radio Academy in London. I said that I do not agree with many of the revolutionary changes John Birt, the director general was making in the BBC. As someone who has worked in the Corporation for nearly thirty years I don't think John Birt understands what the BBC was, or indeed what it should become. I made these points very clear because I thought that I had knowledge and experience to speak about the BBC and that I was not motivated by any personal animosity.

What are the changes in the BBC that you disapproved of?

What is taking place in the BBC is a revolution. It started with a sweeping attack on the BBC's journalism. But I wouldn't have spoken so openly if it wasn't for the fact that millions of people in South Asia have confidence in BBC journalism and admire it.

I was made by the BBC, the BBC was not made by me. By the BBC I meant not just the institution and its traditions but also all the staff who have been involved in the coverage of South Asia. I also meant those of South Asian Language Services whose achievement in carrying the BBC to the remotest villages is far too rarely sung. There is one group of journalists who are usually forgotten altogether — the

Indians, Bangladeshis, Nepalis, and Sri Lankans who live in their own countries and report from there for the BBC. It is they who have borne the brunt of their Govt's wrath. You have all heard of Mark Tully, but who now remembers the name of Nizamuddin who was killed by the Pakistan Army because of his reporting for the BBC during the Bangladesh war of independence? There was this Ataus Samud of Dhaka who was arrested by the military dictator General Ershad. During the last days of the unconstitutional monarchy in Nepal the prime minister phoned BBC's Kedar Man Singh and threatened to burn down his house, or that Sanjiv Gaur who was stabbed by Sikh separatists after interviewing one of their opponents in the Golden Temple in Amritsar for the BBC. When I remember these South Asian journalists' pride in working for the BBC I am angered by any generalised attacks on our journalism.

Are there any experiences in your many years in Delhi that you particularly cherish?

One of the great privileges of the many years I have spent in the BBC's Delhi Office is the friendships I have made with so many members of the staff. Every director general since Charles Curran and most chairmen too have been through Delhi in my time. Some of the VIP visits have presented their problems. I had great difficulty in convincing the collector of customs at Delhi Airport that the informality and colourfully dressed George Howard really was the chairman of the BBC, especially when he announced that he had brought a suitcase of dresses with him. The collector had not heard of the Museum of Customs at Castle Howard. When I took Ian Trethowan to see Indira Gandhi he asked how she had come to forfeit the confidence of the people of India in the election after the emergency. Indira Gandhi replied "some of them spread by the BBC." For once Ian Trethowan was left speechless.

When John Birt came to Delhi I had a problem I had never faced before. He was the first senior executive of the BBC I had ever entertained who was reported to favour Perrier water over whisky. It had been the tradition to throw fairly large parties in the past. At one such party there was a guest, who had to be removed three times, before he was convinced that he had enough. I feared that the reportedly austere director general designate might not be amused by such an incident. I debated giving a small dinner party with guests specially selected for their sobriety. But that is a hazard in Delhi because guests are rather casual about attending dinner parties, even after they have accepted the invitation. If no one had turned up to dine with John Birt he would have thought that I didn't know anyone in a city in which I had lived for more than twenty years. In the end, coming as I was near the close of my career, I decided to risk the displeasure of John Birt and give a party which at least I would enjoy. I have to report that John Birt appeared to enjoy it too, and even admitted to the slightest of a hangover the next day. Both I and my guests found him to be warm, relaxed and friendly, quite the opposite of the impression I at least had been given.

Of course it's not just chairmen's and the DG's company that I have enjoyed. I have spent long evenings with countless producers, reporters, presenters, editors, managers, camera crew, engineers, secretaries and at least one driver from London. Most of them have been about their own business, which impinged very little of mine.

Could we expect a Mark Tully programme on radio or television channel shortly?

Well, I shall be the non-executive broadcaster of Radio Network, a Calcutta based radio channel that we are planning.

Ace Radio Cab

- Computerised meters • Can be summoned to your doorstep
- No call up charge within city limits • Vehicle access from selected stands
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Our Longest Day (Concluded)

Jayantha Somasundaram

The Manchester *Guardian* said that "The President has decided that his immediate task is to placate the majority Sinhalese mobs which are still rioting, burning, looting and murdering at the expense of the Tamil minority. He has effectively outlawed the only serious Tamil party. Instead of throwing a protective Gandhian arm around the minority population, the President has thus at a stroke disfranchised the great mass of them and turned them into a race of untermenschen or institutionalised second class citizens. The danger is that the President's decision may be seen both by the Sinhalese mobs and the Tamil masses as a virtual endorsement of the blood bath."

"When presented with evidence that the Army or the Police have committed atrocities against defenceless Tamils, the Government has reacted with a shrug of the shoulders" wrote Francis Wheen in the *London Times* (30.7.83). "Police misconduct has actually been rewarded. In two separate cases the Supreme Court found that police officers had acted illegally; in both cases the officers concerned were promoted."

"On the first day of violence in Colombo," wrote T.R. Lansner in *The Observer* (14.8.83) "when thousands of Tamil businesses and residences were gutted, police had orders not to intervene, it is claimed. Certainly hundreds of armed Police deployed through the city could be seen standing idly by as mobs broke vehicles and looted homes and businesses. Even when Tamils were set upon and beaten and burned to death, police armed with automatic weapons did nothing."

India Responds

Having watched silently for almost a week as anti Tamil violence engulfed Sri Lanka, Indira Gandhi finally called J.R. Jayawardene on the 28th of July and expressed concern about the fate of Sri Lanka's Tamil population. She also said she was sending her External Affairs Minister Narasimha Rao on the following day to Sri Lanka.

Once international concern was shown about the situation in Sri Lanka the Jayawardene Regime found it necessary to change its position and distance itself from the perpetrators of violence. Government spokesmen thereafter spoke of an anti Government plot, a communist conspiracy and foreign involvement to explain the unchecked anti Tamil violence of the previous week. They also proscribed the CP, the N SSP, and the JVP. But in a letter to the President, Amirthalingam said: The Tamil people do not believe that Left parties had any hand in the attack on them. They regard this as an attempt to win the sympathy and support of the Western powers. The attack on the Tamil people was executed by the same forces that attacked the strikers in July 1980, attacked Prof. Sarachandra and demonstrated outside the houses of Judges."

"Initially Mr. Jayawardene hinted publicly at an Indian Soviet Conspiracy and rumours spread that he had asked Western powers for help," wrote John Elliot in the *Financial Times*. "Then he said he had no 'direct evidence' of a foreign power's involvement but he was sure that army officers loyal to the JVP planned civil disturbances. Recently in an interview in Colombo he told me that the trouble was caused by the JVP together with people in his own party who are violently anti separatist."

"Cyril Matthew, a member of the rigidly Buddhist Jaggery caste and boss of the UNP's trade union is widely suspected in Colombo of having a guiding influence over the riots."

