

LANKA

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BRIEFLY...

TULF on the package and the war

Mr Sivasithamparam, leader of the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) has told the government that the Tamil people may find it difficult to respond to a peace package when it is offered while a war is still being conducted in the North. Mr Sivasithamparam said in an interview with the state run *Sunday Observer* that he had written to President Kumaratunga for the third time calling for a ceasefire and the commencement of negotiations.

The TULF leader said: "Our position is that you cannot find a solution to the Tamil problem through military action. It is only by political settlement that you can bring an end to this problem and establish peace." He said that they ask both sides to come to a ceasefire and re-start negotiations.

SLMC wants a unit

Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) has proposed to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitutional Reforms a "Predominant Muslim Unit" and a "Predominant Tamil Unit" in the North-East region.

For the predominant Muslim unit the SLMC has suggested the areas of Kalmunai, Samanthurai and Pot-tuvil in the Ampara district and identified Muslim areas in the Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Mannar districts. For the Tamil unit the SLMC has suggested the districts of Jaffna, Killinochchi and Mullaitivu and identified Tamil areas in Mannar, Trincomalee and Batticaloa.

"Will not give back"

"Our forces will not give back to the LTTE a foot or an inch of the 78 sq. kilometres of land re-captured in the Operation Leap Forward launched in the North" Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte told parliament. He was answering Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremasinghe.

Former minister questioned

A former minister of the UNP regime has been questioned by the Permanent Commission on Bribery and Corruption about some foreign aid which has been traced to a private London bank account.

Asked to quit

Former MPs still squatting in government flats have been asked to quit, to accommodate new ministers and deputy ministers who have no houses in Colombo.

MPs told to be in seats

Government MPs have been told by Chief Whip Richard Pathirana (Minister of Education) to be present in parliament during debates.

Landcruisers instead of Intercoolers

The state has ordered 3000 cc Landcruisers for Members of Parliament in place of the super luxury Intercoolers which some had earlier clamoured for.

"Red Cross a fraud"

An erudite and much respected Buddhist monk told a public gathering in Colombo that the Red Cross movement was a fraud and should be banned from the country. The Venerable Dr Walpola Rahula, Cha-

ncellor of the Kelaniya University, was speaking at the launching of his biography. ICRC operatives in the island have been accused of taking sides in the on going ethnic war.

CID investigates defence purchases

In the course of investigating fraud and malpractices in the use of government funds (during the previous regime) the CID was investigating an alleged discrepancy of Rs 24 million in the purchase of high frequency direction finding equipment costing Rs 72 million in foreign exchange. Among statements recorded was that of former Army Chief Lt General Cecil Waidyaratne.

It is alleged that this equipment failed to function.

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NEWS BACKGROUND

TURNING POINT ?

The Fortunes of war suddenly turned in the government's favour when over 300 LTTE fighters were killed in a massive assault on four well-defended Army posts in the north-east WELIOYA region — Janakapura, Jayasinghepura, Kokilai and Kokkuttoduvai. (Some official spokesmen said that the casualty figure could be as high as 400). For the Armed Forces, and indirectly for a politically embattled Peoples Alliance, the news from the front was a much-needed morale boost.

In the north, the Army had pulled out of the 74 square kilometres it had taken in the much-publicised OPERATION LEAP FORWARD, personally commanded by Deputy Defence Minister, Colonel Anuruddha Ratwatte.

In the wake of this "Welioya Waterloo" as the *SUNDAY TIMES* called it, President Kumaratunga and Constitutional Affairs Minister, G.L. Pieris seem to have decided that this wide-open "window of opportunity" was the ideal moment to present the Constitutional Reforms package.

Since the P.A. reforms require a two-thirds majority, the U.N.P. must cooperate with the Kumaratunga administration to introduce "the Union of Regions" that the P.A. has proposed. Despite the major military debacle at Welioya, the LTTE is still a resourceful enemy in the field. The P.A. cannot fight the U.N.P. in Parliament and the LTTE on the battleground at the same time. Torn by internal dissension, the P.A. has to re-think its overall strategy soon.

Mervyn de Silva

Violation of Human Rights in Myanmar

Noble Peace Prize Winner Aung San Suu Kyi was released last month

Dr. Neelam Tiruchelvam, M.P.

Mr. Speaker, I move the following Motion:

"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 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."

Mr. Speaker, this Motion is in the name of nine Members of Parliament including Dr. Sarath Amunugama, Mr. Lakshman Kiriella, Mr. Earl Gunasekara, Mr. Y.P. de Silva, Mr. Vasudeva Nanayakkara, Mr. Batty Weerakoon, Mr. K.P. Silva, Mr. Lakshman Seneviratne.

