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# GUARDIAN

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## TAMING THE PRESS

*K. M. de Silva*

## THE PREMADASA ROAD

*Tisaranee Gunasekera*

*Dayan Jayatilleka*

## 1994 VOTING TRENDS

*Laksiri Jayasuriya*

## THE CHANDRIKA TRANSITION

*Mervyn de Silva*

## SINHALA BUDDHIST THOUGHT

*Kumari Jayawardena*

## THE DRUG RACKET

*Sarath Tillekeratne*

## SRI LANKAN WOMEN

*Mala Dharmananda*

## THE DEBT BURDEN

*Gamini Corea Group*



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## BRIEFLY...

### Kadrigamar in India

Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao told Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadrigamar in Delhi that an end to the island's ethnic conflict would be one less problem for India. The Foreign Minister was on a four day official visit, the first by any minister of the new government.

Despite talk by Indian politicians about asking for the extradition of Tiger supremo Prabhakaran to face the Rajiv Gandhi murder charge. Foreign Minister Kadrigamar told mediemen that Prime Minister Rao had not uttered "a single word" on that matter. In answer to questions the minister said that negotiations with the LTTE would continue, because the mandate that President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga's government had received was clearly for peace.

thousands from all parts of the country were due to participate in a public rally at the Ananda Samarakoon playground at Nugegoda, after their leaders, Buddhist monks and Catholic priests, handed over a petition at the American Embassy in Colombo.

The petition protests against US pressure on the government to proceed with the controversial Irana-wila VOA project, which the temple and the church say, in a rare show of solidarity on a national issue, will debase the cultural life of surrounding villages.

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During his visit Mr Kadrigamar met the Indian President, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. He also toured Buddhagaya. The minister said that it had been one of his ambitions to visit the land that the Buddha had trod.

### Constitution supreme

The Government proposes to make the Constitution supreme. Parliament will be subordinate to it. The supremacy of the Constitution and judicial review of legislation will protect the individual from "majoritarian tyranny and/or the unwarranted intrusion of the State". Justice Minister G.L. Peiris said announcing a proposal for constitutional reforms.

### VOA protest

Anti-Voice of America demonstrators were due to rally in Colombo shortly after this magazine was going to press. The All Religions Solidarity Alliance, organisers of the campaign, said that

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# PERIOD OF TRANSITION

Mervyn de Silva

The Peoples Alliance (PA) was stunned. Taken by surprise, it accused the opposition UNP, and other "reactionary and subversive forces" of a plot to "destabilise" the newly elected administration. It was a knee-jerk reaction. In the circumstances, understandable. How could there be a working class 'uprising', such widespread trade union protest, against an "alliance" that had just ended seventeen years of reactionary, capitalist rule? How could labour unions launch an attack against a four-month old alliance which included the political parties that formed the traditional vanguard of organised labour? A cunningly woven plot, a *konspiratzia* was the obvious explanation. It was a compliment that the UNP did not deserve. If it was that resourceful, the UNP would not have got the drubbing it did barely month ago.

There is no worker in the world who does not have "just grievances". Nor a trade union that does not have a "list of demands". But the union leadership always asks itself "is it safe?". Do the likely rewards of victory outweigh the risks of failure? The calculation on which the final decision is taken has much to do with the political climate. At no time is the climate more congenial than a post-election situation where a labour-friendly administration has replaced a conservative regime.

The trade unions were pleased by the PA's mid-August general election performance but the actual result in terms of seats or percentages was far too close for comfort. Not so candidate Chandrika's historic victory. The dam burst. The result — confusion and chaos; the kind of situation which any opposition, except the most brainless will instantly recognise as a target of opportunity. Since it is the Opposition's job to oppose, and opposition parties in the Third World, if not in the First,

do not always respect MCC or Queenberry rules, Sri Kotha had reason to smile, when charged as mastermind. But serious students of the new post-election situation must approach the problem from quite a different angle. The starting point is the fast-changing nature of our economy and its impact on our politics.

Whether the Japanese Foreign Minister telephoned the President or not, the fact is that the Japanese government reacted promptly to the ugly incidents. According to former Foreign Minister A.C.S. Ha-meed, the Japanese Foreign Minister called the President's office. "The business of America" said Calvin Coolidge seventy five years ago "is Business". It is Japan's motto as it prepares for the next century, but with a difference. Exports, investment, joint ventures. That fact shapes Japanese foreign policy and diplomacy. Noritake was established in 1973 when Mrs. Bandaranaike's United Front, with the LSSP and CP, was in office. "We have never suffered such humiliation in this country" said a Japanese spokesman when asked for his reactions by the *Financial Times* London. While most commentators highlight investment and joint ventures, Japan's role as a major donor is forgotten.

Noritake Managing Director T. Shibata told the press that the firm had lost over 20 million rupees, with a 42% drop in production, "This is a Japanese-owned private company and the government understands that. No matter how long it takes, we will not open the factory until we are sure such incidents will never happen again" says Mr. Akasaka.

## US ISSUE

It is not always that a tiny country like Sri Lanka is mentioned by the presidential candidates of both parties but President

Bush and his challenger the young Governor Clinton did hold up Sri Lanka as a "model" Third World country. Why? Because JR Jayawardene, 'Yankee Dicky' did show South Asia that for all its many virtues social welfarism (or socialism) did not guarantee growth that without growth there was not much to share, which is what Sri Lankan welfarism was all about. It scored high marks for social commitment and moral concern but not many marks for hard-headed economics. Yes, the J.R./ UNP experiment deserved high marks for its strategic choice on the fundamental issue of growth but it needlessly blotted the party's record by its dictatorial ways, some totally unnecessary, capricious or plain wicked. e.g. Mrs. Bandaranaike's civic rights.

The monumental blunder however was the Tamil question — from the burning of the Jaffna University Library, representing not a whiff of grapeshot but barbarous "goondaism". And thus the rise of the LTTE, matched by a parallel rise in the defence vote, the IPKF intervention, the JVP's vicious patriotic ultra-nationalist backlash, the soaring defence budget, the budgetary cut-back on social welfare, inflation and unemployment.

The UNP hit a bad patch with President D.B., the man who was never supposed to succeed the younger incumbent. A weak, ineffective leader with an outrageously narrow, provincial view, in a Sri Lanka that had led the region in joining "the open market economy" Club. The winning Premadaist equation — and it was a narrow victory — had two main factors, tolerance and understanding vis-a-vis the minorities and a well-advertised populism e.g. JANASAVIYA. The provincial polls showed that a new stronger force had put this equation under increasingly severe strain — 16 years in office and



the generational factor, all the more forceful because Sri Lankans vote at 18.

#### PARLIAMENTARY POLLS

And yet, the mid-August parliamentary polls stunned the P.A.'s braintrust by both the voting percentages and sharing of seats — nearly 46% for the UNP and 94 seats in the House, while denying the PA a simple majority for its 51.5%. It was Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga (the personality) plus the minorities plus the "pull factor" (vividly expressed in the Sinhala "vaasi patheta hoiya...") that made such a difference.

Of all these factors, I would place Chandrika's charisma as the overwhelming **subjective** factor because it is not possible otherwise to explain the rising PA wave from Southern province to the General Election to the Presidential polls in November.

President Wijetunga's May Day budget, Santa Claus arriving very early, was one of the most cynical and partisan decisions taken by a party which knew it would face the electorate in a few months. And so to Prof. Pieris' "On account" budget — for two months.

#### THE BUDGET

And so the PA must take the "PEACE NOW" route not merely to satisfy the "minorities" that backed candidate Chandrika but to negotiate the peace settlement which alone will ease the huge burden of military spending. The recent explosion has made a resolution of the conflict not only desirable but necessary. Urgently so. Though ideal, conflict-resolution will prove elusive, certainly so if the PA's timetable demands a ceasefire before the pre-budget talks with the IMF-WB. But the LTTE insists on a ceasefire and opening of the Pooneryn route. The PA is quite responsive to the first, though it prefers a "cessation of hostilities" but on Pooneryn, the Armed forces having lost 400-500 men, the High Command has dug its heels. Pooneryn, no way.

Sooner or later, Mr. Prabhakaran who will NOT compromise on EELAM because "the homeland" is a vision, not a trade

union demand, will make his move having proved to his people that one Sinhala party is **NOT fundamentally different** from another Sinhala party on the Tamil question. One must hope that the move will NOT be another demonstration that we were right in identifying him as one of the most brilliant practitioners of pure, unrestrained terror.

Meanwhile the PA, having angered the Japanese over NORITAKE has another fight on its hand — not just an economic superpower but the **SOLE** superpower, the US.

We are left with S.W.R.D's favourite cliché — "a period of transition". But to what?

Friday, January 06, 1995

### Notices of motions and orders of the day

Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam  
Dr. Sarath Amunugama  
Mr. L.B. Kiriella  
Mr. Earl Gunasekara  
Mr. Y.P. de Silva  
Mr. Vasudeva Nanayakkara  
Mr. Batty Weerakoon  
Mr. K.P. Silva  
Mr. Lakshman Senewiratne,

Violation of Human Right in Myanmar, — That, whereas the general Assembly of the United Nations on the 20th December, 1993 resolved without a vote that it is greatly concerned at the continuing violations of human rights, summary and arbitrary executions, torture, forced labour, abuse of women, restrictions on fundamental freedoms, the imposition of oppressive measures particularly on ethnic and religious minorities in Myanmar;

And whereas the Government of Myanmar has not implemented its commitments to take all necessary steps towards democracy in the light of the results of the elections of 1990;

And whereas the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of Government;

And whereas the people of Myanmar and Sri Lanka have had strong historical, religious and cultural linkages;

And whereas human rights activists in Sri Lanka made an appeal on Vesak Day in 1992 to all concerned groups in Myanmar to respect the verdict of the people as expressed in the elections of July, 1990 and to work towards an immediate transition to democracy;

This House resolves that the Noble Peace Prize winner, Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi who is in her sixth year of detention without trial be released unconditionally and immediately together with other political leaders and political prisoners, and immediate steps be taken to transfer political power to the democratically elected representatives and to allow all citizens to participate freely in the political process. And full respect be given to human rights, fundamental freedoms, more particularly right to live and the integrity of the human person and full effect be given to the Resolution 48/150 of 20th December, 1993 of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

# The Crisis of Alternatives and Sri Lanka's Second-and-a-Half Road

Tisarane Gunasekera & Dayan Jayatilleka

The 1980's was a lost decade for the underdeveloped countries of the Tricontinental world, in more senses than one. With the definitive failure of the state capitalist — closed economy model and 'really existing socialism's crisis of survival (which became obvious towards the end of the decade), the Third World was confronted with a **crisis of alternatives**. Faced with the twin problems of economic stagnation and a mounting debt burden, these countries had only one way to go — the path charted for them by the IMF and the World Bank, that of adopting a neo liberal/monetarist economic strategy.