John Elliot continued: Many foreign and local observers regard the claims of Mr. Jayawardene and his fellow Ministers as an attempt to cover up the fact that a few leading members of his own Government may have played a role in the plot which was partly aimed at striking a death blow at Tamil activists and at removing Tamils from their positions.

In an interview with *Asiaweek* (12.8.83) Mrs. Bandaranaike dismissed the 'conspi-

racy theory'. "It is definitely racial," she said. "Anyone who says the violence was anything else but racial is living in a fools paradise. This Government since it came to power in 1977 has been trying to encourage lawlessness. The UNP and its members have been on the wrong side of the law all the time. Now they are telling lies — that this is a plot to overthrow the government. They are only interested in looking for scapegoats."

Conspiracy Theories

"There is a wealth of theory and a remarkable shortage of fact," comments the ICJ, "(Ananda Tissa) de Alwis saw in the master plan 'the minds of certain foreign elements'. He had previously said much the same about the 1981 outbreak. In a press interview in December 1983, he identified those foreign elements as the KGB. In parallel press interviews his colleague Cyril Matthew saw 'the dirty hand of India'. For simpler-minded Tamils the answer is only too obvious: the entire blame falls on the Government but interestingly and encouragingly they do not blame the Sinhalese people as such, nor have they attempted any reprisals against them. What I find most extraordinary is that to this day there has been no attempt to find out the truth through an official, public and impartial enquiry when the situation in the country cries out for nothing less."

"Virtually every Tamil I met was of the opinion that the violence against them was organised by the Government," reported Prof. Gananath Obeyesekere in *Political violence and the future of democracy*.

"Both the Tamils hurt by these events and even Sinhalese people, as well as the foreign press, openly stated that the government either condoned the attack or it was done by factions within the government. As a response the government came out with its own theory of an international and local Communist conspiracy," continues Gananath Obeyesekere. "According to this anti Government plot scenario the Muslims and Christians were to be massacred next. All three of the proscri-

bed parties were sympathetic with Tamil language aspirations. Similarly it is difficult to believe that a government so promptly informed of a Naxalite plot by the CID a day after the presidential elections were ignorant of a more serious plot by Marxist groups to create race riots. In other words, the government was forewarned of a plot that did not occur but not warned of one that did! If the race riots were caused by Marxists why did the government imply that it was a popular uprising by the Sinhalese and why in heavens name did no one offer sympathy for the dispossessed?"

The Jayawardene Regime now carried the pogrom to its logical conclusion. Firstly they made it clear that the remaining Tamil population were hostage against any external intervention to protect them. J.R. Jayawardene told *India Today* "The worst that India can do is to invade us. If they invade us that is the end of the Tamils in this country." In the *Break-Up of Sri Lanka* A.J. Wilson quotes what Gamini Dissanayake told a meeting at Sri Kotha on 5th September. "They are bringing an army from India. It will take 14 hours to come from India. In 14 minutes the blood of every Tamil in the country can be sacrificed to the soil by us."

The Regime proceeded with the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution which removed the TULF from parliament. Tamil MPs supporting the UNP took the required oath and retained their seats. But none of them S. Thondaman, Bill Devanayagam and C. Rajadurai, were reelected to Parliament at the next election. Thondaman returned on the National list.

Finally the situation was used to economically marginalise the Tamils. Ananda Tissa de Alwis explained that the ownership of Tamil business would be restructured to deny them a majority shareholding. And trade itself would be reorganised. "The Trade Minister has already reorganised rice wholesaling to break the Tamil grip. It is no longer in my interests to allow one community to dominate, insist Lalith Athulathmudali," in the *Irish Times* (24.8.83). "The Tamils have dominated the commanding heights of everything good in Sri Lanka," explained Finance Minister Ronnie de Mel, "the only solution is to restore the rights of the Sinhala majority."

The final toll may never be known but during that week when homes, shops,

farms, cinemas, factories and vehicles belonging to Tamils were destroyed 140,000 of them fled to refugee camps. Government estimates were that 100 factories and 2,497 shops were destroyed throwing 23,466 out of work. 1,440 homes were smashed and the collection of burned out vehicles had to be carried out to sea for disposal. They assessed the damage to factories alone at Rs. 2,000 million.

Postscript

After the events of July-August 1983, the Tamils who had completely lost faith in dealing with the Colombo Government, began to hold out for an external party not only to act as mediator, but also to guarantee the implementation of any agreement arrived at. This is the role India played in the period leading up to the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord.

The Accord was the best hope and the last hope for a negotiated settlement. But even while it was being signed the prospects for permanent peace were being questioned. Prof. A.J. Wilson wrote in *The Break-up of Sri Lanka*.

"While the book was going to press, an agreement was concluded on 29th July 1987 between President Jayawardene and Rajiv Gandhi. Its terms provide among other things for recognition of the Northern and Eastern Provinces as areas traditionally inhabited by the Tamil-speaking people; for the devolution of powers to Provincial Councils and for Tamil and English to be recognised as additional official languages.

However the Sinhalese mind is not prepared to accept even this limited framework. It is my belief that the agreement will serve only as a temporary respite."

With the collapse of the Accord the last remaining hopes for peace disappeared. We had entered the Twenty Fifth Hour in time.

"We stand at the cross-roads of history. We can either become the Switzerland of the East by following the middle path of negotiation, conciliation and goodwill or the Lebanon of South Asia where intransigence, violence and hate have made it a playground for destruction."

— Committee for Rational Development

Middle Class Apocollapse

Clowns Cantos — 6

*Confound it, being Cerebral
At least for appearance
Involves some nuance
That can't be crude and chameleon
Like being loyal
Fool to each fickle decades Icon.*

*History does not unravel
As simply as hard currency
Determines loyalty.
So sounding sufficiently intellectual
We compound confusion
From the take-off point of Myth,
Cave paint the ethnic hieroglyph
But slyly steal the Sun
Which seems to have begun
Each point of Self determination
Flooding the National Question
With reason, warm and human.*

*Only the fangs of Class
Each Union have torn apart.*

U. Karunatilake

Broadcasting Futures ?

The agenda for the discussion was prompted by the recent revolution in broadcasting technology principally, the advent of satellite television transmissions. This new technological era has created an unprecedented opportunity for large numbers of broadcasting organisations, both domestically-based and international, to use the television medium. Millions of people in the Indian sub-continent are now watching television for the first time in their own homes. But the very impact of the satellite revolution has also given rise to a range of new, and sometimes urgent, issues. In the countries of the sub-continent, lively debates are in progress about how to respond. These revolve around various questions, such as the need to develop a strategy for dealing with the cultural effects of foreign programmes on a mass indigenous audience; how to license and regulate new regional stations, as well as trying to guarantee standards of quality in their programming.

The seminar was formally opened by Dr Dharmapriya Wesumperuma, Director, Sri Lanka Foundation Institute.