Sir, this Motion has been very carefully constructed. Sir, it follows the language of a Resolution which was passed unanimously by United Nation on the 20th December 1993 and calls that full effect be given to the Resolution by calling for the release of the Noble Peace Prize Winner, Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi who is in her 6th year of detention-it will be 7th year. Sir in July this year. We called that she be released unconditionally and immediately together with other political leaders and political prisoners and that immediate steps be taken to transfer political process in Myanmar. Sir, this House has had a proud tradition of expressing solidarity with the strug-

gles for human values, wherever such struggles may take place. Many years ago Motions were tabled in this House, Mr. Speaker, calling for the release of a political prisoner in Robin Island, Mr. Nelson Mandela who is now the President of South Africa. We have always believed, Mr. Speaker, that "injustice anywhere is a call to the just everywhere" and in this bi-partisan spirit that Members on both sides of the House have approached this political development in Myanmar. The reason that we, in this House have a special need to express concern with regard to Myanmar is due to the strong historical and religious link — that we have had between our respective countries. Mr. Speaker, you are aware that the Polonnaruwa Kings, both Parakramabahu I and Vijayabahu I, in the 11th and 12th centuries expressed, cordiality and forged close political links with Burma, then known as Ramanna. These links were further consolidated by the religious affinity, the affinity between the Theravada buddhist traditions, both in Burma and in Ceylon at that time. These links have endured over the centuries and particularly during the struggle for Burma's independence led by Aung San. So this motion symbolises the continuing respect and affection of the people of Sri Lanka for the indomitable spirit and courage of the people of Burma who have overcome many setbacks over the years. It was in this spirit that on Vesak day in 1992, a large number Human Rights and Non-Governmental Organizations made appeal in Colombo, 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. The mere tabling of this motion has triggered a chain of events in the sub-continent. In April at a Conference jointly sponsored by UNESCO and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan reference was made in the final resolution of that conference to this initiative in this House. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto who inaugurated this meeting courageously added her own personal appeal for the immediate release of Aung San Suu Kyi. A few days later in India the prestigious Nehru Memorial Award for International Understanding was awarded to Aung San Suu Kyi. The Hon. Foreign Minister is aware that awards of this nature reflect a growing consensus and concern within the Indian Establishment with regard to the political developments in Myanmar. I mention this because in the struggle for human values even the smallest initiative can create ripples which then become waves which reach beyond the shores of even our Island. The recent troubled history of Myanmar commenced with the assumption of power by the Burmese Army on September 18, 1988. General Saw Maung, the chief of staff of the Burmese Armed Forces, announced that the military had assumed power and abolished all civilian government institution. The Ministry established, Mr. Speaker, a 19 member military ruling Council called the State Law and Order Restoration Council. So, on the orders of this Council the pro-democracy demonstrations were forcibly crushed. Hundreds of thousands of people were shot and killed on the streets of Rangoon. Political demonstrations were banned and mass arrests of students, political activists, Opposition Party Members and Buddhist monks took place. A second crackdown in July 1989 resulted in the detention of the Opposition Leaders including the leader of the National League for Democracy Aung San Suu Kyi. Mr. Speaker, despite the continuing political repression the National elections held on May 27th

1990 was a stunning victory for the political opposition to the SLOC's rule. The NLD took 392 out of 485 contested seats, more than 80 of the contested seats. The group which was backed by the military was able to secure only nine seats. The results of this election are yet to be honoured and as you know, Mr. Speaker, there had been no transfer of political power to civilian rule.

Now the situation in Myanmar has been comprehensively documented by several organizations including Amnesty International which published several important reports. The inter Parliamentary Union Mr. Speaker, passed a resolution particularly expressing concern that 29 Members of Parliament held remain in detention in Myanmar and this is again another reason why this House has to express concern with regard to these developments and as I pointed out both the UN Human Rights Commission and the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1993 and 1994 passed without vote a Resolution on the situation in Myanmar calling for the release of political prisoners, restoration of democracy the full effect being given to individual rights in Myanmar particularly and also expressing concern with regard to the problems of refugees and displaced persons.

There have been particularly in 1993 some attempt by the Burmese authority to respond to this international concern. Some political prisoners were released, a commitment was made to work with the International Committee of the Red Cross with regard to Human Rights and humanitarian issues. But a special rapporteur of the United Nations who has been appointed to investigate events in Myanmar has expressed concern that no meaningful progress has been made, with regard to the transfer of power to civilians who were democratically elected in Myanmar at the elections that were held in 1990.

So Mr. Speaker, there are many who would like to participate in this debate, I wish to commend to this House in the bipartisan spirit in which this Motion has been tabled, as an expression of our solidarity with the people of Myanmar and urge that this House accept this Motion.