In 1977, Sri Lanka became the first Third World country (after Chile and Sadat's Egypt) to discard the closed economic model and to opt for an open market economic strategy. It was certainly the first to do so in a competitive electoral system (a 'pluralist democracy'). This was the logical outcome of 7 years of state capitalist 'closed economy' under the regime of Ms. Sirima Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), which retarded economic growth (1), increased unemployment drastically (2) — and even reduced the school enrolment ratio (3). This model, incidentally, is qualitatively indistinguishable from the latest prescriptions of Samir Amin in his advocacy of a 'national and popular, delinked' model as a 'genuine option' for the Third World, and its failure discredits Amin's 'option', in practice. The resultant economic difficulties (particularly chronic scarcities and shortages) led to the resounding electoral defeat of the incumbent regime in 1977. The United

National Party (U.N.P) which obtained an unprecedented 4/5th majority in the Parliament, proceeded to open up the economy. The new policies resulted in rapid economic expansion (4). Unemployment declined (5) and exports boomed (6).

Though successful in ensuring the rapid growth of the forces of production, the downside of the new economic strategy was becoming increasingly evident by the mid 80's — the most crucial being the high level of poverty. By 1987, nearly 30% of the Lankan population was living below the poverty line. "The rural sector had the highest proportion of people in poverty. Nearly 82% of the rural population and 14% of the urban population were below the poverty line... The per capita daily calorie consumption levels of the three lowest deciles declined between 1978/79 and 1981/82... Malnutrition among children increased particularly in rural areas between 1975/76 and 1980/82." ('Assault on Poverty' — An Address at the Institute of Fundamental Studies — Dr. Warnaseena Rasaputram - Governor, Central Bank of Sri Lanka - 25th November, 1987).

This situation was exacerbated by the war in the island's North-East (between Tamil guerrillas fighting for a separate state and the Sri Lankan Army). The Sinhala insurgency led by the Polpotist JVP (which was a reaction to the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord and the Provincial Council system which gave the Tamil people some degree of regional autonomy) wreaked havoc in the Southern part of the country and further compounded the socio-economic problems. Economic growth declined and unemployment soared.

By 1988 Sri Lanka had come to a turning point. It was obvious that though the economic strategy of the post '77 period ensured high growth levels (at least until the festering ethnic problem exploded into a full scale war), it had not succeeded in tackling the problem of poverty. The benefits of high growth had not 'trickled down' to a majority of the populace as the architects of the open economic policies predicted. Despite the rapid growth and

expansion of the economy, the living standards of a large segment of the people had actually declined. This made it imperative — particularly in the context of the vicious Polpotist insurgency — to rethink the economic strategy of the post '77 period and to come up with new ideas and policies to ensure that a greater share than hitherto of the benefits of growth accrue, relatively rapidly to the majority of the populace. The prevailing international context (the failure of the State capitalist as well as State socialist models the world over) as well as the experience of the closed economy era of '70-'77 (shortages, economic stagnation, chronic unemployment) made turning the clock back, impossible. The task and challenge then was **to find ways and means to fight poverty and all its attendant social ills within the broad framework of an open market economic strategy.**

It was to meet this challenge that the Presidential candidate of the ruling UNP, Ranasinghe Premadasa, presented his imaginative Poverty Alleviation Programme, 'Janasaviya', as the main plank of his electoral platform in 1988. The struggle against poverty became the hallmark of the discourse of the Premadasa candidacy and later on, the Premadasa presidency. In a context where the standard neoliberal remedy for the problem of poverty — high economic growth and 'trickle down' — had failed abysmally, the task was one of creating alternatives, both conceptually and concretely. The Janasaviya programme was an attempt to fulfil this task.

## A Really Existing Alternative

Sri Lanka had one previous (and highly successful) experience in creating alternatives, in charting a new course to find creative and viable solutions to the pressing problems of the masses. This was the Million House Programme (Gam Uda-wa - Village Reawakening Movement) launched by Premadasa in the 80's, which succeeded in alleviating the problem of homelessness. (At the time, he was Sri Lanka's Prime Minister).

The magnitude of this achievement can

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*Dayan Jayatilleka was formerly Minister of Planning Manpower Mobilization and Youth Affairs of the North-Eastern Provincial council and until recently, Director Conflict Studies at the Institute of Policy Studies. He is currently Executive Director of the newly formed Premadasa Centre. Its Patron is Ranil Wickremasinghe, Leader of the Opposition. Desmond Fernando P.C. and Susil Sirivardhana are Senior Advisors of the Premadasa Centre.*



be understood by the fact that homelessness is a major problem facing not only the countries in the Tricontinental World but also the affluent, post-colonial and neo-colonial West. Homelessness was a major problem in Sri Lanka too by the end of '70's (despite the fact that the Minister of Housing of Ms. Bandaranaike's government was the leader of the country's pro-Moscow Communist Party). The rapid, though unbalanced, economic growth of the '80's would have made this assume crisis proportions — except for the Million Houses Programme launched by Prime Minister Premadasa in his capacity as the Minister of Housing and Construction. The massive Housing Programme which was launched in 1984 was based on his approach to development as "finding ways and means of getting the people to stand on their own feet." The aim was to eradicate the problem of homelessness and turn Sri Lanka into a House Owning Democracy, by "making housing a people's movement."

**This idea had to face much opposition from within the government itself** because it was regarded as a radical departure from the predominant neo-liberal policies. The Million House Programme was therefore perceived by the 'economic managers' as a Utopia which was bound to fail. The programme was launched in a traditionally marginalised, oppressed caste village — a symbolic gesture of no little importance in an extremely caste conscious society and was based on three guidelines. As Premadasa stated: "First we seek no major foreign aid to support our housing construction effort, second, we rely on local technology to the maximum. Foreign aid and foreign technology have their place. They are however no substitute for local skills. And the best capital investment is the labour of the house builder. A third guideline is the encouragement of exponential development through housing. The rapid growth of local centres of culture, commerce, education, social service are the frequent by products of our programmes." (7)

The Million Houses Programme deviated from the dominant economic thinking on two major counts. Firstly, in contrast to the extremely outward oriented/dependent economic strategy, it adopted a more self reliant (though not autarchic) approach. Secondly, in contrast to the prevailing dogma of doing away with all forms of state intervention, it entailed direct state intervention to solve a major

social problem — not by fostering dependence on the state but by empowering the people. The aim was to ensure "a fundamental reversal of roles between government and community. The State has joined the process of the people, instead of inviting the people to join a process of the State." (8)

The Housing Programme therefore can perhaps be regarded as the forerunner of a more balanced approach, a new path to development, symbolising Premadasa's belief that "development necessarily involves change and therefore a choice of alternatives or a choice between several options." (9)

### **The Poverty Epidemic and the Poverty Emergency**

The creativity and the bold, unorthodox approach of placing a high premium on the need for change and for new thinking, which characterized the Million Houses Programme, was brought into Premadasa's Poverty Alleviation Programme — (Janasaviya). The basic premise was that as in the case of homelessness, the redressing, the redressing of poverty is not a result but a pre-condition of genuine development. Form a medium/long term goal, poverty alleviation was turned into the most urgent task of the day by placing it at the top of the government's agenda. As Premadasa stated "Poverty is the greatest social disease of many countries. It has reached epidemic proportions in much of the Third World. Epidemics are emergencies. Emergencies do not have the luxury of leisurely solutions." (10)

In implementing the Janasaviya Programme (JSP), the first step was to identify food stamp holding families living below the poverty line. They were provided with Janasaviya Entitlement Certificates. The Programme itself was to be completed in 11 rounds with each round taking 2 years. During this period the chosen families will be granted a consumption allowance of Rs 1458/-. (Of this they were encouraged to save a sum of Rs. 458/-, if possible). The Co-operative Societies were to supply food and other consumer articles to the JSP recipients to the value of this consumption component.

Arrangement were also made to provide bank loans to the JSP recipients who were interested in setting up self employment projects.

The main objective of the JSP was to

integrate the hitherto marginalised poor into the development process by helping them to become economically productive. Poverty Alleviation was regarded not as something separate or divorced from the development process but as an integral part of it. In fact the JSP was to play the role of a catalyst in the country's development effort.

As President Premadasa explained "Janasaviya is not a dole or merely a welfare programme. Its primary purpose is the activation of the people. It enables them to participate in production and share in its benefits. Janasaviya also seeks to make people self reliant, acquire a new confidence and become actors in their own destiny. It seeks to break down alienation and involve people in the social process."(11)

### **Export-led Poverty Alleviation?**

The JSP was regarded as the main component of Premadasa's concept of 'People Centred Development'. Attempts were made to integrate the JSP with the country's export promotion drive, under the 'Big Investor, Small Producer' concept of President Premadasa.

Exporters were asked to provide market opportunities, technological knowhow and inputs to the JSP recipients engaged in production activities. A new institution, the Janasaviya Trust Fund (JTF), was established to expand the scope of the Janasaviya Programme, to enable it to play its allocated key role in the development process. The stated tasks of the JSP were the provision of credit to the poor without collateral, training and providing opportunities to the rural poor to find employment in public work programmes.

Since the JSP is still being implemented (the 4th Round commenced a few months ago), it's too early to say how it has worked in practice and how many of the objectives have been achieved. But it would be no exaggeration say that it opened up new vistas for the country's hitherto marginalised poor and enabled at least a segment of them to escape the trap of poverty. Since the 'consumption component' was double the value of food stamps, it is reasonable to assume that the living standards of these people improved considerably — at least for the duration of the 2 years.

The programme also enabled a segment of the recipients to obtain bank

loans — something unimaginable previously, as these people were regarded as 'assetless' and therefore 'not credit-worthy'. During the first three rounds more than 100,000 JSP families (around 28% of the total no. of families coming under the first three rounds) (12) received loans amounting to around 808 million (13) from the two state banks, the Bank of Ceylon and the People's Bank and the Co-operative Rural Bank. **Considering the prejudice against the poor inherent in conventional banking practice all over the world, this was nothing less than a radical -progressive change.** Perhaps the weakest aspect of the JSP is the uncertainty regarding the future of those recipients who have completed the two year period but were unable to become gainfully employed. The JSP contains two measures to look after such people. Firstly, all Janasaviya recipients who have completed the two years are to be — given a Savings Certificate stating that each family has Rs. 25,000/- deposited in their name in a State owned Savings Bank. This money cannot be withdrawn, though the recipients are entitled to a monthly interest payment. This is also supposed to enable the recipient to also obtain loans from banks using this document as collateral. Secondly those recipients who have completed the two years but are not gainfully employed are supposed to be provided employment opportunities in various Public Works Programmes in their areas. But not enough data is available to comment on how these measures are working in practice.