Hon. A.J. Ranasinghe, State Minister for Information, emphasised that the need to modernise broadcasting has to be balanced by an awareness of the many social, economic and cultural implications of this process.

The first keynote address was by Victor Gunewardena, Director, Political Studies and Editorial Services, Marga Institute: *A Regional Perspective On Current Developments*.

In outlining some of the prominent demographic details of the sub-continent, he stressed that widespread poverty remained a fact of everyday life. So the resulting questions include how this impoverished and generally disadvantaged class can be catered for by the media.

Looking at the region as a whole, Mr Gunewardena gave an assessment of the political environment; democratic institutions and a wide variety of opinions are broad features. Radio and television function mainly as state-controlled institutions. But there is no clearly-articulated national policy on information and the media. Without such a policy, the state-run media are subject to direct interference from government. This can allow for a partisan use of the media by the current regime.

Although there are Press Councils in some countries of the region, there aren't any equivalent frameworks for radio and television, which would provide a forum for inquiry into listener's and users' complaints arising from broadcasts. In Sri Lanka specifically, a proposed Media Commission Bill was aborted before it could reach Parliament. Among its opponents were various groups of journalists, who appeared to reject any kind of regulation by a public body on the grounds that it would result in control and the stifling of the right of free expression. But Mr Gunewardena disputed any argument that the essence of freedom is the absence of law. The abuse of media freedom, he said, is prevalent in both the public and private sectors of the media. Where self-regulation is absent or lacking, the discipline of law must prevail. While journalists must have freedom to report and inquire, it is equally important that the mass media should be responsible and responsive to public concerns.

In the following general discussion, Mr Gunewardena insisted that any media policy must be consistent with constitutional guarantees on freedom of speech, expression and information. There should also be a sensitivity in broadcasting to the needs of different communities or language-groups.

The second keynote address was given

by Mr Edward Ying, Managing Director of MTV, Sri Lanka's first privately owned commercial television station. He said that MTV is a beneficiary of broadcasting deregulation by the government of Sri Lanka. It operates within a general code of conduct observed by multi-national communications media, and is mindful of the particular political and cultural conditions of the country for which it provides programming. Among the advantages of satellite television are greater variety of programmes. But the disadvantages include the fact that there is no geographical pin-pointing of particular countries because the wide range of transmission crosses national borders.

Because of the growth of international trade links throughout Asia, the prospects for satellite and cable television are good. Terrestrial stations will continue to be indispensable, frequently working in tandem with satellite television for more effective and cost-efficient re-transmission of programmes such as the way that MTV rebroadcasts BBC programmes in Sri Lanka. The potential market for advertisers appears healthy.

In the following general discussion, Mr Ying said that television advertising has the power to inform, educate and inform young children. Whether it is good or bad for these impressionable viewers, depends on the message of the specific commercial. The task of advertising goods and services is likely to be more geared to the specific markets within a country than broadly international, so that it has greater relevance to consumers who are watching.

Mr Ying added that it will be very difficult for a pan-Asian media planner or advertiser to adopt a universal policy or international standard of advertising. One obvious example is the ban in Sri Lanka and many Muslim countries on advertising liquor or beer.

With the global spread of capital investment today, foreign companies are waiting to invest in several Asian countries. So if the terms or conditions in any particular state are not attractive, economic development is bound to be slower.

Rainer Welzel, Media Expert, *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, said that the rapid expansion of television advertising is very difficult to reverse. So it should first be carefully considered. There is a danger that such widespread advertising highlights the disparate standards of living within a society, or it can exacerbate between different groups. But the example of Indonesia shows that, overall, it can be handled constructively, and turned to beneficial effect for the development of the national economy.

William Crawley, Head of BBC Eastern Service, pointed out that there is likely to be intense competition for advertising between terrestrial-based domestic and international satellite channels even though, at the moment, many more people have access to national television than satellite transmissions.

Rainer Welzel gave a special presentation: *Where Is Technology Taking Us?* New technology developments, such as the silicon chip, are, for the first time, opening up the possibility of two-way communications between broadcasters and the general public. So, given the precedents of desk-top publishing and personal computers, cable television may allow for a new kind of network. It may be just a news or programme data-base, which the individual consumer can dial into, rather than a system broadcasting set programmes at set times. The consumer could request particular programmes to suit his or her needs.

In the following general discussion, Mr Welzel added that the amount of information which is available for each individual will increase substantially. In the development of new forms of broadcasting technology, there has to be a considerable financial contribution for investment. But we must also be sure that we can handle

these market mechanisms analogous to taking care of the environment so that industrial growth doesn't destroy the world around us.

Alexander Thomson, the editor of *South Asia Report* in the BBC Eastern Service, delivered a presentation: *News Management and Programming*. According to recent BBC research, 11 million households in South Asia are watching BBC World Service television regularly. This represents a total of about 50 million regular viewers. There has been discussion within the BBC of the immediate impact that its television coverage had on viewers. Many governments are faced with the fact that their monopoly on powerful media like television has ended, because of the spread of international broadcasting. This has caused a certain discomfort. But sensitivity to different cultures is vital. And, for many BBC WSTV journalists, their professional background in radio does help. So this blending of television and radio skills has helped to build an international network which commands trust.

There can, of course, be problems, such as when archive library film of events is not properly labelled on screen; that can confuse viewers and inflame them. A recent example of this was when earlier footage of scenes at the mosque in Ayodhya, northern India, appeared on WSTV. There have been other concerns, such as those aired in the Pakistani press after our seminar in that country. One fear was of informational imperialism, in which the West will dominate vulnerable local broadcasting organisations. But, in reality, this can be overcome by showing that the BBC, for example, has a working partnership with local journalists and production companies, drawing on them for news and other items. Also, by being based in Third World countries, the BBC can relay news from there, and so help people in the industrial world to understand the continent of Asia, say, far better. There is an over-exaggerated fear of the possible evil effects of television in those countries which abuse it themselves through distortions and heavy-handed editorial control. The BBC, for its part, is committed to the

free flow of information, which, it believes, is the healthiest approach in the term. We try, under very difficult circumstances, to be even-handed in our news coverage.

In the general discussion, Mrs Kadiragama said that she and her broadcasting colleagues would ideally want an open platform and free of information. But that isn't possible because of a certain amount of censorship, which forces a dilution of the truth. Where do you draw the line between a news item which might be detrimental to national interests and one which is beneficial?

William Crawley presented a paper: *Opportunities for International Broadcasters*. On the technological level, the break-up of the Soviet Union, and the collapse of the former *Radio Moscow External Broadcasting*, for example, has meant that there are now a lot of facilities to hire in the independent republics there. There is also great scope for the BBC to co-operate with local radio stations around the world, transmitting BBC programmes at a time which is convenient for local schedules. But we must recognise that the BBC itself is only one organisation in a growing and diverse international broadcasting environment; the choice for the viewer and listener is getting larger.