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A modest proposal

N. Stanislaus

The war-and-peace situation in Sri Lanka is truly trapped in fantasies and fairy tales. One sign of this is the series of articles in the press, both the popular press as well as the journals of opinion, about "traditional homelands of the Tamils". To begin with there is K.M. de Silva giving us the same old arguments in one newspaper, to be expanded and re-argued by that famous historian and deep thinking scholar, Amarasekere. This elicits a critical response from Darini Rajasingham in *Pravada*. In the meantime Rajan Hoole has been developing a complex thesis about the political motivations of K.M. de Silva's early work on the same subject in *Counterpoint*. He also has provided however a more defensive position on the concept of "traditional homelands": it is a political notion and not a historical or geographical one.

These are all utterly futile exercises because one of the assumptions behind them is that these issues of rights to occupy a land, people it and govern it can be settled by the "correct" information being used or by the force of the logic of an argument. Far from this being the case, these issues have always been settled by the force of arms. The interpretation of Sri Lankan history provided by a variety of scholars over the years was supported by the state and its various institutions — the University and the Department of Archeology, but above all by its standing army. In recent years a different interpretation of Sri Lankan history has been put forward by others, including some scholars and is being ultimately defended by another standing army, albeit a more irregular one.

Any moves for peace, i.e. a settlement of this dispute, must take this into account. The situation on the ground then is that a given number of people have organized themselves into an alternative army and made certain claims. They are able and willing to assert these claims and defend them with ruthless efficiency and unrelenting brutality. On the other hand, there is a state whose army is unable, since its hands are tied by having to avoid civilian

casualties as far as practicable, to win decisively against the counter army of the militants. Further, besides depriving the northern people of certain selected items a total economic embargo is also not possible for a government that still claims sovereignty over these people. The government and its agents have indeed to fight a war with some limitations. A Chechnya type of operation is surely not possible.

Yet events had progressed so far over the years, that not only have the militants developed an alternative standing army, but have in fact created an alternative state. This had been well expressed by Jayadeva Uyandoda, in the *Island*: "The LTTE is no longer a guerrilla organization. It is a quasi state and beyond Vavuniya it is a quasi state."

Uyandoda however continues in the same vein a point that is debatable: "I think no president, prime minister, minister, or army general of the army need to be told about this."

They may not need to be told about this, but the entire peace negotiations conducted recently had nevertheless been undertaken without taking this home-truth into account. Far from doing this, the peace process has proceeded on the assumption that they were negotiating for a settlement with a political party that can be brought into the mainstream by making certain constitutional and administrative arrangements. This was a futile move and could not but have lead to the re-emergence of a state of war.

One of the implications of recognizing that a quasi state had emerged is to accept that it has now the power and resources to maintain itself. Uyandoda says "In the quasi-state situation, LTTE has evolved a state apparatus. They have their own administration their own judiciary and have political and ideological control of the people." He may also have added that they have a standing army and quasi-embassies in the capital cities of the world.

The demands that the LTTE put forward

at the peace negotiations should in fact be viewed in this context. The demand that the army be withdrawn from Pooneryn is really a demand that the army of an occupying power be withdrawn from the sovereign territory of a state. It would almost certainly have been followed by demands that the army be withdrawn from Palaly and the offshore islands.

The other demand — that the cadres of the LTTE should be allowed to carry arms in the eastern province is a continuation of the same claim. The east may not be militarily in the hands of the northern quasi state; nevertheless it is part of the territory for which the quasi-state has been fighting all these years. From the point of view of this same state, it has all been conceded by the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement of J.R. Jayawardene and Rajiv Gandhi. The LTTE may have fought against this agreement but on one point there can be no doubt: they accepted the legitimacy of the **boundaries** set by the agreement.

The upshot of all these considerations is that a **claim** made by the Tamils, or at least some of them, that historically there has always been two states in the island of Sri Lanka and that these two states, must be reconstituted has been successfully asserted **militarily**. The historical accuracy of this claim is irrelevant. Further, the claim can be maintained and militarily defended by a variety of means by a quasi state — military assaults, assassinations, taking the war into the enemy state, overseas campaigns of propaganda and so on and so forth. To this, the Sri Lankan state has no defense now, or in the long run.

Yet, even if it can mobilize a powerful and well-equipped army and engage in the successful war and take Jaffna, there will still be a need for a political settlement. No modern state can maintain control over a people on a purely military basis. It is inconceivable that Jaffna and its environs will be maintained by a Colombo government exclusively under the control of the

military. The military will have to relinquish control sooner or later and a political settlement reached.

But one does not have to wait to do that. It is possible to do this now. Or at least, it was possible in the immediate aftermath of the P.A. election victory and may be possible once a new cease-fire is negotiated. It will take the fellowship shape.