#### A Different Development Discourse

Whatever the drawbacks of the JSP, it's undeniable that it caused a radical change in the way the poor, the problem of poverty and the task of poverty alleviation were perceived by policy makers. With the JSP, poverty alleviation was made one of the main axis of the government's economic strategy. The hitherto forgotten and marginalised poor were brought on to the centre stage, economically, politically and socially. Helping the poor turned from a subsidy (which was considered a 'drag' on the economy) to one of the main tasks of the economic development process. A fundamental change has been caused in the **economic/development discourse** which will be well nigh impossible to reverse. **The rudiments of a new development paradigm** were created which gave precedence to the task of poverty alleviation above all else.

#### Land and the Bourgeois Democratic Revolution

The theme of poverty alleviation was not limited to the JSP but was common to all the major development programmes implemented by the Premadasa administration since 1989. Foremost among these is the Land Reform (Presidential Land Task Force) Programme which was launched in late 1989 with the objective of distributing state owned land free of charge among landless peasants. As President Premadasa explained: "This accelerated programme of land alienation was launched to bring about a realistic equilibrium in land ownership. It will also broaden the productive assets among the poor, landless segments of our society". (14)

The importance of the Land Task Force programme cannot be overestimated. Solving the agrarian question is, after all, one of the main tasks of the Bourgeois Democratic Revolution. Landlessness and state/private monopoly over land are two interrelated problems faced by a number of Third World countries. These have contributed to the exacerbation of rural poverty and have acted as obstacles to the development efforts of these countries. It's accident that the Third World's two most notable success stories, Taiwan and South Korea, both carried out extensive land reforms which helped to redress rural poverty and inequality and acted as a catalyst for the industrialization drive.

By 1985 82.5% of the total land mass of Sri Lanka was under the ultimate ownership of the State (15). Though a variety of 'land reform' programmes were implemented in the post Independence period, none of these were targetted at solving the problem of rural landlessness. As a result, by 1985, 27% of peasant households were landless and 70% of the country's unemployed were located in the peasant sector (16). The aim of the Land Task Force was to redress these problems of rural poverty and unemployment by attacking the root cause — landlessness. The stated aim was to re-distribute one million acres of land among the landless (17). This was supposed to address the redistribution aspect which was hardly visible in the previous effect at land reform, under the Bandaranaike government.

*Next: Unemployment*

#### Notes

1. The GDP growth rate (at 1980 prices) was 2.9% during the 70-77 period compared to 3.4% in 1950-60 period and 4.8% in 1970-70 period.
2. Unemployment was as high as 24% in 1973.
3. The school enrolment ratio for the 5-14 age group declined steadily from 100 in 1970 to 80 in 1976.
4. GDP growth rate was 8.7% in 1978 and 5.5% for the period 1977-85.
5. 14.7% in 1978-79 and 11.7% in 1981 & 82.
6. 4840 million rupees in 1976 and 13,193 million rupees in 1978.
7. Address at the International Housing Awards Ceremony at Princess Anne Theatre in London 3.10.88.
8. R. Premadasa Speech at the Seminar on Housing Development 19.9.87.
9. Address to the Asia Society, New York — 30th Sept. 1980.
10. Address at the Inauguration of the Janasaviya Trust Fund — 25.9.91.
11. A Charter for Democracy.
12. Economic Review - February '93.
13. Ibid

#### LETTER

### 'Double standards'

Apropos of your comment about the "*deafening silence*" of your resident community of human rights activists vis a vis the Thotalanga bomb blast that killed the Leader of the Opposition and 53 others, it may interest you to know that Sri Lankans abroad were very much alive to the tragic events in the country than foreign funded local NGOs.

I enclose two statements issued by less affluent, little publicised human rights groups in London, in respect of that bomb blast.

You will recall that the political selectivism of your local human rights industry, like the proverbial monkeys, saw no evil, heard no evil and spoke no evil of the violence by the State, which funded the PRRA to catch and produce Southern rebels, at the rate of Rs. 25,000/ per decapitated head. (Vide Sunday Observer 17-02-1991)

Prins Gunasekara

London.



# Minority Voting Trends

Laksiri Jayasuriya

Following a spirited campaign, and despite being obviously weighted in favour of the government in power (consisting of 91 Ministers!) with ready access to a vast political apparatus, independent observers have reported a free and fair election. One of the most revealing features of the Election is the high degree of voter participation on this occasion (Table 2). This confirms the overall pattern of voter turnout at General Elections since 1947 barring elections held between 1987 and 1989 which were characterised by internal strife and reports of voter intimidation.

Voting proceeded peacefully in all Provinces except the Northern Province. In the Eastern Province there was a voter turnout of about 75%. The voter turnout throughout the country was quite high (the nationwide turnout was 765); approximately 82% cast their votes outside of the North (e.g. in 20 out of 22 electoral districts). The consistent trend for a high voter turnout except for 1988-89. The high level of voter participation clearly indicates the political maturity of the electorate and preparedness of the Sri Lankan voter to exercise the privilege of the ballot freely and purposefully.

Table 2 also shows the extent of voter invalidity due to rejection. The proportion of rejected votes compared to previous elections is much less (4.80 in 1994 compared with 6.13 in 1989), but it is still a cause for concern, especially in a country which has a high adult literacy rate (approximately 89%). Some outlying rural areas have recorded a very high level of rejected votes (e.g., Moneragala, 9.5% and Badulla 7.8%). Allowing for the fact that this level of voter invalidity may be partly due to deliberate spoilage, this data suggests that the complex PR system of voting introduced with the 1978 Constitution is gaining greater acceptance and is better understood.

The only exception to this pattern of high voter participation was the results of the Jaffna District in the Northern Province. Here, voting was virtually paralysed (only about 8% of registered voters cast their votes) because of the existence of a state of siege.

**Table 2: Sri Lanka Voter Participation In Parliamentary Elections, 1947-94**

Year	General elections		
	Total Votes	%	% Invalid Votes
1947	3,048,145	55.8	na
1952	2,990,913	70.7	na
1956	3,464,159	69.0	na
1960 March	4,724,507	77.6	na
1960 July	3,724,507	75.9	na
1965	4,710,887	82.1	na
1970	5,505,028	85.24	na
1977	6,667,589	86.7	0.53
1982 <sup>a</sup>	6,602,617	81.16	1.22
1988 <sup>a</sup>	5,186,223	55.32	1.76
1989	5,962,031	63.6	6.13
1994	8,344,095	76.24	4.80
		(81.2) <sup>c</sup>	

Notes: <sup>a</sup> 1982, 1988 Presidential voting highlighted in italics; <sup>b</sup> In the 1982 Referendum, 70.82% votes were cast; <sup>c</sup> Results mainly of 20 out of 22 districts. na: not available

**Table 3: Jaffna Vote**

Polling District	Total Votes	Polled	EPDP	SLMC
Jaffna	50,045	1,208	40	1,151
Kayts	49,504	11,263	9,978	819
Vadukkodai	58,949	964	556	5
Kankesanthurai	60,417	121	93	5
Chavakacheri	51,717	79	62	-
Kopay	56,496	57	40	-
Killinochi	55,995	66	2	56
Point Pedro	40,336	34	3	-
Nallur	62,372	19	8	-
Manipay	58,382	12	4	-
Uduppidi	52,153	8	5	1

(Source: Jayanth 1994)

Note: This includes refugees who voted in Puttalam and Colombo. Polling was held only in the islands off Jaffna and the cleared areas of the peninsula.

Table 3 gives the results of voting in Jaffna which has the highest concentration of Sri Lankan Tamils. These results are somewhat farcical in that, the elections were boycotted by the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Elam (LTTE), the dominant Tamil party which has de facto control of the Jaffna District. Not surprisingly, only 2.32% of the voters participated and this too mainly in the island's off Jaffna and the 'cleared' areas such as Kankasanthurai and Palali. As Jayanth (1994) observed:

Some of the winning EPDP candidates polled 'nil' votes in most of the booths. If they obtained, say, six votes in all, they were declared elected under the system of proportional representation (p.11).

The EPDP led by Douglas Devananda contested as Independents in Jaffna and won 9 out of the 10 seats. It is a nondescript Tamil Party opposed to the LTTE which, it is reported, 'has been assisting the security forces in the maintenance of law and order' in the 'safe' areas. The Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC) won the other seat mainly on the strength of Jaffna voters who were refugees in camps in Puttalam and Colombo. The representative of the major parties at a meeting, summoned by the Commissioner of Elections in August 17, 1994 immediately after the Election, agreed that the Jaffna results should not be annulled. However, there is some prospect that the results from the Jaffna Electoral District maybe challenged in the courts.

The 94 GE continues to exhibit anomalies and shortcomings of the PR system adopted in Sri Lanka (i.e., the *Hamilton Method of Largest Remainder*). This is mainly because the voting is not a constituency based but on a party and a candidate for an electoral district. Thus, it may be that, even if a candidate is not directly elected, could still get elected on a District basis, (i.e. in terms of the system of bonus seats allocated to a party in terms of the voting strength in the District). To give a hypothetical example, it does not matter whether a candidate, say, from the UNP in the initial votes cast polled much less than one from the opposing People's Alliance (PA) provided that this UNP candidate ranks within the number of bonus seats to be allocated to the UNP in that particular District. For example, as happened in the Trincomalee District, even

though 'the UNP did not win any seats (in a direct election), it took two of the four seats because, overall it polled the largest number of votes in the district' (Jayanth 1994, p.11). The Election Manifestos of both the UNP and PA appeared to be cognisant of these anomalies, and have indicated that they would make amendments to the PR system if elected to office.

Table 4 shows results of the 94 GE in terms of seats gained by the parties.

Table 5 gives the additional percentage of votes gained by the main parties in 1994 and the number of seats secured. Table 6 also presents an overview by giving comparable data (votes gained and number of seats) for the previous two General Elections, noting that the 1977 Election was based on First Past the Post Voting and for a lesser number of parliamentary seats.