By broadcasting around the world, the BBC is not aiming to replace or be a substitute for domestic programmes. There's a whole range of things that domestic broadcasters can do more effectively; they have access to the language, the culture, the information and entertainment which can appeal to local consumers. But in news coverage the BBC offers a global grasp of events, with people on the ground and experts on many subjects. We are looking to develop greater access within particular countries, so that journalists and producers can contribute material in the languages which the BBC is broadcasting. In that way, it should become a matter of partnership and sharing of journalists values, so that both sides can learn and gain from it. It's important to offer real choice to our viewers and listeners not simply more of the same kind of output available through other organisations.

THE KATHMANDU STATEMENT

A Programme of action for regional cooperation in South Asia

The Conference on "Shaping South Asia's Future: Role of Regional Cooperation" was held in Kathmandu on 19-20 May 1994. The Conference was inaugurated by Rt. Hon. Girija Prasad Koirala, Prime Minister of Nepal. The Secretary General of SAARC, H.E. Mr Y.K. Silwal, delivered the keynote address. Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, former Foreign Minister of Malaysia, addressed a special session on "Experiences of ASEAN and Prospects of ASEAN-SAARC Cooperation". Ministers, Members of Parliament, academics, policy practitioners, media people, representatives of women, labour, trade, industry, private sector and non-governmental organisations participated in its deliberations.

The Conference had the following objectives:

- to disseminate findings of the nine studies completed by the Coordinating Group for Studies on South Asian Perspectives (CGSSAP)*, set up by the German Foundation Friedrich Ebert Stiftung [FES], and consider various scenarios emerging from the studies undertaken;
- to generate awareness about the extent of the progress made in the field of South Asian regional cooperation, or the lack of it;
- to highlight the cost of non-cooperation and the benefits of regional cooperation;

* The nine studies include the following themes: *Promotion of Greater Inter-Governmental, Inter-People and Inter-institutional Understanding in South Asia; Payments and Monetary Cooperation in South Asia; Enhancing the Capacity of Collective Self-Reliance and Negotiating Strength of South Asian Countries; Democratisation and Regional Cooperation; Complementaries, Comparative Advantages and Benefits and Costs of Regional Cooperation in Land Transport and Communication; Role of Electronic Media Towards Promotion of Regional Cooperation in South Asia; Regional Cooperation for Technical and Professional Education and Training; and Employment Generation and Poverty Alleviation in South Asia.*

- to formulate strategies for intensified cooperation and make recommendations for a programme of action; and
- to define the roles and functions of the different concerned segments of society for facilitating the implementation of the programme of action.

Keeping in view the above objectives, the Conference, through three plenary sessions and seven working groups, had a comprehensive and fruitful exchange of views. It decided that the findings of the studies be disseminated widely through thematic workshops, seminars and other group activities, highlighting in particular the aspects of the cost of non-cooperation and the benefits of regional cooperation.

The Conference took note of the progress already achieved by SAARC in the field of regional cooperation since its inception. Noteworthy among them include initiatives taken in the areas of social issues, economic and financial cooperation, technical cooperation in the framework of the Integrated Programme of Action, and people-to-people contacts through various schemes and programmes. It appreciated that, over a period of years through successive SAARC summits, the scope of regional cooperation has expanded and now covers a significant number of areas, including women in development, environment and poverty alleviation. The Conference noted, however, that the pace of progress under the auspices had been slow. It was further noted that there has been hardly any progress in the setting up of Action Committees comprising member states concerned with implementation of projects involving more than two but not all member states as envisaged in the Charter.

The Conference noted that some South-Asian societies were facing considerable internal challenges from economic inequality, regional divides, ethno-national cleavages and a revival of religious extremism. It was of the view that the consolidation of democratic processes and institutions was integral to enduring political stability in South Asia. It recognised that socio-political forces in South

Asia must respond to the needs and aspirations of the peoples for a just and equitable social, political and economic order giving a new direction to democracy, development and regional cooperation in South Asia.

Recalling the objectives of the SAARC Charter, the Conference affirmed its deep commitment to regional cooperation and stressed the need to overcome the hurdles in its way. In particular, it emphasized that the provision of annual SAARC summit meetings be strictly adhered to as they provided the unique opportunity for imparting necessary impetus to the process of regional cooperation at the highest level.

Programme of Action

The conference recommended the following programme of action in the areas covered by its working groups:

1. **Overcoming Hurdles in Socio-Political Fields**
 - i. South Asian nations needed to jointly evolve a vision of the region which would transcend parochial interests in pursuance of urgent developmental goals and for meeting the needs and aspirations of the peoples of the region. It recommended that the traditional approach towards politics in the region, based mainly on rhetoric and emotions, needed to be replaced by one guided by logic and greater appreciation of the realities of the region.
 - ii. Political will needs to be built up from within by building institutions and mechanisms at people's level starting from grass-roots. A sense of regional solidarity needs to be created wherein members of the region are seen as assets in a cooperative endeavour and not as adversaries locked in confrontations between nations, groups and localities. Parochial national interests should be transcended in pursuance of a shared common vision of South Asia as a whole. The right

environment needs to be created so that SAARC can play a pivotal role in establishing a new South Asian order.

- iii. SAARC summits should be held regularly every year in accordance with the SAARC Charter. There should be more frequent meetings at the level of Foreign Ministers / Foreign Secretaries / Planning Bodies and these should be made purposeful and productive.
- iv. Appropriate mechanisms for confidence building and conflict resolution may be established on the basis of mutual respect and in a spirit of give and take, bearing in mind the needs and aspirations of the peoples of South Asia.
- v. For strengthening people-to-people contact, the meetings, visits and exchanges at all levels, i.e. academicians, business leaders, media personnel, political leaders, teachers, youths, women and their organisations should be promoted.
- vi. The Secretary-General of SAARC should strengthen his contacts with governmental and non-governmental organisations in South Asian countries engaged in identification of ways and means to accelerate regional cooperation in South Asia. He may bring feasible ideas to the notice of member states of the SAARC.

2. The Role of Media

- i. The regional media should play its crucial role in sustaining public awareness of the advantages of regional cooperation and the costs of non-cooperation. The measures proposed in the colloquium on "Media Without Walls: A South Asian Initiative", held in Delhi in December 1993, may be implemented by both media and the governments. In particular, a South Asian Media Commission with well defined terms of reference be established to study the conditions of the media and propose appropriate steps for their advancement in the region. Voluntary multi-media organisations, such as the South Asian Media Association, be strengthened through individual and institutional membership with a view to increasing networking and cooperation. Intra-regional syndicated media services for dissemination of news analysis and features be developed using the mate-

rials from the media in South Asian countries. Initiative may be taken by media practitioners to establish a satellite TV channel for South Asia.