Step I: A cease fire and agreement by the Sri Lanka government to withdraw all its forces from the North within a matter of weeks.

Comment: There is really no reason for the government to reject this. Insofar as the government and its masses of supporters accept that peace is possible and regional autonomy is desirable, there will be no need to maintain a centralized army in the north. To say otherwise and insist on maintaining an army is to **implicitly** assert (a) that peace is not possible in the foreseeable future, (b) that even after peace, we must keep control and a watch over these buggers. Obviously these are untenable and self-destructive moves to a peaceful solution. Needless to say the free flow of all commerce between the south and north should be resumed without **any** restrictions. Once again, the ban on goods that will be useful in a military sense is also made on the assumption that war will resume soon. Further, these bans have not had any conspicuous military consequences. Indeed it is a measure of the fact that the history is repeating itself as a farce in Sri Lanka is the government banning batteries against a quasi-state that has assembled a heat-seeking missile and a powerful anti-aircraft gun!

Step II: The government should demarcate the territories of the eastern province that is to be included in the Tamil unit. This can include the Muslims **by their consent**, or a separate Muslim territory can be demarcated as well. This unit — the new Tamil unit will form an extension of the quasi-Tamil state that exists in the North. The residual population of Sinhalese in the northeast is exactly parallel to the residual Tamils in the south and at this time one can only hope that the two respective governments will treat them with respect dignity and equal rights.

Comment: It is true that unlike the north, the eastern province is not militarily

under the control of the militants. This is however irrelevant. The new mode of struggle that the LTTE is able to undertake is to batter the Sri Lankan state slowly, deliberately and with a singleness of purpose. This can be summed in one phrase: Take the war to the heartland of the enemy. The Islamic militants have a similar strategy, but so far with limited success. The Tamil militants however are uniquely able to accomplish this because any number of Tamils can easily and legitimately come to Colombo and do what they have to do with despatch and efficiency. The LTTE does not have to fight a conventional war or even a guerrilla war anymore. They merely have to defend their northern territory and engage in a series relentless, but punctuated, attacks in the capital. They may even be able to wreck the economic foundations of Sri Lankan state and society by these and other means.

Step III: Once the army has been withdrawn from all points in the north and a plan of demarcation been made for the east, negotiations can be begun on the nature of the relationship between the northern quasi-state and the government of Sri Lanka. The form of this relationship should not be put on the table before the negotiations. It should emerge in the course of the negotiations.

Comment: Once again, the government has nothing to loose by following this procedure. It is true that the militants have an upper hand militarily and otherwise, but they do face certain important limitations of their own. To begin with, however heroically the people of Jaffna may have borne the economic difficulties of these times and however valiantly some of their leaders have tried to make Jaffna economically self sufficient, it still needs to maintain a relationship with the south.

Secondly, however indifferent the leadership of the Tamils may claim to be about the fate of the Tamils who are now living in the south, they cannot afford, emotionally, politically and economically to disown them completely. Any political settlement they have to device must accept the fact that a large number of Tamils will continue to live, and continue to **want** to live in the south.

Thirdly, the newly demarcated boundaries, in the east in particular, cannot but be very porous ones. It will take enormous resources in manpower, money, will and

temperament to defend it continuously from encroachment as must be done in the event of a separate sovereign state. Whatever happens politically, the Tamils and the Sinhalese are **fated and doomed** to share the same land. Emotionally attached many of the Tamils may be to Tamil Nadu and southern India and to Dravidianism, but they certainly cannot detach their land and take it to the coromandel coast and merge with it!

Conclusion

These steps are not only wise and practical but also in my view inevitable. The Sri Lankan government cannot win this war and even if it wins it, it will still have to concede most of the demands of the militants, sooner or later. After that is, many lives have been lost and resources have been spent.

The mistake the PA government (the habit of referring to the government as the "Chandrika government" or the "Kumaratunge government" should be abandoned. Those titles carry their own inefficiency and pathos!) made was in not withdrawing all its military forces in the north immediately after it won the election. After all, what did this army's presence achieve? What did its presence mean? Surely, nothing. The second mistake was in postponing the announcement of the boundaries of the north eastern unit. And the third mistake was in trying to write a new constitution by having discussions in Colombo with lawyers and constitutional experts. Despite claims to the contrary, constitution are not **legal** matters but **political** ones. Lawyers get into it only after the politicians are done with it and fatten themselves arguing its nuances.

The need of the hour — that is in November 1994 — was to have been bold and decisive. It is however too late to try again. In fact, it is never too late. All wars, after all lead to peace, even the hundred years war.