**Table 4: The Final Tally of Seats GE 1994**

Party	District Seats	National List	Total
People's Alliance (PA)	91	14	105
United National Party (UNP)	81	13	94
Independents (Jaffna)	9	-	9
Muslim Congress	6	1	7
Tamil United Liberation Front	4	1	5
Democratic People's Liberation Front <sup>1</sup>	3	-	3
Sri Lanka Progressive Front (JVP) <sup>2</sup>	1	-	1
Independents (Nuwara Eliya)	1	-	1

Source: Uyangoda (1994)

Note:

<sup>1</sup> All from the Vanni District in the Northern Province

<sup>2</sup> From the Hambantota District

**Table 5: General Elections 1977-94:**

**Distribution of Votes and Parliamentary Seats by Parties**

Party	1977 <sup>a</sup>		1989 <sup>b</sup>				1994 <sup>bc</sup>			
	% Votes	Seats Elected	% Votes	Seats Elected	Seats National List	Total Seats	% Votes	Seats Elected	Seats National List	Total Seats
UNP & CWC	51.9	141	51.9	110	15	125	44.0	81	13	94
SLFP	29.7	8	31.9	58	9	67				
SLFP+	5.95	-	5.7	2	1	3	50.7 <sup>d</sup>	91 <sup>d</sup>	14 <sup>d</sup>	105 <sup>D</sup>
SLMC			3.6	3	1	4		6	1	7
TULF+TC	6.8	18	3.8	9	1	10	2.3	4	1	5
Others	5.7	1	3.6	14	2	16	2.9	14	0	14
Total	100	168	100	196	29	225	100	196	29	225

Notes:

<sup>a</sup> Based on First Past the Post; <sup>b</sup> Voting based on PR system; <sup>c</sup> In 1994 SLFP + is a coalition known as the People's Alliance (PA); <sup>d</sup> Total vote includes SLMC vote.

The data in Table 5 shows that the SLFP and its allies in the form of the People's Alliance (the PA) gained, for the second time in its history, over 49% of the total votes cast. The total votes for the PA, along with those for the SLMC votes give a total of 50.74% votes for the coalition parties in the new regime. This would be marginally more if the votes cast for the Independent (Nuwara Eliya) member (Upcountry People's Front) supporting the PA in government are included. When compared with the UNP's voting strength (44%), the difference is sizeable and convincing though not expressed similarly in the number of seats won by the PA (Table 5). Not surprisingly, the Leader of the PA (Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga) complained bitterly that, despite gaining 49% vote, the system of voting devised by the UNP had, deprived her of an absolute majority of seats.

**Table 6: Hypothetical Results of a General Election on the basis of First Past the Post Wins**

Party	89 GE	94 GE
UNP	131	44
SLFP	5	
PA		94
DYNF		
SLMC		9
TULF		4
Jaffna		5
Other	24	5

Source: Sahabandhu (1994)

Note: In the 94 GE, the combined PA and SLMC would have 94+9=103.

Table 6 shows the hypothetical distribution of seats if it was based on First Past the Post Voting as in 1977 and previous elections. This data certainly lends some credence to Mrs Kumaratunga's complaint that she has been somewhat unfairly treated by the prevailing system of elections. The contrast between the two main parties (UNP and PA) is more pointed — a difference of 50 seats. However, what stands out from the overall pattern of results is the distinct bi-party polarisation of the Sri Lankan electorate. This confirms a trend evident from 1956 onwards and firmly establishes the future direction of Sri Lankan electoral democracy and party politics.

Two other key features characterising the Election results, evident from Table 6, warrant comment. They both relate to the way the minority vote has manifested itself in this Election. The Muslim vote (approximately 1.8%) has gone to the SLMC which was first established in 1987. This party gained 2 seats in the 1989 General Election, and has improved its position considerably in the 94 GE, with a total of 7 seats and forming part of the new government. It is destined to play a critical role particularly in view of its strength in the Eastern Province, which is likely to be sticking point in any negotiated settlement on the Tamil conflict involving a devolved system of administration for the North and East.

According to Hellman - Rajanayagam (1986), the North Eastern Province (especially the Trincomalee District in) is a pawn for both the Sinhalese and Tamils. It is felt that the possession of the North East will decide the outcome of the fight and the chances of survival of an independent Tamil State (p85). The support given by the SLMC to the PA is also likely



to be a determining factor in the eventual pattern of negotiations and they may well be able to gain maximum advantage for the Muslim community, not just the East, but nationally.

Mohan (1987) in his pathfinding study of the Muslims in Sri Lanka, makes the perceptive observation that there has always been 'two distinct segments of Muslim society in Sri Lanka, viz the Eastern Province and the West Coast Muslims' (p. 115). Over many years the Muslim leadership has rested more with the elite and affluent West Coast Muslims who have, according to Mohan, regarded the Eastern Province Muslims as 'inferior — a poor relative' (p. 115). In the past, the East Coast Muslims had 'acquiesced in the political leadership of the West Coast Muslims', who in turn had established close alliances of varying duration with the two main parties — the UNP and SLFP. But, the reverse may be true today in that the SLMC — the new party of the Muslims — led by Mr Ashraff (the grandson of the veteran Eastern province politician, Gate Mudaliyar Mr Kariapper). The SLMC, as a result of the 94 Election, has emerged in a strong bargaining position not just in the resolution of the Tamil conflict, but also in determining the future directions of Sri Lankan politics.

Equally, the other main group in minority politics in recent times, viz. The Indian Tamil community, has also shown signs

that its leadership is no longer safely ensconced in the CWC, the long-standing Trade Union cum political party. The CWC, led by octogenarian, Mr S. Thondaman, a skilful and charismatic leader, for over four decades has bequeathed — in dynastic succession style — the leadership to his grandson, Mr Arumugam Thondaman. But, the success of Mr Chandrasekaran, representing the Upcountry People's Front as an Independent (Nuwara Eliya) member, as well as the growing disaffection in the ranks of the CWC spearheaded by its former General Secretary, Mr Sellasamy heralds an uncertain future for the CWC.

The CWC will no longer be able to play the pivotal role it has played in Sri Lankan politics for the last three decades, and has greatly helped to keep the UNP in power as the governing party. It is true that in the past 'the CWC needed the UNP and the UNP needed the CWC' (Dissanayaka 1994, p. 92). But, within CWC, its new forces — the youthful militant segments — have challenged the orthodoxy of the CWC and its conventional style of leadership. In the inevitable restructuring of the CWC, which is likely to occur in the foreseeable future, the SLFP, more than the UNP, stands to benefit from any realignment that may take place in the political forces within the Indian Tamil community.

## PRESS AND DEMOCRACY IN SRI LANKA

# The Taming of Sri Lanka's National Press 1960-1974

K M de Silva

On 12 August 1960 the throne speech - the annual statement of policy - of the newly elected Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) government led by its new Prime Minister, Sirima Bandaranaike, contained a proposal that attracted much attention and a great deal of criticism.

It was announced that:

"A Commission will be appointed to inquire into the functioning of the press in connection with the General Elections held in March and July this year".

"My government will introduce legislation to take over the newspapers controlled by the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd, and the Times of Ceylon Ltd, and to vest such newspapers in statutory public corporations with unlimited share capital in which individual holdings will be restricted so as to ensure a broad-based ownership. This legislation will ensure the democratic character of newspapers in this country and

prevent abuse by the formation of unhealthy monopolies".

This was the first move in a long campaign which was to stretch over the next four years. In choosing to challenge the press the new government was certain of support from Marxists parties both within and outside Parliament. Indeed the Marxists with whom the new government had had an electoral alliance in July 1960 were more consistent and resolute in their support of this policy and whenever it seemed as though the SLFP, for whatever reason, was inclined to give it a lower priority than the bold statement of 12 August 1960 appeared to promise, the Marxist left would keep the issue alive with well-timed and well-publicized reminders. The United National Party (UNP) for its part, led the opposition to this measure, and as usual JR Jayewardene, the party's deputy leader, provided both the strategic insights and tactical operational skills for his party's campaign. As we shall see later

on in this paper, he so managed that campaign that the SLFP and its allies of the left came to grief over this issue in a vote of non-confidence which toppled the government in December 1964.

Sri Lanka's national press of this period was dominated - indeed overwhelmingly so - by the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited or Lake House as it was called and as we shall call it in this paper. Together with the formerly British-owned Times group whose principal journal was the *Times of Ceylon*, Lake House had a duopoly in the country's newspaper business. Since the 1940's, and especially after the early 1950s, the Times group was very much a junior partner in this duopoly. Lake House towered above it in terms of circulation of newspapers, and financial resources. The existence of the Times group merely served to conceal the virtual monopoly position that its formidable rival had achieved. Indeed that dominance was so great that had a similar situation

arisen in the US it would certainly have attracted the attention of trustbusters.

Looked at from another perspective the establishment and growth of Lake House is one of the great success stories of Sri Lankan business enterprise, at a time when the island's economy was dominated by British and Indian capitalists. This story, in all its complexity, is worth the attention of researchers. Unfortunately all we have on Lake House at the moment is the official biography of D R Wijewardene (1886-1950)<sup>1</sup> the founder of Lake House, written by a man who had served for many years as the editor of its two principal newspapers in turn, the *Ceylon Observer* and the *Ceylon Daily News*, the latter very much the flagship of the enterprise. That biography, unfortunately is unsatisfactory. It leaves out so much of the story. We have no information on the growth in the circulation of the newspapers, very little on the financing of the expansion of the group and its newspapers, nothing at all on some of the issues that made Lake House and its imperious founder so controversial with large and vocal sections of the Sri Lankan population.

In HAJ Hulugalle's biography of his employer, D R Wijewardene, he described the latter as

...the first [Sri Lankan] to create a newspaper business. When he launched the *Daily News* in 1918, [Sri Lanka] was a Crown Colony ruled from London. When he died thirty-two years later, she had become an independent nation..."<sup>2</sup>

He went on to add that:

"By any reckoning Wijewardene was among the leading newspaper proprietors in the Commonwealth, yet his name was unknown outside a small circle of newspaper men. The public knew next to nothing of the Press magnate. His photograph did not appear in his own newspapers or in other journals. He was a man of few words and unassuming ways. Yet his influence on the events of his time in [Sri Lanka] was greater than that of most politicians..."<sup>3</sup>

Wijewardene's achievement was remarkable for his day and age. One is inclined to agree with much of Hulugalle's assessment of it. That assessment read as follows:

"...he bought a bankrupt newspaper and, by degrees, established a group of journals, in the English, Sinhalese and Tamil languages, which were among the best of their kind. Financially and politically independent, his papers were able to serve the public without fear or favour. The country needed, as never before, a strong well-informed public opinion, and Wijewardene deemed it his mission to provide the right conditions and means for its development..."<sup>4</sup>

Within 20 years of the beginning of his career as a newspaper proprietor, Wijewardene was a power in the land. Marriage ties<sup>5</sup> and personal friendships linked him to some of the most powerful politicians of the day. In the last days of the transfer of power (the 1940's) he was the man behind the scene in his support of the policies of the then Leader of the State Council, D S Senanayake. The latter regarded Wijewardene as a trusted advisor and dependable ally.