- ii. Media groups in respective countries may interact regularly with one another and, when necessary, mobilise opinion for concerted action on matters of mutual interest. Meetings and contacts between leaderships of bodies such as Federation of Working Journalists and media professionals be encouraged. The possibility of commissioning radio and television programmes over and above those under the aegis of the SAARC Audio-Visual Exchange may be explored. For this purpose, efforts may be made to mobilise funds from philanthropists, media proprietors etc.
- iii. The frequency of SAVE programmes should be increased from once a month to twice a month and these should be broadcast on fixed days of the month and at prime time. The contents of the programmes should be enhanced and enriched by focusing on socially sensitive issues such as poverty, environment, children, women and youth. The SAVE programmes should highlight success stories for combating problems common to the region. The SAVE Technical Committee may comprise media professionals including free-lance producers, besides other relevant personnel.
- iv. The SAARC Secretariat and other SAARC institutions must increase dissemination of information about their activities on a regular basis through the print and electronic media in suitable formats, professionally executed and distributed to a multiplicity of journalists, parliamentarians, heads of political parties etc.
- v. The governments of SAARC countries which have not yet done so should implement early recommendations made by the SAARC Council of Ministers in regard to promoting necessary interaction among the media in the SAARC region and for facilitating its due role in promoting regional cooperation.
- vi. The subject of media and communication may be given due prominence at the Eighth SAARC Su-

mmits scheduled to be held in April, 1995. The possibility of waiving the requirement for visas for South Asian media professionals in order to facilitate their travel in the region should be explored on the lines of the facility enjoyed by the journalists in the ASEAN member states. A request may be addressed to the Heads of State / Government of SAARC countries for earmarking some time at the Eighth Summit when a presentation could be made to them on a media charter for South Asia which would incorporate the recommendations of the Kathmandu Conference and also other principal recommendations made at the Delhi Colloquium.

3. The Role of Parliamentarians and Political Parties

- i. Individual members in each National Parliament may form a group which would consider regional cooperation matters on a regular basis. Each Parliament should hold periodical discussions on regional cooperation matters. Committees of the parliament dealing with foreign affairs may do the same.
- ii. A Regional Forum consisting of such parliamentary groups from all seven SAARC countries may be formed in due course and, for this purpose, a group from any one country may take the initiative to convene a meeting of all national groups in order to work out the modalities of the forum. The forum may meet once each year, or more often, and make recommendations on issues of regional concern which may be considered by the Annual SAARC Summits. Specialised Consultative Committees may be set up the forum to address issues such as trade, environment, political systems, human rights, social reforms etc.. The evolution of such a Regional Forum may in time lead to a non-legislative South Asian Parliament.
- iii. The proposed Regional Forum may establish a close working or, at least, a consultative relationship with the Association of speakers and Members of Parliaments.
- iv. The SAARC Secretariat should prepare and disseminate an information bulletin for the use of the parliamentarians.
- v. Recognised national political parties in each country may also take

parallel initiatives. Periodical regional meetings of political parties may be arranged to address issues of common concern.

- vi. The front organisations of political parties and parliamentarians, such as of students, youth, labour and women, may also involve themselves actively in the regional cooperation process.

4. Capacity Building through Institutional Mechanisms

- i. As a means of strengthening institutional mechanisms for consolidating the process of regional cooperation, the Secretary General of SAARC should be empowered to play the role of the central authority to recommend, monitor and review the activities of SAARC. His rank should be that of a Cabinet Minister. He should be the nominee of member states in alphabetical rotation and should be an eminent person from the public or private sector whose background and experience would enhance the objectives of SAARC. His tenure should be more than the present two-year term. The role of the Secretary-General and the staffing of the SAARC Secretariat must be viewed as an essential element of capacity building through institutional mechanisms.
- ii. The Secretary-General should call for reports on the current activities and future programmes of already established SAARC institutions. These institutions should be strengthened and monitored and reviewed on a regular basis.
- iii. The whole structure of SAARC institutions, including Technical Committees, be streamlined with a view to making them more effective in furthering regional cooperation. Such a review should result in recommendations in regard to rationalisation, reinforcement and restructuring, where necessary, as well as the creation of any new institutions that may be required to meet felt regional needs such as a Centre for South Asia Policy Studies.

5. Involvement of Labour and Non-Governmental Organisations

- i. Labour and Non-Governmental Organisations should be enabled to play their due role in generating awareness and empowering the

underprivileged groups and implementing development works in the region. SAARC should enhance the process of building regional cooperation with the help of initiatives taken by NGOs. The Governments and SAARC institutions must give due recognition to the efforts and authority of trade union organisations and groups such as the International Confederation of Independent Trade Unions and labour support groups, women's organisations, people's movements and cultural groups etc. Necessary institutional mechanisms and environment conducive to further developing, expanding and strengthening cooperation through direct involvement of the people in the region should be created.

- ii. Appropriate institutional facilities and institutional support should be provided so that optimal benefits may result from the strengthening of NGOs and labour organisations in the SAARC region.
- iii. A separate cell should be set up in the SAARC Secretariat for promoting cooperation among non-governmental and labour organisations.
- iv. SAARC may convene a tripartite meeting bringing together the government, labour representatives and the representatives of employers for discussions on common labour standards in the member states keeping in view socio-cultural and economic diversities existing in these states.
- v. SAARC may take a common stand in ameliorating the difficulties faced by the workers of this region while they work in countries outside the region.
- vi. A joint programme on human development should constitute a developmental priority in all member states and should aim at progressive improvement and upgradation of the skills and capabilities of the workers of South Asia.

6. Developing Opportunities of Socio-Economic Cooperation

- i. Socio-economic issues should receive adequate attention at official levels. National economic and social development ministries should have SAARC cells which can interact and coordinate their regional

approaches for economic and social development.

- ii. Gender and environment concerns need to be internalised, integrated and incorporated in all regional, economic and social development activities. Women's concerns should include those of the girl-child. Environmental concerns should include sanitary and habitat aspects particularly affecting the poor.
- iii. Regional programmes for increasing awareness and sensitisation with respect to unemployment, poverty, women's and environmental issues need to be evolved and implemented.
- iv. For evolving and monitoring programmes for women's development at the official level, SAARC Technical Committee on Women should function as an advocacy / pressure group. However, such official activities need to be supplemented and reinforced by networking between national commissions on women, family planning associations, other concerned bodies and associations.
- v. A SAARC Convention to control cross-border trafficking of women and children should be agreed upon.
- vi. A group of development / planning experts should develop and harmonise developmental strategies which are aimed at employment generation, poverty alleviation and are eco-friendly and friendly to women's causes.
- vii. Existing SAARC mechanisms like SAPTA, SAARC Fund for Regional Projects and proposed South Asian Development Fund etc. should be utilised to promote intra-regional trade exports to third countries, and joint investments primarily to increase more income and employment generating opportunities particularly for the poor, the traditional artisans, women etc.
- viii. A SAARC Fund for Social Development may be established. South Asian countries should jointly evolve common policies and approaches for the forthcoming international conferences and socio-economic issues, particularly in respect of World Summit on Social Development.