Yet, one must admit these moves may fail: the quasi state of the north may evolve into a state of Eelam. It is a danger that the government has to face. It has no other choice, not because they are losing a war in 1995 or have brought it to a stalemate; they lost the united country in 1956. At this stage we can only hope that a genuine federation of independent units can hold the country, a changed country to be sure, together.

The day after

M. B. Naqvi

Nadeem Ahmed, 67, resumed his morning walk on Tuesday, after a gap of three days. It was the first day after the three-day mourning announced by MQM's leader, Altaf Hussain, for the gangrape of the sister of a young MQM activist, during which the Pakistan's industrial capital came to a total stand still. All establishments remained closed and no transport plied. But for Ahmed, life had to go on.

An eerie calm had settled over Karachi's deserted streets before six a.m. While his wife waited anxiously at the gate for his return, here is what Ahmed encountered: A little way down his normal route, he found the road half-blocked by the charred remains of what must have been some push carts, a motorcycle rickshaw and some household odds and ends, including the ashes of tyres from which there was an acrid smell. Quickening his pace, Ahmed pressed on. Near the petrol pump in north Nazimabad's K sector, he accosted the burnt shell of a minibus, popularly called the 'yellow devi'. Ahmed was struck by the large amount of the usual rubbish strewn on the roads — the locality had not seen a sweeper for three or four days. And just when he thought the calm would last a little longer, he heard the familiar rumble of gunfire — a series of typical, rapid half-explosions of the AK 47 assault rifle.

Almas teaches Botany at the Federal Government College For Women near

Urdu Bazar. Not being a regular employee, she is not on the payroll and gets paid only for the days she attends.

On that Tuesday, Almas was at the bus stop by 8.30 in the morning. After three days of unofficial closure she was anxious to report to work. She couldn't afford to lose out on yet another day's pay, as her income — Rs 2500 — was an essential component of her family's monthly budget.

Besides wanting to reach the campus before the principal marked a cross against her name in the attendance register, Almas also wanted to get in early so that she could legitimately return home early. That morning, it seems everyone had the same idea. After letting two buses go past because they were too crowded, she boarded the third and found space enough to stand only on one foot most of the way.

The one place that was bustling with its usual activity at noon was the Press Club. Only the noise from the dining room was unusually high where seven or eight reporters were squabbling over each other's figures of casualties during the preceding three days. Then, on a tip, almost all of them suddenly rushed out. Apparently, some action was in progress in two of the chief battlegrounds at the two ends of the sprawling city: The Orangi township, made famous by octogenarian social worker Akhtar Hamid Khan, and Korangi.

Access to both the townships is nearby impossible — while the major entrances are blocked by phalanxes of vehicles belonging to the security forces, the residents of the localities have dug up all the other approaches.

The one industry that has flourished during the last few stormy months is the holding of seminars and symposia. Any number of them are being organised almost daily in private houses with the residences of political leaders having become permanent venues for heated discussions among all who visit. It seems everyone, with the sole exception of Pakistan People's Party leaders and ministers, wants a political dialogue to start between the government and the MQM.

Prime minister Benazir Bhutto, however, is sticking to her guns. She is demanding the surrender of arms and an end to the violence on the streets before any dialogue can begin. She has also made it clear that her government will only talk to those members of the MQM against whom there is no FIR. Of course, Benazir's second demand has created a stalemate since there is no notable MQM member against whom dozens of FIRs do not exist, not even a women senator.

While the battle rages in the corridors of power, it is unfortunate that the citizens of Karachi are paying for the one on the street.

Politics of dialogue

The crisis in Karachi is amenable to a satisfactory solution provided there is a political will, the spokesperson of the Pakistan High Commission tells Sakina Yusuf Khan

Q: Is the situation in Karachi as dismal as it is portrayed in the Indian and international Press?

A: The situation in Karachi is a matter of concern to all Pakistanis and well-wishers of Pakistan. Some sections of the international Press have painted too grim a scenario. Expectedly, some Indian newspapers have been sensationalising the violence in Karachi. However, we are hopeful that this current unfortunate aberration will settle down.

Q: Do you view the present crisis mainly as a law and order problem or does it arise out of political and ideological issues?

A: There is no ideological issue. The problem is political and has law and order dimensions. But we are confident that given the political will, the problem is amenable to an early and satisfactory solution.

Q: Is there any possibility of a dialogue with the MQM?

A: Yes, very much so. The government has offered a dialogue and has asked Altaf Hussain to shun violence, return to Pakistan and submit himself to the process of law. The government's view is that no one is above the law and it would not like to be pressurised by coercion and violence on the streets.

Q: What, if any, political and other initiatives are the authorities in Pakistan proposing to retrieve the situation?