He was, in short, a key figure in the emerging Sri Lankan political establishment. Inevitably this brought him - and his newspaper - into conflict with the critics and opponents of that establishment. Hulugalle explains that:

"Powerful newspaper proprietors are not, in general, popular personages. The fact that they have the means to make or break reputations seems to be resented subconsciously by their fellow beings. They sometimes gain popular esteem, but rarely public affection. They make enemies even when they are doing no more than their duty. Newspapers are supposed to expose scandal and inefficiency in public life, without respect for persons; the victims rarely forgive. When a press magnate dies, he is generally forgotten as easily as yesterday's newspaper..."<sup>6</sup>

But these were not the reasons for the obloquy that Wijewardene and Lake House earned among sections of the Sri Lankan population. For one thing Wijewardene was a martinet, and was feared and respected among his employees and admired rather than loved. The ruthlessness with which Wijewardene successfully broke a strike in his establishment in April 1929 did not come as a surprise

to those who knew him well. At that time, A E Goonesinha and his Labour Union was on the crest of a wave of successes one by one powerful British commercial houses succumbed to his organizational skills and dedicated advocacy of the rights of labour. Successfully thwarting Goonesinha and his union on this occasion set Wijewardene on a path that brought much opprobrium from radical and left-wing groups, his defiant role as one of the principal opponents of the trade union movement in the country, and of trade union leaders. That policy continued well into the next decade, and Lake House was literally in the forefront of the opposition to the trade union agitation in the public services in the mid-1940's and the general strike organized by the Marxist parties in 1946. Naturally the trade union movement, especially the Marxist controlled unions, counted Lake House and its proprietor, Wijewardene, among its principal targets in its political agitation. To them they were the unacceptable ugly faces of Sri Lankan capitalism, and enemies to whom no quarter would be forthcoming when the day of reckoning came.

Just as Lake House identified itself completely with D S Senanayake and the Sri Lankan negotiators for the transfer of power, its close ties with Senanayake continued after he became the country's first post-independence Prime Minister. That support was extended to the party he established, the UNP, and Lake House became to all practical purposes the voice of the political establishment and of the party in power. This is not an unusual phenomenon in democratic states in other parts of the world, this partisanship of newspapers. One has only to turn to Britain for appropriate examples. But the difference in Sri Lanka was that the support was extended to the governing party by a group of newspapers that had virtually no effective rival.

As long as D S Senanayake was alive Lake House gave him unstinted support. At the time he died D R Wijewardene was no longer alive, but the latter's heirs helped to swing party and public support in favour of Senanayake's son, Dudley, in preference to Sir John Kotelawela, the Leader of the House, and heir presumptive. At the general election of 1952 the Lake House newspapers served as propaganda sheets for the UNP. when Kote-



lawela took over as Prime Minister in 1953 they supported him as enthusiastically as they had done his predecessors in office. At the next general election in 1956 the Lake House campaign on his behalf failed to save him and the UNP from a stunning defeat. For the first time its propaganda campaign had proved to be completely counterproductive.

During the UNP's year in the wilderness (1956-1959) Lake House found a new role as a very effective opposition press. There were innumerable opportunities to exploit the divisions in the ranks of the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP) coalition led by SWRD Bandaranaike. On many of the controversial issues that divided the MEP government the Lake House press could be relied upon to expose weaknesses within the government, and, on occasion, to take a partisan stand behind one or other of the factions within that coalition, but generally against the left-wing and Marxist elements. To its many critics this was no more than mischievous, irresponsible journalism. Those who ran Lake House could argue, not without justification, that they were acting in the public interest in exposing shortcomings in the government's policies, and the foibles of its more irresponsible Cabinet ministers. The Prime Minister himself was not immune to attack, sometimes at a personal level, for his indecisiveness, his tendency to succumb to pressure, and to tolerate indiscipline, but more often criticisms were on policy matters. Nevertheless whatever he may have felt about it in private he made no move to curb the press. Not once did he threaten to break the dominance of Lake House in the newspaper business, much less to nationalise the press. Such threats generally came from the Marxist parties.

With the assassination of SWRD Bandaranaike Lake House returned to its traditional role of propaganda organ for the UNP - for a return to power of a revived and re-organized UNP. There were two elections in 1960, the indecisive one in March that year, and the election of July 1960 which brought the then inexperienced Mrs Bandaranaike to power as head of the SLFP. On that latter occasion an electoral pact with the parties of the left helped once more, as in April 1956, to prevent a division of the anti-UNP vote. The Lake House campaign of July 1960 was intent on helping the UNP to return

to power with a larger support base than it had in March 1960 when it headed a minority government. The campaign had an air of desperation about it because of the realisation that the new SLFP leader was a star attraction and there was every prospect of her leading the SLFP to another period of power. The Lake House campaign focused on her presumed lack of experience, and it also played on the potential instability of a government of incompatible allies. The Lake House campaign was shrill, but no shriller than it had been in opposition to SWRD Bandaranaike as Prime Minister.

On this occasion, however, the SLFP leadership and its allies made a public issue of the political partisanship of Lake House and held out the threat that if they — the SLFP, either on its own or in coalition with the Marxists — came to power they would appoint a commission to examine the press campaign of 1960, and to take effective measures to break up the press monopolies in Sri Lanka, Lake House, in particular, and the Times of Ceylon. Left-wing politicians and the SLFP's new leadership took offence at the lively political propaganda turned out by the Lake House press, in its newspapers, at the cartoons of Collette, the country's best known cartoonist, no less than at the slanted newspaper reportage. But looking at these 34 years after the event one is amazed that anyone could treat these as offenses that merited "capital punishment" for such was the effect of nationalizing the press. In retrospect Lake House political propaganda was small beer compared to the heady potent brew that Dr Elliott and the *Colombo Observer* provided a little over a century earlier during a time of crisis in colonial Sri Lanka. Whitehall, and the colonial government in general, if not Viscount Torrington the governor, showed far more restraint in dealing with the resourceful Christopher Elliott and his newspaper than the Sri Lankan politicians of 1960's and 1970's who led a campaign for nationalization of the press.

The most persistent proponents of controls over the press and the breaking up of Lake House as a media centre were the Marxist allies of the SLFP whose animosity against Lake House, in particular, went back to the 1930's and 1940's, and to the days of D R Wijewardene. They were seeking to exercise the ghost of D R Wijewardene. They heartily endorsed

the proposal, outlined in the new government's statement of policy on 12 August 1960, to bring the national press under state control.

Thereafter it was the Marxist left that kept pressing the government to implement these proposals on state control over the national press. Thus when the 1961 throne speech made no mention of these it was the Marxist left which focused attention on this omission. When the 1962 throne speech referred to the proposal in the following terms: "A Bill to prevent Press monopoly will be submitted for your approval," Pieter Keuneman of the Communist Party (CP) accused the government of watering down its earlier proposals, while in the Senate, a Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) member regretted that the proposal in the first throne speech had not been implemented. In 1963 there was no reference to the press take-over in the throne speech, and on this occasion the LSSP moved an amendment, through its members in both houses of Parliament, urging that the press monopoly be effectively ended. On 31 July 1963 the Minister of Justice, SPC Fernando, announced that the government had decided to appoint a Press Commission in accordance with its throne speech of 1960. A similar assurance had earlier been given by CP de Silva as Leader of the House, in the House of Representatives, in his reply for the government in the debate on the throne speech.

(To be Continued)

#### Notes

1. H A Hulugalle, *The Life and Times of D R Wijewardene*, (Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd.) Colombo, 1960.
2. *ibid.* p.1
3. *ibid.* p.3
4. *ibid.*,
5. He married Ruby Meedeniya, the daughter of Meedeniya Adigar a Kandyan aristocrat, and an influential member of "traditional" element of the colonial administration. His wife's sister Adeline was married to AF Molamure, who was for many years Speaker of the State Council as the National legislature was called under the Donoughmore Constitution of 1931-1947. He was the first Speaker of the post-independence legislature, and a very influential politician by virtue of being one of the most trusted political associates of D S Senanayake.
6. Hulugalle, *The Life and Times of D R Wijewardene*, *op. cit.*, p.2.

# Buddhist Religious Women

Kumari Jayawardena

The *dasa sil mathas* (mothers of the ten precepts) are lay women, with shaven hair, dressed in yellow robes, observing the ten precepts or rules of conduct. They are not *bhikkunis* or ordained nuns. The beginnings of this movement can be traced back to 1907. Catherine De Alwis, a convert to Buddhism from Anglican Christianity, who had gone to Burma and received ordination there as Sister Sudharmachari, started an *aramaya* (Buddhist temple) in that year. The movement did not attract much attention during the early period when its few members were generally old women (Salgado, n.d.). Recently, however, there has been an expansion in the numbers of *dasa sil mathas*. Earlier the majority of them were mainly poor older women, treated with little respect since they lacked social and religious status. A fair number of recent converts are, on the other hand young and well educated.

Buddhism was the earliest religion to ordain women. Though agreeing finally to the ordination of women, Buddha is said to have laid down certain conditions that clearly defined their subordinate status. "A nun who has been ordained even for a century must greet respectfully, rise up from her seat, and do proper homage to a monk ordained but that very day.... Admonition of monks by nuns is forbidden, admonition of nuns by monks is not forbidden". According to Buddhism, a woman can never become a Buddha. Moreover, her birth as a woman is due to her past bad *karma*, and if in this life she acquires merit, she may be reborn a man. Buddha, while treating exceptional women like Visakha on an intellectual plane, frequently warned Ananda about the wives of women: "Women are soon angered, Ananda, full of passion, envious, and stupid" (Conze, 1954).

A *bhikkuni* order actually existed in Sri Lanka at least up to the tenth century; there are historical records that nuns from the Abhayagiri Vihara in Anuradhapura went to China and ordained women there. The order of nuns disappeared in Sri Lanka about the twelfth century but lives in the Mahayana form in China. It has been suggested that the *bhikkuni* order in Sri Lanka be revived with ordination from China but this is a tricky question, since Sri Lanka is very protective of its Theravada tradition. Another factor preventing an ordination of *bhikkunis* today is Sri Lanka

is the lack of enthusiasm among both the Buddhist monks and laity. A few feminists have raised the issue without success, and as Salgado writes:

Individuals and the media may give some publicity to their cause, but the patriarchal nature of Sri Lankan Buddhist society is such that either the *Dasa Sil Matha* well have to come to the fore and contribute to changing it, or the character of the society itself will have to change (Salgado, n.d., 18).