- ix. Regional education, training and retraining resources should be pooled to benefit from regional economies of scale in these areas. Exchange of students, teachers / trainers, researchers etc. should be facilitated. For this, the concerned apex national institutions should be encouraged to network and coordinate such regional activities.

7. Fostering Economic and Financial Cooperation

- i. SAARC may play a more active role in fostering economic and financial cooperation among and between its Member States. The private sector should be enabled to play the due role in strengthening economic cooperation in the South Asian region. For this purpose, the instrumentality of the recently set up SAARC Chamber of Commerce may be strengthened and used efficaciously.
- ii. A group of eminent South Asian Economists should examine the possibility of evolving and adopting a common stand vis-a-vis the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the IMF / World Bank. In particular, they should examine the impact of such programmes on the socio-economic conditions of the societies in the region and suggest ways and means to cope with these problems.
- iii. Possibilities of harmonisation of exchange rate policies in the region may be studied in order to eliminate the adverse effects of arbitrary exchange rate adjustments.
- iv. A South Asian Export Credit Financing Agency [SAEFCA] may be set up. The possibility of establishing a SAARC Export-Import Bank may be examined. SAARC institutions in the area of development finance and insurance / re-insurance may be set up to facilitate investment by the private sectors of the region. Branches of commercial banks and insurance companies of one country be opened in another member country and financial cooperation may be extended through joint ventures in banking and insurance.
- v. The subject of trade barriers should be examined in a more comprehensive manner than envisaged in SAPTA. The stronger and larger

economies of the region should take the initiative by unilaterally reducing the tariffs in favour of the least developed countries in the region with a view to increasing their exports. Arrangements should also be made at the sub-regional / bilateral level so as to accelerate the process of trade liberalisation aimed at enhancing intra-regional trade.

- vi. Export Processing Zones [EPZ] may be established in the border areas of member countries.
- vii. Special efforts should be made to attract investment to the least developed countries in the region.
- viii. Transit facilities should be streamlined so as to increase intra-regional trade.
- ix. Wide-ranging action should be taken in transport and communication fields with a view to facilitate intra-structural development, simplify border formalities, rationalise and standardise movement of goods by road and rail.
- x. Visa requirement for business travel and for tourists and students should be relaxed.
- xi. An Association of Regional Freight Forwarders and Shippers be formed.
- xii. The Tourism Promotion Council under the auspices of the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry be strengthened.
- xiii. An Association of South Asian Economists be formed. A South Asian School of Economists should be established which could serve as a centre of excellence for studies on Regional Economic Cooperation matters in South Asia.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Conference recommended the following roles and responsibilities for the implementation of the Programme of Action:

Parliamentarians and political parties: The Conference highlighted the pivotal role of parliamentarians and political parties in generating the political will for regional cooperation. It appealed to them to give adequate attention to the task of furthering the cause of regional coope-

ration. It solicited their active support and assistance for the implementation of the above programme of action.

Government institutions: The Conference urged the government institutions to take into account the above mentioned recommendation and create conditions to facilitate their implementation.

Private sector: The Conference was of the view that the private sector has a public responsibility for furthering regional cooperation. It called upon the private sector to play a leading role particularly in the economic and financial fields.

Women, labour and non-governmental organisations: The Conference emphasized the vital importance and significant role of Women, labour and non-governmental organisations in furthering regional cooperation. It urged that the necessary conditions be created to enable them to play their due part in the implementation of the programme of action.

Media: The Conference underlined the crucial role of the media in generating awareness among the people about the issues and content of regional cooperation. It called on the media practitioners to make their due contribution in facilitating the implementation of the programme of action.

Academia: The Conference recognized the valuable work of various academic groups, such as CGSSAP, Independent Group on South Asian Cooperation (IGSAC), South Asia Dialogue, Committee for Studies on Cooperation and Development (CSCD) and others, in the field of regional cooperation. It suggested that inter-disciplinary, multi-institutional and collaborative study and research work in region on matters connected with regional cooperation be organised on a systematic and planned basis. It called upon academia to provide the necessary intellectual support to the process of regional cooperation.

The Conference, in conclusion, decided that the Statement be widely disseminated throughout the region. It agreed that the contents of the Statement be brought to the attention of the policy and decision makers of the region. It recommended that appropriate measures be taken for the implementation of the programme of action.

The Conference thanked the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung for the valuable support it is extending through its South Asia programme.

Some Observations on English Translations from Sinhala Literature

Kamalika Pieris

Gooneratne goes on to state, elegantly, that in 19th century Ceylon 'English poetry seemed a field full of Wordsworthian daffodils and the fading summer roses of Moore, regulated by Thomas' seasons. Brought up on a diet of Shakespeare and the English romantics poetry seemed so much a in fact, a demesne of England, so far removed from the Sri Lankan experience, that no local poet could think of venturing unprotected into its glades.⁹ She points out that the first breakthrough in evolving a suitable local idiom for English poetry which could adequately express its content came via translations from oriental poetry into English. She looked at the oriental translations of the 1815-1878 and found them to be a contributory source for the development of an Anglo-Ceylonese literature in English. She distinguished between the expatriate translator of oriental literature who attempted to fit oriental imagery and descriptive excesses into the western mode and the Ceylonese translator who was forced to 'attempt to shape the English sentence in new forms'. She singles out for special mention, in this respect, George Key's translation of Sinhala folk poetry (1938) and the free translation of *Gita Govinda* later on.¹⁰

Some of the modern translations could also be treated as an extension of creative writing in English, in that they avoid straight translations and aim at an acceptable English product. Therefore they approximate creative writing. In this respect two translators are outstanding. Ranjini Obeyesekere and Yasmin Gooneratne. Of the two, Obeyesekere is the more committed, prolific translator and her translations never fail to impress and delight this writer. Her translation *Revenge* is completely satisfying in itself, and one

could dispense with the original poem. Yet another translation *With beads and coloured baubles round my neck* uses contemporary language and I particularly liked the simplicity, directness and the use of rhyme. (I refer to the version in *New Ceylon Writing*) Reference should also be made to Obeyesekere's sensitive translation *After he died* from a Nawagathegama short story.

Yasmin Gooneratne's output as a translator is much less, but she shows more sophistication and originality. A gifted poet, she has no hesitation in recasting a poem quite radically, doing away with the original structure altogether, but in such a way that it not only achieves maximum impact but also conveys the tone of the original.

And he, busy
Reckoning his harvest treasure
Weighed me two pounds of unhusked rice
by measure
into a common sack
Shall I take it?
Leave it?
So the thought came
to me,
Was it by measure, my son, the milk that
I gave flowed to thee?