A: The government is doing its best to initiate political dialogue. The offer of the dialogue has been conveyed publicly through various intermediaries. The government has also constituted a negotiating team under the minister of law and invited Altaf Hussain to nominate his team. The government is only insisting that violence must cease. This will make the atmosphere conducive for a political solution.

'MQM is not a separatist party'

Altaf Hussain, leader of the movement, tells L.K. Sharma in London

A suburban house in London has suddenly captured the interest of the media, thanks to Pakistan prime minister Benazir Bhutto's statement that Britain must not allow its occupant to cause an insurgency in Karachi. The occupant — Altaf Hussain, the self-exiled leader of the Mohajir Quami Movement — has in turn charged the Pakistan government with organising a genocide in Sindh.

At the MQM headquarters, members are monitoring the developments in Karachi. The walls are plastered with photographs of party workers being tortured and frog-marched by the Pakistan army and other forces. Hussain, dressed in Kurta-pyjama, appears with a newspaper cutting carrying a report of rapes and atrocities in Karachi. Some of his associates with origins in U.P. are talking of their family members in Pakistan who are either in jail or being harassed, and reveal how even after four decades, culturally they would still feel more at home in Azamgarh or Faizabad than Lahore or Karachi. They wonder aloud whether India's Partition was a mistake.

Hussain, waiting for yet another TV crew to turn up, refuses to comment on this, and talks at length, instead, on the genocide in Karachi. Some excerpts:

Q: Aren't you worried that the British foreign office might heed Benazir's request even though at present it has said you are free to live here?

A: No, I am not worried. This is a democratic country and I am not doing anything unlawful. I am drawing the world's attention to the genocide of my people in the entire community in Pakistan. I am not in touch with governments but with many human rights organisations.

Q: How do you assess the chances of political negotiations with the government?

A: The Pakistan government is not interested. Benazir Bhutto is racist. She has called Mohajirs "rats" who need to be terminated. She has said that a different blood flows in our veins. What bigger insult can there be? We, who made the most sacrifices for the creation of Pakistan are being persecuted and discriminated against in every walk of life. The army was let loose on us. There is no politician in Pakistan who can speak against the army. I am the only politician who did not accept this domination of the army and the feudal

forces who neglect the poor and misuse power.

Q: What is your main demand?

A: The government must consider the Mohajirs as legitimate not third-class citizens with guaranteed fundamental constitutional rights and economic opportunities in proportion to the population ratio.

Q: You have been living in this self-imposed exile for more than three years now. Would you like to take your fight back to Pakistan?

A: No not now. My people have warned me that if I return, I will be killed.

Q: How will the violence in Karachi end?

A: It is for the government and the Haqiqi group created by the government to destroy us, but this group has failed to win any public support while our popularity has been increasing. The authorities and Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party was causing ethnic violence and blaming the MQM.

Q: Do you now think it was a mistake for your party to have boycotted the last elections?

A: We did not boycott the elections: we were forced to keep out. The army was

not allowing even our campaigners to do their work freely.

Q: What measures would you like to be taken to ensure that the Mohajir community is not victimised and treated equitably in Pakistan?

A: The patience of my people has reached its limit and they will soon want a separate province. But the MQM is not a separatist party. I am a patriotic Pakistani. Benazir Bhutto keeps maligning me as a foreign agent to cover up her own misdeeds.

Q: So how do you intend to counter this campaign?

A: The MQM is a peaceful organisation. It does not believe in guns and tanks which the authorities are using to intimidate our people in Karachi. The latest reports say that they are using paratroopers and helicopters. But we will continue our struggle peacefully.

Q: Last time, when the former prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, came to meet you here, were you able to forge any understanding?

A: He understands the situation a little but does not want to join this legitimate struggle. He does not dare to speak up against those who threw him out of power.

Clowns Cantos - 13

Peace Talks

With a zoom on his broom
Hess hit the heather
Just south of Loch Ness
He had a message, he said,
From that other monster
Could the Reich Marshal
Talk things over with the King?
The Fuhrer sends his compliments
To Buckingham and Blenheim.
Peace on both our houses, after all
Our Junkers are also Blenheims,
Let's shatter the Communist rabble.
Poor Hess, had to confess, he didn't reach
Buckingham or Windsor, or even Downing Street
All the King's Men were on their guard
One track bent and rather hard
They did not invite Fascist Hess
To join the democratic process.

U. Karunatilake

Four years of Rao — a saga of survival

K. Katyal

A survivor, a wrecker, a modern-day Chanakya. Varied, indeed, are the epithets that are applied to the Prime Minister, Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao, who began the fifth year of his tenure on June 21. Survivor, indeed, indisputably! How many people gave more than a few months to him when he assumed office in June 1991 as the head of a minority Government?