But changes have occurred in recent years in the status of the *dasa sil mathas*; and many educated women have joined these groups and have assumed the functions of a *bhikkuni*. A walk of over 100 miles of *dasa sil mathas* from Colombo to a developmental celebration (*gamudava* in Kamburupitiya) over several days in June 1991 was given publicity daily in the newspapers and on television. These religious women have also assumed roles in counselling and helping women, in social work and in religious rituals. Some of the young better educated ones have taken more aggressive stances leading to opposition to their role by leading monks. In July 1991, the Rev. Walpola Rahula, a well-known intellectual monk of Sri Lanka, chose the occasion of a ceremony in his honor to make a public criticism of the *dasa sil mathas*: "It has become evident... that female lay devotees are making an attempt to appear and act as *Bhikkunis* (Nuns) emulating the *Bhikku* appearance, in a manner that is contrary to the Theravada tradition". The monk condemned their use of yellow robes like male monks, and suggested that they be provided with facilities to learn Buddhism and meditate "rather than be utilized as exhibits". Significantly, he did not advocate a parallel order of nuns, but was content to keep the *dasa sil mathas* in a subservient status<sup>3</sup>. This led to lively correspondence in the press; one writer alluded to Rev. Rahula as one of the "anti-feminists and male chauvinists in the Sangha," and added that "The proposal to demote *Dasa Sil Mathas*, give them white robes and oppose ordaining them as *Bhikkunis*... should be condemned and resisted," and noted that, "the Sinhalese Sangha has an unenviable history of monopolism, casteism... and male chauvinism"<sup>4</sup>.

## Conclusion

I have outlined above some acceptable

roles for women that were developed within the overarching framework of Sinhala Buddhist consciousness. There will probably be others that further research will uncover. However, it is often the case that activities undertaken with one intention tend to generate opposite impulses. I want to make a brief mention here of one such impulse.

The educational activities undertaken by the Buddhist Theosophical Society and other such organizations created the context for new roles for women that were in contrast to traditional views. The *Buddhist Schools Magazines* in 1895, for example, lamented the absence of "blue stockings" in Sri Lanka and called for higher education for local women so that they could become as distinguished as Western women (Jayawardena, 1986, p. 124). The first Sinhala Buddhist women doctors appeared at the turn of the century, and educated women started entering other professions such as teaching and nursing. In the 1920s, women began to be active in politics; some of them entered the Ceylon National Congress and the Ceylon Labour Party, while others joined the trade union movement. The Women's Franchise Union was an autonomous women's organization that agitated for women's suffrage; they made representations for votes for women in 1927 to a constitutional commission. Educated women also made their presence felt in other ways. To give one example, Nancy Wijekoon, a school teacher, wrote poems with a distinct anti-British flavour around 1915 and was suspected of sedition by the police (Jayawardena, 1972, p. 172).

In the early 1930s educated women took a further step. Inspired by their teachers, some women from Buddhist Theosophical schools joined the early anti-imperialist and socialist movements. Most responsible for this trend was a British socialist, Doreen Wickremasinghe, nee Young, wife of the leftist leader Dr. S.A. Wickremasinghe; she was successively the principal of two Buddhist girls' schools, Sujatha Vidyalaya in Matara (from 1930 to 1932) and Ananda Balika in Colombo (from 1933 to 1935). The Suriya Mal movement, organized by radical groups as a counter to the Poppy Day of the colonial power, had its nerve center at Ananda Balika school, whose teachers and pupils eagerly participated in its activities mixing freely with young men of the



Left of different casts and ethnic origins. These trends, however, were not welcome to the conservative elements of the Buddhist educational establishment with whom Doreen Wickremasinghe had problems. Once, when she was offered the post of Principal of Visakha Vidyalaya in 1933, the offer was withdrawn when it was discovered that she was to marry the Leftist politician, Dr. S.A. Wickremasinghe that year. Again in 1936, she was replaced as principal of Ananda Balika because some Buddhists were alarmed that the school had become a centre for controversial anti-British and Leftist activities.

The concern of Buddhists at the appearance of women political activists was reflected in a Piyadasa Sirisena novel of the 1940s. He categorizes the "bad woman" as one who travels about on her own, attends political meetings, addresses public meetings, speaks English to Sinhala persons, considers household work demeaning, and shows scant respect to parents. What is more revealing, however, is that a character in the book who talks in favour of education, employment, sports, theatre and other independent activities for women is told: "If anybody accepts all that you have said, then he or she must necessarily be a communist" (Sirisena, *Debera Kella*). This illustrates the view among some Buddhists that socialism meant women going out of control in the form of free love and the holding of women in common. The reality, however, was that there was no Buddhist feminism. There were no women from within the Buddhist discourse to dispute its patriarchal structures or at least to reinterpret its texts and practices in ways that would question women's subordination. Buddhism did not apparently offer any inspiration to feminism.

I have thus far looked at a few of the constructions of womanhood engendered by the Sinhala Buddhist movement. As pointed out earlier, it started as a revivalist discourse in the late nineteenth century with anti-Christian and anti-Western overtones, and developed into a movement dedicated to the maintenance of Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony over other ethnic groups. During this long period it has passed through many phases and has undergone many changes and nuances of emphasis in response to changing politico-economic circumstances.

There have recently been greater attempts at welding the many and sometimes contradictory elements of this consciousness into a coherent ideology. During the last decade, some members of the Sinhala intelligentsia have attempted the articulation of a *jathika chintanaya*, or national ideology. While stressing the Sinhala Buddhist nature of Sri Lankan

society and the need to preserve it, they have developed a set of arguments based on ideas of cultural relativism to justify their position. They have reinterpreted history to invent the picture of an egalitarian and harmonious society that existed in Sri Lanka in pre-colonial times and whose restoration is the aim of their project. Their attitude to gender remains traditional. According to them, Judeo-Christian civilization is inherently oppressive to women; not so Eastern or Buddhist cultures that recognize the importance of women and give them an equal role with men. Thus no changes are required in the basic status quo as far as women are concerned. For example, the wearing of Western dress by university women has been challenge by male students in the name of *Jathika Chintanaya*.

While it is certainly true that the condition of Sri Lanka women in terms of their physical quality of life has materially advanced, and the rhetoric of women's rights is freely indulged in, women remain subordinated. Messages to women, couched in religious and ethnic terms, have despite some nuances, remained remarkably traditional. Buddhist monks, supported by lay intellectuals, still emphasize correct patterns of conduct. Women are urged not to follow alien and demoralizing examples; preventing the entry of such intrusions is seen as the duty of a righteous government. In such a situation, women leaders professing to be Buddhists hesitate to take up feminist causes, and radical women agitating for women's rights do not seek support among the Buddhist religious and lay hierarchies.

During periods of heightened Sinhala-Tamil ethnic conflict and war, with the resultant increase of chauvinism and xenophobia, one also sees a hardening of attitudes towards women. They have to be brainwashed and conditioned to perform their "patriotic" and ethnic roles. Women are discouraged from cross-ethnic contact with other women and a barrage of propaganda in the media urges them to confine themselves to the religious and ethnic community. Those who disregard this and continue to seek contact across ethnic boundaries are termed traitors to the nation. In this context, it is not surprising that to the orthodox, the feminist often emerges as the threatening deviant "Other". For it is she who can challenge the patriarchal imposition of roles that confine her as wife or mother, and in condemning both ethnic chauvinism and male chauvinism, it is the feminist who is able to project a vision of a society that has overcome both ethnic and gender subordination.

I would like to express my appreciation to Romila Thapar, Valentine Moghadam,

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#### Notes

3. The Island, 25 July 1991.
4. Letter to the Editor from D. Amarasiri Weeraratne, "Demolishing Das Sil Mathas." in *Sunday Observer*, 11 Aug. 1991.

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# Patient Dispensable ?

Sarath C. Tillekeratne

Here is a throttle down description of how drug Rationalization in Lanka, the country of its birth, was strangled.

It is perhaps not so well known (memories are short) that Prof. Bibile's proposals met with violent opposition from within his own Ministry and he was compelled to go to the Ministry of Industries for their implementation.

In the Industrial field this intervention led to an immediate upsurge in Pharmaceutical production by the Island's six Pharmaceutical factories, an influx of new technology from some of the best known International Pharmaceutical research groups, increase in skilled employment and scientific knowhow, saving of valuable foreign exchange, and growth in this GNP sector.

In the reluctant-Health Ministry, Prof. Bibile's plans brought about an immediate saving in Drug Expenditure, eliminated shortages of Essential Drugs, and nipped several looming epidemics in the bud by instant supply of unanticipated requirements of medicines from local production. His cheerful and pragmatic approach took all the local Pharmaceutical Manufacturers (most of them branches of foreign firms) off balance and while he was on the scene they responded with three shift production of Essential Drugs so well that they abandoned their old clientele of promotion primed, brand activated, professionals. To meet the information gap Prof. Bibile and his team, which included some charming and persuasive personalities like Prof. Lionel and Dr. Gladys Jayawardene brought out newsheets and journals and conducted seminars to neutralize brand reflexes and foster a healthy questioning attitude amongst doctors to drug-use and action.

By an unfortunate train of events, all these people (who were considered mavericks by their Health Ministry contemporaries) were dead within a decade, Prof. Bibile, Dr. S.A. Wickramasinghe, Prof. Lionel, Mr. Edirimanasinghe, Mrs. Osmund Jayarathne, and Dr. Gladys Jayawardene, the latter brutally murdered on the streets as she drove away from her Office in the Fort.

Also by an unfortunate administrative move the entire edifice put up by Bibile, safe from Health Ministry interference, was transferred back to this Ministry. Thus the State Pharmaceutical Corporation, the Drug Quality Control Laboratory, the Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Corporation, and the control of Private Sector drug manufacture were all put back under Mini-

stry administration. This looked logical on paper, but what happened?

Several things began to happen at the same time.

The import protection afforded on Essential Drugs made locally was stopped. Also stopped were the raw materials imported by the Pharmaceutical Corporation at very favourable World prices and supplied to the local factories for contract manufacture for the State Medical Stores. The State Quality Control Laboratory which was geared for sampling and analysing, every batch of locally manufactured drugs supplied to State Medical Stores was systematically dismantled.

Though Prof. Bibile had advised that the Laboratory be administered by the Govt. Analyst it was placed under the General Hospital Colombo and staffed mainly with Hospital Pharmacists who had no training in Pharmaceutical Analysts. The Chemists in charge of the Laboratory resigned in disgust.

Within a few years the valuable Analytical equipment donated by the Japanese under WHO auspices was in shambles due to unskilled use and the Laboratory was deliberately relegated to a condition where it could not analyse and certify locally manufactured drugs. The Analysts who regularly called at the Factories tendering for state supply of drugs for inspection and drawing of batch samples ceased to come and the certification of tender supplies was totally disorganized. This was perhaps what was required by the new administrators because local tender supplies were delayed or disrupted and tenders were cancelled and awarded to importers at higher prices.

The aim of Drug Rationalization in the Third World as conceived by the WHO was to arrive at self sufficiency in essential drugs by fostering local manufacture. Lanka was in a very advantageous position in this respect because already there were six local manufacturers with ample technology transfer capability and up-to-date, instrumentation for quality control. Prof. Bibile took maximum advantage of this readily available production potential to arrive at self sufficiency within the shortest time. This was why he provided a State Quality Control Laboratory for third party confirmatory analysis, and this was exactly why the Ministry Officials who had opposed his every move hastened to dismantle the Laboratory the moment they took control. There were million dollar stakes in Tender imports and local su-

plies had to be stifled. They had to reverse all progress towards self sufficiency in Drugs as early as possible.