(*Word, bird, motif* p 17)

English translations from Sinhala literature have been published locally and abroad. The translations issued abroad are more significant, in that they are specifically intended to introduce Sinhala literature to non-Sri Lankans, through the medium of international programmes for the dissemination of Asian literature. The audience for Sinhala literature is thereby enlarged — or so one hopes.

The first of these was prepared for the literature translations collection of Unesco at the suggestion of the National Commission of Ceylon for Unesco. It was titled *An anthology of Sinhalese literature up to 1815* Its purpose was to 'give an overall picture of a representative sample of classical Sinhalese literature a literature which is of substantial value, bulk and antiquity, but of which virtually no translations of an adequacy are available at present.' It was designed to introduce the Sinhalese literature of Ceylon to the ordinary reader in the West. The introduction pointed out that much of the beauty of Sinhala classical poetry lay in the metrical patterns, the resonances and the intricate rhyming systems. Since it was not easy to make satisfactory translations of these, particularly to translate it in terms of any form of English verse, some of it was given in prose or a poetic layout. The anthology also carried an appendix, unsigned, on the metres. This anthology was edited by a European (Reynolds) with a foreword by a Ceylonese of European descent (Ludowyke). The introduction said nothing of Sinhala literature's obvious links with Sanskrit and Pali, nor of its place in the broad corpus of Asian literature, but instead gave us fleeting references to Hardy, Tolstoy and Brecht.¹¹

Unesco followed this up with *An anthology of Sinhalese literature of the Twentieth Century*, a part of the Unesco collection of representative works, Sinhalese series.¹² This anthology attempted the strange task of trying to convey the flavour of trilogies and a long opera by translating bits of Martin Wickremasinghe and Sarachchandra. It also contained two of the most slapdash and cursory introductions to modern Sinhala literature I have ever read. The introduction contains a fairly

comprehensive listing of the English translations which have appeared in the West. Two items are missing from this list: D.M. de Silva's translation of *Pemato Jayati Soko* published in the Salzburg Studies in English Literature (1976) and the special issue on Sinhala and Tamil writing of the 1970's, edited by Ranjini Obeyesekere and published in the *Journal of South Asian Literature* (1987).

A third anthology to appear on this subject was *An anthology of modern writing from Sri Lanka* edited by Ranjini Obeyesekere and Chitra Fernando.¹³ This is the best of the anthologies dealing with modern Sinhala literature and I would recommend it for the quality of the introduction and the quality of its translations.

In its introduction we find a clear statement of intent and some attempt to place Sinhala literature within the constellation of major and minor world literatures. Some of the observations made in this introduction are worth mention here. The introduction stated that the smallness of Sri Lanka and the fact that Sinhala is not spoken anywhere else in the world made it seem almost presumptuous to offer an anthology of its material.

However despite its smallness it possessed some distinction in belonging to a literary tradition and language which spanned 2000 years. Literature of Sri Lanka was rarely represented in anthologies of Asian writings because it was often considered an extension of the Indian culture area. It was not represented in anthologies of Indian material because it was distinct and separate from Indian literature. Thus a need for a collection of representative writings from Sri Lanka had long been felt and this collection was a response to that need.¹³

It is difficult to decide exactly what the purpose of locally published translations could be or quite where their impact is. The local material includes the occasional effort published in humanities journals and English literary magazine. *The Crest gem of poetry*¹⁶ it appears was translated by a person who could not read Sinhalese

to start with and it was left to another translator to tactfully point out, in a review that the 'Haiku' style would have been better for the translation. The local product seems to consist primarily of translations of the work of Martin Wickremasinghe. There is no statement of intent on the part of the translator in either *Madol Doova*, *Lay bare the roots*, or *Way of the Lotus*, though there is a brief analysis of the original work in the first two titles mentioned. Some of these translations would have found their way into foreign libraries, but the main readership would be in Sri Lanka. Since most Sri Lankans would have read these in the original anyway, one wonders whether these translations have hit their target.

Anthologies of translations have resulted in an interesting byproduct. They are sometimes accompanied by evaluations of Sinhala literature provided by graduates of English literature using the critical canons current in western literary thinking. This is not always successful, but some of the observations are pertinent and perceptive. Two instances of such illuminating assessments are given below.

Ranjini Obeyesekere and Chitra Fernando have dealt extensively with language in their anthology of translations. The literary critic writing in Sinhala does not pay attention to this aspect. Obeyesekere comments that the poetic language of the contemporary young writers was an 'unconscious synthesis of their everyday world and the world of their reading and imagination. Their worlds were no longer compartmentalised as they were for the poets of the fifties and the result is a living, growing language of the broad urban and rural middle class to which the poets belong and for which they write'. Possibly for the first time, there is some reference to the westernisation of these groups. 'Poets who write for this large urban rural middle class no longer run the risk of being considered decadent or anti-national if they reveal western influence in their work, being old fashioned and out of touch if they have recourse to the classical tradition. Their poetry has neither the subconscious defensiveness of the writers of

the fifties nor the somewhat strident note of the writers of the first decade of the century'.¹⁴

In the same anthology Chitra Fernando has put forward certain interesting parallels between the problems faced by the Sri Lankan writer in English and the Sinhala counterpart. Fernando suggests that the English writers followed the traditional western models very closely for much the same reasons as the Sinhala writers did. Also both faced the same problem of forging an idiom which is effective and reflected the social situation described. Fernando felt that the similarity of the modern Sinhala novel to the nineteenth century English novel was largely due to the fact that this seemed to be the style best suited to the themes that appear in Sinhala writing. It was a style that was 'slow, discursive, evoking character and place by the same pace as the leisurely tempo of the life it describes'.¹⁵

An earlier version of this article was published in part in the *Lanka Guardian* of 16.5.1991. Thereafter, a tremendous explosion of English translations from the Sinhala literature came to be seen. However there was little inclination to evaluate these from either a literary or sociological perspective. This article has attempted to draw attention to the research possibilities inherent translations and to outline some of the dimensions along which translations could be examined.

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Akka from Lanka

Anoja Weerasinghe has won international acclaim for her depiction of suffering women. And the endearing status of an elder sister, she tells **Nikhat Kazmi** of India on the eve of a retrospective of her films

'Akka' Anoja is the answer to many a woman's prayers in Sri Lanka today. For Akka (elder sister) knows it all. The agonising trauma of adjustment that a rural migrant woman faces when she is thrown from the lap of nature into the concrete jungle. The burden of dignity, respectability and morality that lies on the middle class widow trying to fend for a family in insurgent times. The outraged modesty of a maid who must serve her feudal lord at all costs. The dilemma of a woman in love who is content to linger in the shadows as a national leader's mistress. Or the stark agony of poverty that impels a woman to lend her womb on hire.