Apart from the fact that the ruling party was outnumbered by the combined opposition, he suffered from other handicaps. For the first time (not taking into account the Shastri interregnum), the Congress, as the ruling party, had conferred the honour of Prime Ministership on a person outside the Gandhi-Nehru family. He lacked the charisma of his predecessors from the Congress. His rise was not uncontested and, although he was the unanimous choice for the post of party president (after the move to install Mrs. Sonia Gandhi was dropped because of her reluctance), there were two other powerful aspirants when it came to electing the leader of the Parliamentary Party and, thus, naming the Prime Minister. The Opposition was in a highly confrontational mood — with each of the mainstream parties feeling cheated out of power, despite the Congress(I)'s failure to get the majority.

Mr. Rao's performance was a mixed fare. Punjab represented the positive in the political field and financial stability in the economic. The stalemate in Kashmir, the fragmentation of the polity and continued hardships of the poor are among the negative factors. He could, at best, be given two cheers on completing four turbulent years. The third would have to be reserved. He would earn it if he, even at this stage succeeded in ensuring equity for the disadvantaged sections — and in rubbing off the gloom in the ruling party camp now in the face of the approaching Lok Sabha election.

Predictions for a mid-term poll began proliferating within weeks after the new Government was formed. The Opposition was conscious of its capacity to rock the ruling party boat and if it held its hand, it was because of two internal compulsions. One, it realised that the electorate, tired of the frequency of elections, would not take kindly to the parties, seen forcing another one on the country. Two, the ideological chasm, between the left and

right in the Opposition was too wide for a meeting ground for an anti-Congress(I) front. That was the initial guarantee for Mr. Rao's survival. In one form or the other, the inter-party contradictions in the Opposition and the intra-party divisions, rather than the achievements of the Government, sustained Mr. Rao in power.

For nearly a year, the unannounced coordination with the BJP helped the Prime Minister out of the tight spots he found himself in more than once. Later, the Left rallied behind him, as was evident at the time of the election of the President and Vice-President, so as to deny the BJP the advantage of influencing major decisions. Later, when all of them joined hands, posing a major challenge to the Government (through a joint no-confidence motion in August 1993), the tiny Ajit Singh group split, with a breakaway section extending the much-needed support to Mr. Rao. But for that case of defection, the Government, perhaps, would have fallen — or, there would have been a tie between the supporters of the Government and its opponents in the Lok Sabha, necessitating a casting vote by the Speaker. Though the means were questionable, the ruling party consolidated its position in Parliament. The subsequent Assembly elections gave him a positive boost. However, that phase did not last long.

From then onward, Mr. Rao had no reason to worry about challenges in the Lok Sabha, but outside the stock of the ruling party — and of the Prime Minister — plummeted. That erosion, confirmed by the humiliating defeats in the South and West and in Bihar, remains unchecked, there being no firm evidence to the contrary. What it means for the prospects of the Congress(I) in the next Lok Sabha poll could not be a happy thought for Mr. Rao. It was not a temporary setback, as, for instance, was the case after the Ayodhya demolition. It is too near the general election, leaving the leadership little time for correctives, assuming that it has the required will.

Mr. Rao's opponents in the ruling party, those who recently parted company with him, likened him to Gorbachev, the suggestion being clear — that just as the leader of the erstwhile Soviet Union was responsible for the disintegration of that mighty nation, Mr. Rao was instrumental in wrecking the Congress(I), bringing it down from the high point it once occupied.

Then there was the other viewpoint — that the Congress's decline had begun long time ago, that the process was first arrested, in a big way, by the assassination of Indira Gandhi and, in a smaller way, by the death of Rajiv Gandhi. The Congress, so goes this argument, would have met the fate, it was heading to now, even if she or he had been in power. The rebel Congress leaders — Mr. Arjun Singh, Mr. N.D. Tiwari and others — ascribed the fall of the Congress(I) to Mr. Rao's penchant for compromise on its cherished policies and programmes. The rebels, however, did not look like emerging as a coherent force — a matter of solace for Mr. Rao within the narrow confines of the Congress politics, but certainly not in the wider context.

Economic reforms constituted a major initiative by the Rao Government but whether the desired results would materialise, without undue delay, was not clear yet. The policies of deregulation and of incentives to foreign investors had, no doubt, generated a momentum. The non-Congress(I) parties, when in power, identified themselves with it, even though their rhetoric was critical and shrill when they were out of office. Mr. Rao could claim this as an evidence of national consensus in practice.

The common man, however, had yet to feel the beneficial effect of the new policies, as visualised by their framers. Mr. Rao tended to blame it on the campaign of disinformation by his critics. But would the people be misled, had the benefits of the reforms percolated to them? The assessment of Mr. Rao's performance had, mostly, been piecemeal and, as such, patchy and lacking in consistency.