Hence the new Drug Act was carefully drafted by the Health Ministry to destroy all initiative towards local production of pharmaceuticals. The six firms which had for years been meeting all the stringent requirements of the Pharmacopoea with batch control in their local and foreign laboratories and in the state Drug Quality Lab, were required under the new Act to re-register every one of their products which had already been approved by the Pharmacologists of the Ceylon Hospitals Formulary Committee. They were now required to obtain approval every year all over again for the same products from a team of Hospital Pharmacists led by foreign expert of unknown qualification and uncertain expertise whose knowledge of Pharmacology and follow up of recent Pharmacological research was nil in-comparison with the Formulary Committee which apparently was sidetracked by the New Act. The foreign expert had his Act well rehearsed. He went full speed into the Registration of Multinational Brands. The Multinationals had apparently supervised the rehearsal because they had product registration applications ready in volumes of irrelevant information of the type which the earlier Formulary Committees had confined to the waste paper basket but with which the foreign expert appeared so enamoured that he insisted on all locals using the same format.

Thus commenced a period of calculated destruction of all local manufacturing initiative of the Six Companies which had originally collaborated with Prof. Bibile in producing the countries requirements of forty Essential drugs. From the earlier intelligent monitoring of their plant capabilities, scientific potential and performance, regulatory activity now descended to unintelligent bureaucratic stalling of local manufacture by canning Applications for dotting I's and crossing T's. By this technique local manufacture got delayed Regulatory Approval while most Tenders were awarded elsewhere.

The Drug Quality Control Laboratory gifted by Japan was so mishandled by the General Hospital Staff of Pharmacists that it limped along for another few months and then collapsed unable to handle the same routine which it had handled so efficiently for a decade. The collapse was shamefully concealed while the routine batch samples from the local manufacturers continued to accumulate without certification.

In this way the local manufacturers were silently elbowed out of the Tender Scene, and once again foreign Tenderers and their local Agents began to dominate the scene. The New Drug Act was also designed to allow them to return on the Open Market Ticket at prices very much above the local Tender prices.

In laying down the procedures for implementation of Drug Rationalization practice Prof. Bibile had insisted that the Drug Quality Control Laboratory which had a complete profile of modern Analytical Instrumentation should be manned and directed by fully qualified Analytical Chemists. After his death this precaution was disregarded and valuable equipment was allowed to deteriorate in a blind leading the blind scenario of Administrators with neither experience in modern Analytical Techniques nor in the basics of Pharmacological investigation leading an appallingly ignorant medley of Hospital certificated Pharmacists. Within a few years nothing was left of the Japanese gifted laboratory except damaged instruments which were surreptitiously sold as scrap.

Of course there may have been method in this madness because the Drug Quality Control Laboratory conceived by Bibile to serve the Local Pharmaceutical Industry was no more. In its place the Health Ministry solicited and obtained aid from a covertly funded Aid Agency for a so called Quality Assurance Laboratory manned by the same old Demolition squad. The Aim was to give a Cosmetic facade to the New Drug Act.

The first thing the New Quality Assurance Lab did was to inform the local manufacturers that it would not handle the routine batch analysis of local tender production. This deprived the local manufacture of only local source of Third Party certification and progressively elbowed them out of the Tender Scene, leaving the path clear for Multinationals and other foreign tenderers.

The excuse given by the Health Ministry was that new trend was Quality Assurance rather than Quality Control. The Health Ministry concept of Quality Assurance was that each manufacturing unit should put up a Cosmetic facade of apparent compliance with Good Manufacturing Practices without its production being subject to vigorous Third Party testing. This would indirectly eliminate the need for routine vigorous testing of foreign tender supplies, allow unlimited access to foreign Tenderers, while local tenderers whose factories could be visited by the Demolition Squad without actual testing of their production, could be promptly told they didn't have the Cosmetic look of the Factories in the Glossy Multinational Brochures.

Under the clauses of the New Act alle-

ged non compliance with GMP could be used to completely paralyse local manufacturers, because product registration, licences to import certain raw materials, manufacturing licences for each product and approval of formulation, could all be arbitrarily subject to Cosmetic compliance of local manufacture facilities with GMP whereas Foreign manufactures represented by local Agents for Import and Tender have absolutely no factory inspection requirements. In fact such material could come from a Multinational drug dump in any part of the World where neither GMP nor even a factory existed. Of course conducted tours and adequate entertainment could have been arranged for Officials if they were in a travelling mood but actually not a single official in the Health Ministry who operates under the Act has either the manufacturing experience or the qualifications to be registered as a Competent Person for GMP inspection under the International Requirements for the Pharmaceutical Industry.

The real criteria regarding Quality Assurance in Pharmaceutical Manufacture are based on Mathematical Models validated by statistical analysis of batch Assay of all parameters specified in the Pharmacopoeia. This validation can only be arrived at by serial Batch Analysis over a period of years then a pattern of random sampling based on the initial data. When parameters change, as they very often do with formulations, the entire process of statistical validation has to be repeated. The so called Quality Assurance Laboratory of the Health Ministry has not even collected the preliminary data for statistical validation of the production of a single local manufacturer. It has not done any, systematic batch Analysis of anybody's production. Furthermore it lacks the fundamental knowledge and expertise to engage on any such validation. It is only a showpiece for the purpose of granting cosmetic compliance to favoured Tenderers while others are brow-beaten with variously trotted out bureaucratic demands that once met, are followed by another.

Instead of paying lip-service to WHO rationalization procedures, in order to smuggle themselves into the WHO hierarchy it would have been fair both by WHO and the local pharmaceutical industry for these Ministry Officials to thank the local manufacturing firms for having promptly provided the drugs and solved their most urgent shortages, during some serious unpredicted epidemics over the past two decades and now tell them that, their services were not needed any more because they could not provide the assurance of attractive incentives (not Quality Assurance) that foreign Drug Firms considered customary.

Some live examples should transmit picture of how our Health Ministry has cracked open the Open Economy.

Nearly all the formulations banned as irrational, obsolete, ineffective or dangerous by the Ceylon Hospitals Formulary Committee have been brought back by the Drug regulatory Authority. These include various Multinational Brands of Liver Salts, Tonics and Minerals with obscure therapeutic claims, witches brews of Liver and other Tissue extracts, Iron Tonics with instant staining action on teeth and unsubstantiated Iron availability. Fancy Iron Capsules with multicoloured granules, again with doubtful Pharmacokinetics.

Corruption and the Open Economy has opened up a virtual Pandoras Box of orrational remedies, diuretic combinations of unproved selective control leading to dangerous electrolyte imbalance, expensive Anthistamines classified as 'of no special advantage and unspecified adverse reactions' even in the market oriented British National Formularies of the Thatcher period. It is amusing to observe how the self-styled research oriented Pharmaceutical Companies go to town and equally amusing how their professional clientele swallow the glib claims expensive Aspirin substitutes with totally false claims regarding 'Solubility' and buffer action, Paracetamol Formulations with false solubility claims and no maximum dosage caution plus a Heroin like Narcotic for Drug dependence, Antiasthme drugs into Mumbo Jumbo Inhalers to boost shrinking profits and empty the pockets of patients who would have had their Asthma under control with five cent Bronchodilator Tablet.

The WHO indicates that its Essential Drugs Programme was established "to provide operational support to countries in the development of National Drug Policies to work towards the Rational Use of Drugs. The Programme seeks to ensure that all people, wherever they may be are able to obtain the drugs they need at lowest possible price, that these drugs are safe and effective and that they are prescribed and used rationally."

Shall we leave it to the WHO to judge whether our Health administrators are acting within these criteria when they have almost destroyed the Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Sector in Lanka, turning nearly all the local manufacturers into importers from their foreign Parent Companies of drugs that were made here under licence for over twenty years. By now denying them manufacturing sanction and registration under various bureaucratic ruses, they open the door to drugs at the highest possible Price with testing for safety efficacy deliberately abandoned in favour of glossy quality assurance claims.



# The Debt Crisis : The Corea Report

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has published a report on debt and development, *The Continuing Debt Crisis of the Developing Countries*, prepared by the NAM Ad Hoc Advisory Group of Experts on Debt. The main points of the report are that there should be a once-and-for-all arrangement for the settling of all outstanding debt; the application of debt reduction to all categories of debt, including multilateral debt; and the application of the above principles as well as an adequate degree of debt-reduction for all countries. The report also found that there were 55-60 countries in 1992 which were facing extreme difficulties in servicing their debt.

This report was presented at the Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Countries on Debt and Development: Sharing of Experiences on 13-15 August 1994 in Jakarta, Indonesia. It was attended by representatives from 25 debt-distressed least developed countries and it was the first time that high level political leaders, economists and experts from so many Southern countries gathered together to address the problem of debt.

The report by the expert group was a result of a decision taken by the NAM Summit in Jakarta in 1992. Following its resolution on the external debt of developing countries, an expert group was set up under the chair of Dr Gamani Corea. The other members of the expert group are: Alhaji Abubakar Alhaji, M Iqbal Asaria, Dragoslav Avramovic, Norman Girvan, Carlos Massad, Percy Mistry, A K Mullei, Ennio Rodriguez, N Vaghul, and Widjojo Nitisastro, with the South Centre providing administrative support. The expert group's report became the focus of this Ministerial Meeting in Jakarta which adopted the report.

Below is the first part of the Executive Summary of the Report.

By the NAM Ad Hoc Advisory Group of Experts on Debt  
Third World Network Features

Seven major conclusions follow from this study:

## Continuing debt crisis in low- and lower-middle-income countries

First, the international debt crisis that emerged in the early 1980s clearly changed character at the turn of the decade. Three major developments have taken place in the past five years. The debt crisis affecting some of the larger developing countries, particularly in Latin America, has largely receded. At about the same time, the USSR and later on its former component states, have emerged as major international debtors in crisis. But the most devastating crisis has been the rapid deterioration of many low- and lower-middle-income developing countries, resulting from a rapidly growing burden of external indebtedness.

The severe difficulties that many developing countries faced in servicing their debt resulted in the persistent accumulation of arrears, which are unpaid debt service obligations. Despite repeated re-scheduling, many developing countries have not been able to meet their debt service obligations fully and on time for several years.

During the early 1990s between 55 and 60 developing countries faced serious debt servicing difficulties, with arrears in excess of 20% of scheduled debt service. In 1992 among 58 countries with arrears exceeding 20%, more than three-quarters had arrears exceeding 50%, half had arrears larger than 75%, and more than a quarter had arrears in excess of 90%.