Yes, Anoja Weerasinghe is not just an ace actress in Sri Lanka. International applause, national acclaim have all been hers over the course of a chequered film career that spans 14 years. But more than that, it is the status of a benign elder sister, bestowed on her by countless fans, which makes her spirits soar, even as it overwhelms her with a sense of responsibility. "Today, I am more than a pair of beautiful eyes and strands of beautiful hair to my people. I am the characters I play in films. Characters that are realistic and depict the sufferings of people," she declares with a sense of modest awe at her own accomplishments.

And no mean accomplishments, these. For in an industry where the fairer sex is almost always the second sex, Anoja has consistently desisted the temptation of being reduced to a mere dimple that colours the fantasies of countless millions. "Oh yes, we have them too," she laughs, "the dolls of commercial cinema who sing, dance and decorate the screen like wall flowers." These being the prototypical roles that are the due of an actress — be it Hollywood, Bollywood or cine Colombo. Defining the role of an actress in a commercial film as essentially that of "a woman who is scared of her family, her father, her

brother and her husband," Anoja confesses that she too has played them all. But only in the initial stages of her career.

The Best Actress Award at the 11th IFFI, 1987 for "her sensitive portrayal of the dual role of the exploited mother and daughter" in *Maldeniye Simion* changed everything. This, along with the umpteen national awards, enabled her to steer her career in a different direction. Henceforth, it will only be realistic cinema, she pledged to herself. And so it was. Today, after a spate of sensitive portrayals in films like *Siri Medura*, *Kelimandala*, *Guru Gedara*, *Seilama* and *Surabidena*, she restricts herself to merely two films a year. A decision which fits in with her particular theory of acting which is demanding, time consuming and calls for unslinited commitment. "I believe that the character must come across the screen, not the actress. And to play such a character, I must live a role that is totally different from the real me. I must learn where this different character came from and its entire way of life," she enunciates.

Aiding her in her preferences is the peculiar economics of Sri Lankan cinema where, as Anoja points out, artistic films are more popular than mainstream cinema. According to her, the high rate of literacy (83 per cent) is responsible for this strange phenomenon. Strange, because it is the exact antithesis of the Indian film industry where realistic cinema is more of a 'canned' reality. Sri Lanka however has a different, more heartening story instead. "No, none of my films have ever gathered moss in the cans," she laughs. The National Film Corporation ensures that all the 'art' films are released in the private auditoriums, once they have been cleared by the censors. That simple!

Sri Lankan cinema however is plagued by other problems, explains the actress. A crippling lack of funds and a hyper-sensitive censor board. "Here you are able

to shoot one song in five days, there we must shoot the entire song in a day. Even the number of retakes is limited," she states. Small wonder then, when it comes to popular mainstream, the natives prefer the 'originals' — the technically superior Indian films which are much better escapist entertainers.

Nevertheless, the actress does longingly eye the comparative freedom which Indian film-makers enjoy when it comes to political cinema and ironically, the depiction of sex and violence too. No politics, no sex seems to be the guiding code of a censor board which is largely composed of "government, officials, retired school teachers" and no representatives of the film industry. "And you know how righteous retired school masters can be!" she smiles. "They banned *Womb For Hire* because they thought I was trying to depict the essential Sri Lankan woman as a prostitute. Don't they realise if I play a prostitute, it doesn't mean that all Sri Lankan women are prostitutes. And then, why can't we show the good politicians with the bad?" she queries.

Understandably then, political cinema in Sri Lanka is forced to find allegorical means of self expression, unlike the literature and the drama which is laced with the experiences of the ongoing ethnic strife. However, Anoja is not too bothered by such curbs and limitations for every artist makes a political statement through her works, according to her. "We don't only make films about happy families, wealthy families. We also talk about people suffering. And why do people suffer? Due to political systems, isn't it?"

A logic that cannot be denied. An actress who cannot be ignored or brushed aside as just another star. A tour de force, instead that blazes across the screen with a disturbing intensity: questioning, indicting and lamenting.

 ENRICHING RURAL LIFESTYLE

Why there's sound of laughter in this rustic tobacco barn....

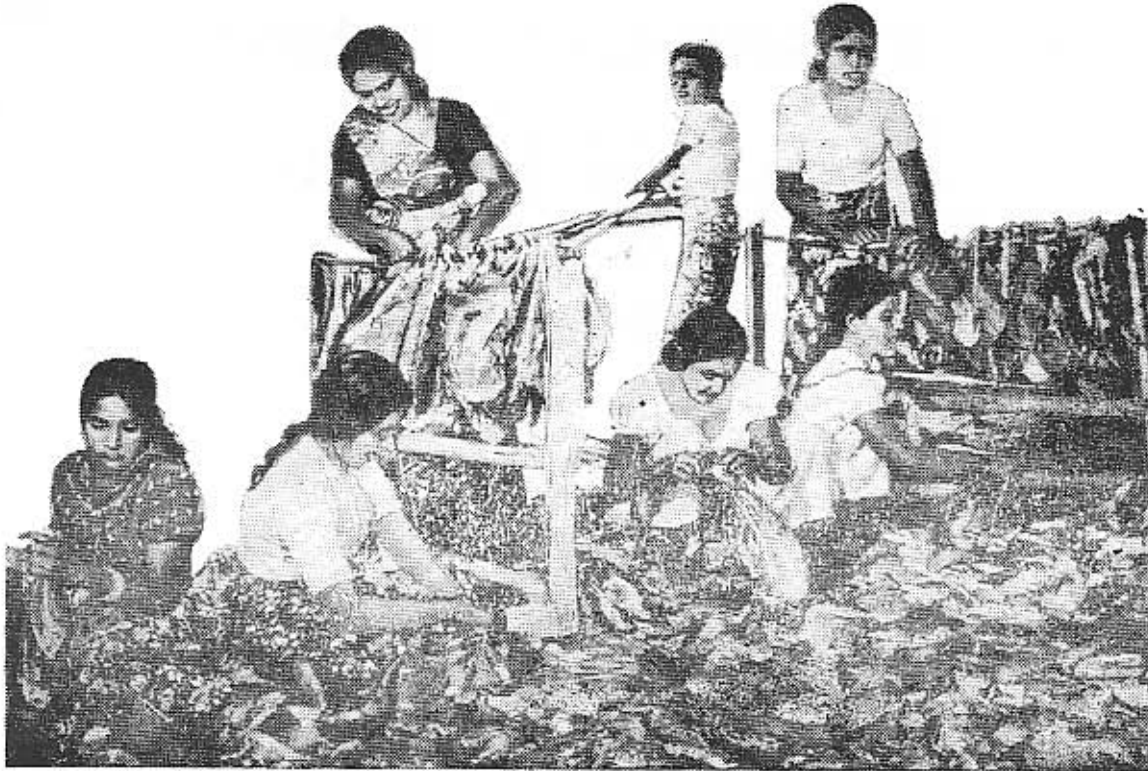
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