Of the 58 heavily indebted countries in 1992, 32 were classified as least developed countries. Since 47 countries are designated as least developed by the United Nations, two-thirds of all least developed countries presently facing serious debt problems. The actual arrears of the 32 least developed countries were much larger than the 20% threshold: 91% had arrears exceeding 50%, half had arrears exceeding 86.7%, and 39% had arrears in excess of 90%.

Of the 58 countries in 1992, 35 had a level of per capita income ranging from US\$60 to US\$650. Their income levels

worsened over time as many experienced negative growth rates: 29 countries had real per capita growth rates between -7.8% and -0.1% between 1985 and 1992, while 15 countries grew between 0% and 2% annually.

Taking a longer time span, 23 developing countries had continuing arrears in excess of 20% during the 10-year period from 1983 to 1992. Their average arrears was 56.5% in 1983, increased to 71.3% in 1986 and reached 91.7% in 1992.

Arrears are a key indicator of the intensity of a developing country's debt burden, because of their undisputed nature as actual facts. If a country is in arrears it is a clear sign that its debt service is beyond its capacity to pay. There may be cases in which arrears occur because the debtor is unwilling, rather than unable, to pay. But such cases are rare. Arrears bring economic development to a halt. Countries with large arrears cease to be eligible for development loans; trade financing frequently ceases altogether; and creditors may take retaliatory measures in finance and trade.

While using arrears as the key indicator of the debt burden of developing countries is appropriate, it should be kept in mind that there are developing countries with serious debt problems which, nevertheless, do not have arrears on their debt service payments. These countries refuse to incur arrears, in order to assure continuing access to market borrowing. Thus, countries with large arrears definitely have serious debt problems. But some countries without arrears may have serious debt burdens also.

## Need for debt reduction

Second, the ability of these heavily indebted countries to resume economic growth through additional domestic savings and investment, repatriation of domestic capital, and new foreign capital inflow are constrained due to the 'overhang' of existing debt which makes new investors reluctant to resume activity in the fear that they will soon share in defaults with the creditors on old debt. The need for debt reduction in heavily indebted de-

veloping countries is accentuated further by darkened prospects for resource inflows from official sources due to rising competition for public funds from the 'transition' economies in Eastern Europe, and to deterioration of the economic position of some other developing countries.

The difficulties that Eastern European and other developing countries have faced in borrowing from the international markets and their recourse to official development finance has tended to reduce the supply of such finance to the heavily indebted developing countries. All this has come in the face of enormous accumulated demand for replacement and modernisation of worn-out equipment, as well as additional new investment required to keep pace with population growth and installation of new technologies, after more than a decade of depressed investment and maintenance due to the debt crisis and the commodity slump.

#### Depth of debt reduction

Third, debt reduction needs to be sizeable to make a difference to the economic future of low-income and lower-middle-income debt-affected countries. Experience has shown that mere debt rescheduling in the case of these countries aggravates the problem quickly due to interest-on-interest effect. The pressure on debt servicing capacity and its future prospects are reflected in heavily depressed prices of debt instruments of low- and lower-middle-income countries in the secondary market and in negotiated buy-outs of their debts owed to commercial creditors. The average discount works out at about 70% off face value, equivalent to the debt price of 30 cents on the dollar. The existence of market discounts was a major factor in the decisions to scale down the Latin American debt to commercial banks through the Brady Plan and the degree of debt reduction followed the market to a considerable degree.

Scaling down the debts of low- and lower-middle-income heavily indebted developing countries by 70% on the average, would seem to be an appropriate objective to be aimed at in international debt policy in view of their poverty and their high degree of dependence on depressed and frequently volatile export commodity markets. The 70% debt reduction, however, is not a single reduction target to be applied to every country, but an overall order of magnitude, applicable to the 55

to 60 countries taken as a group. Such an across-the-board review serves the purpose of highlighting the size of the problem and the scale of the strategic solution to be reached for. It cannot be a substitute for detailed work on debt settlement for individual debtor countries.

In practice, debt reduction would need to be negotiated on a genuine case-by-case basis, taking into account the indi-

vidual country capital requirements over the medium term and the likely debt servicing capacity over the long term, in addition to the debt market price, or, if the latter is not available, prices of debts of other countries in similar circumstances. This will lead, among different debtor countries, to different scales of debt reduction and differences in interest and amortisation terms on the reduced debt.

— Third World Network Features

### Clowns Cantos 10

## The Guv'nor takes a holiday (without foreign exchange)

*The Guv'nor purrs, his car purrs  
At the crossing, waiting for the train  
Deep in his cushions, he sees the Tea Maids  
Curl colour from the misty glades  
Then descend with their pluck  
What are they to him, not nymphs  
Nor sirens even though they sing  
Tripping bare feet in silver anklets  
Past the running spring?*

*No, just fifty kilos of leaves and a bud  
That with luck, may be, will be  
With firing & fragrance  
(Value added) ten kilos of tea*

*The Guv'nor thinks (even on holiday)  
Fifty kilos for just fifty chinks  
Isn't a bad factor input  
What's then the snag?  
The cost of P says the WB  
Is twice the Free MP,  
State management they say's the drag*

*So you need a Private Eye.  
(The Guv'nor's glass to his own glass eye  
Reveals no inflation and whats more  
He reports 5 percent growth!  
But poverty? That he says is only sloth)  
High management overheads?  
Change the pillow for the ache in the head  
The World Bank saith.*

*The Guv'nor dozes, seeing dollars fall  
From the leaf baskets, and the train clatters past  
(Ha, that train needs World Bank attention)  
The Nymphs chatter by, as the car horns call  
He decides there'll be travellers cheques for all.*

**U. Karunatilake**



# DRUGS ?

Amendment to Drug Regulation No. 34 of 1984 in Govt. Gazette Extraordinary No. 722/3 of Monday the 6th July 1992.

*“No person shall dispense a prescription which does not specify the Generic Name of a drug.”*

*MSJ goes down in the history of Drug Rationalization in Sri Lanka as the first Company to collaborate with the Government on Generic Manufacture. MSJ swiftly moved over from two decades of Brand Manufacture for the biggest multinational Drug Companies operating in this region to almost exclusive Generic Manufacture for the people of this country. Our range of Generic drugs now serve a wide spectrum of Health Services from the big city Clinics and Base Hospitals to the remotest Govt. dispensary and General Practitioner in the country.*

There is no glamour in illness — not for the sick anyway. The sick need swift, cost-effective, safe, rational treatment, not market incentives.

*Illness does not spare either rich or poor, patient or physician.*

The Bibile-Wickremasinghe drug reforms were designed and adopted to re-introduce ethics into therapeutics. Generic prescribing and Generic dispensing were the main levers of implementation of Drug Rationalization Policy.

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## *The Gaze of the Coloniser: British Views on Local Women in 19th Century Sri Lanka*

Elizabeth J Harris

Social Scientists' Association (1994) 63pp.

The images of Sri Lankan women drawn by Elizabeth J. Harris in *The Gaze of the Coloniser* indicate how general concepts of femininity, beauty, chastity, marriage are imbued with values, assumptions and expectations of the observer.

Archival material reviewed by Harris comprise a range of sources from members of the military and their wives, missionaries, Theosophists and colonists. It includes comments and observations made by George Callandine, Colour-Sergeant in his memoirs, Rev. Frederick Jobson who visited Sri Lanka on his way to Australia, Henry Charles Sirr, barrister and advocate in South Ceylon and Lucinda Darby Griffith, an avid diary writer who accompanied her husband, a Major, in the 1840's. Marie Musaeus Higgins, Theosophist and founder of Musaeus Girls School, comments about women and education are characteristic. She notes that "happily in Ceylon woman has no necessity to enter into the rough and tumble of the world in competition with her male relatives. She has still to be wife and mother, and we have to train the growing girls in all that makes woman the goddess and the light of the home" (page 33).

To the extent that Harris analyses the values that underscored British observations, the images of British men and women that emerge are illuminating. For instance, Harris in considering the nexus between women and religion notes that Victorian stereotypes of womanhood were projected onto Sri Lankan women, who were expected to become the "moral conscience of the village and the angel to her husband" (page 44). In addition, the impact of class and gender on British views are considered.

My reservations stem from a methodological perspective, and it is acknowle-

ledged that many readings of the text are possible. The sub-title of *The Gaze of the Coloniser* is *British Views on Local Women in 19th century Sri Lanka*. I, for one, expected an analysis from a post-colonial perspective that deconstructed the ideologies that informed British observations of, and attitudes to local women. The stated purpose is to assess the views of British colonizers in light "of the cultural conditioning and class background of the writers, together with nineteenth century statistical material and Sri Lankan writing" (page 1). It transpires, however, that the *The Gaze of the Coloniser* is concerned primarily with ascertaining the status of Sri Lankan women, albeit Kandyan, Hindu or Buddhist during the 19th century, wherein the primary source of data are the views and observations made by the colonisers.

Harris acknowledges that "the British were not objective or unbiased observers. They were conditioned by the conviction of cultural superiority and the power relationships of their imperial venture" (page 1). The "conditioning context", that is, the factors that informed the views and expectations of the colonisers are also considered by Harris. Accordingly, British views of Sri Lanka were underscored "with the feeling of superiority" and "a romantic fascination with "the exotic Other" (page 6). Thus, the British picture of British women was "one which could hold within it education for women, respect for women's ability and a woman's right not to be ill-treated within the family, but it rejected divorce violations of Victorian ideals of modesty and chastity, and also the idea that women could win the economic and political privileges held by men" (page 9).

Despite this exegesis of the conditioning context of the colonisers, Harris proceeds to accept observations made by the British, and attempts to substantiate their

views. Her analysis of the appearance of Sri Lankan women is salient. On the one hand, Harris ascribes some British views to "the male propensity to objectify women and to make judgments according to idealized standards of external perfection" (page 19). On the other, observations relating to the premature aging of Sri Lankan women are accepted because it "appears in several accounts", and possible explanations posited (page 19). For instance, Harris suggests that "Sri Lankan women were faced with pressures not experienced by middle and upper class women familiar to the British observers" and "their remarks imply... that Sri Lankan women were expected to undertake excessive duties in or outside the home (pages 19 & 20).

Thus the "object" of scrutiny shifts between the colonisers and Sri Lankan women, as attested in the concluding paragraph, where Harris seeks to assess the overall status of women on the basis of British evidence (page 56). The subjectivity which underlies British discourse about Sri Lankan women is at once, both questioned and accepted. Within this framework, the status of Sri Lankan women is delineated by the writing of the colonisers, and on occasion by reference to the comments by Sri Lankan men of the time.

Discourses about women have been challenged and transformed by feminist theoretical paradigms. Irrespective of whether the critic/I adopt a fluid position shifting between and including the insights of post-structuralism, deconstruction and/or psychoanalysis, or locate myself within feminist lacuna, the delineation of women's experiences, where those women's voices remain silent, is theoretically problematic.

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