A success would lead to euphoric references to his "statesmanship," his "sagacity" and he would be hailed as a Chanakya of the 20th century. A failure, on the other hand, would evoke sharp comments, seeking to dismiss him as a disaster.

Mr. Rao had been at the helm at a particularly ungovernable stage in the post-Independence India. He became the Prime Minister by an accident, when his party was still in trauma in the wake of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. Those viewing his performance in this context take a charitable view. Others are ruthless in their censure.

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Can Women Lead Nations ?

A Muslim Perspective

Jezima Ismail

The scenario in Sri Lanka and the Region today, presents a significant visibility of women, especially at the top. This is a source of satisfaction, although some important issues concerning women still need attention. However, the focus of my article is on women as leaders of the nation. Sri Lanka is being described to ad nauseam level, with little or no action to promote it, as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-religious and multi-lingual country. As such, it would be interesting to consider the perspective of the different communities to this question, vexatious as it may be to some members of some communities.

Naturally, being a Muslim, it's the Muslim point of view I am projecting. When Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga was the choice of the People's Alliance as the president there were murmurs, kept for obvious reasons at a low level, whether a woman could be a head of a state and whether Muslims could vote for her. Destiny engineered by human forces assassinated Mr Gamini Dissanayake and then the choice was Srma Dissanayake. Now one woman became two women and there was consternation in the 'yard'. Though Muslims form only an 8% of the population, yet they are a significant minority.

What do the scholars say, using the primary and secondary sources of Islam, about a woman being head of state? A brief examination of Rafiq Zakaria's book — 'The Trial of Benazir Bhutto — An insight into the status of women in Islam would be interesting; quoting from the preface "The emergence of Benazir Bhutto, a 35 year old modern, western educated, unveiled, sophisticated, beautiful Muslim woman as Prime Minister of the most powerful Muslim state in the world, created quite a stir in November 1988. It was generally believed that a woman could never be allowed by the faithful to assume political power, certainly not in a Muslim state and most certainly not in Pakistan, the bastion of Muslim orthodoxy. But it happened".

So it was thought by the writer that the Muslim view point as discussed by eminent scholars would be not only interesting, but may also serve a useful purpose in promoting some kind of understanding of what Muslims conceive of women and leadership, especially in today's context. Furthermore, there have been many articles particularly in the print media that give many constructions to the rituals, folk customs and community's rites and if Sri Lankans are to live in one country as one people, it would be necessary to understand how the communities live and think.

It is not my task here to discuss the status of women, but as indicated by the heading (Can a Woman be a Ruler of the State?) only the question of 'Leadership' will be addressed in this paper. The final judgement as portrayed in the book by Zakariya, pointed out that what must be taken into account is the totality of the Prophet's (S.A.L.) approach, and not by

isolated Hadith. The equality of the sexes is definitely the thesis of the Quran although there is only a near-equality in family affairs, but this no way signifies that a man is superior to a woman. There is no specific injunction in the Quran that prevents a woman from participation in public life. Consider the activities of the Women in Islam:

Hadrat Aisha (wife of the Holy Prophet — S.A.L.) participated in discussions pertaining to affairs of the state, and in the battle of the Camel she lead the troops against the Caliph, Hadrat Ali. She also actively participated in major political developments.

Hadrat Fatimah, the daughter of the Holy Prophet (S.A.L.) was actively involved in the campaign to make her husband the Caliph.

Asma, the daughter of Hadrath Abu Bakr (The first Caliph of Islam) stood unflinching by her husband in the war against the Umayyad Viceroy. Hadrat Umar (one of the Caliphs of Islam) appointed a woman to one of the key posts in his administration — Shifa bint Abdallah controlled the markets in Medina.

Fathima Mernissi in her book "Can We Women Head a Muslim State?" — (Simorgh Publication 1991) lists 16 Women Heads of State in Muslim.

In Arabic texts alone, 16 women acknowledged as having been heads of state with Khotba (the official sermon in the mosque on Friday) their names as well as money coined with their titles are found with:-

1 Razia Sultan	634/1236	Delhi
2 Chajarat ad dur	648/1250	Cairo
3 Kutlugh Turkan	655/1257-681/1282	Mogul dynasty
4 Padish Katun	691/1292-694/1295	Mogul dynasty
5 Ab'sh Katun	662/1263-686/1287	Mogul dynasty
6 Dawlat Khato	716/1316 (25 years)	Mogul dynasty
7 Sati Bek	739/1339	Mogul dynasty
8 Sultana Tindu	714-814	Baghdad
9 Sultana Fatema Begum	1679-1681	Central Asia
10 Sultana Khadija	1347-1379	Maldives
11 Sultana Myriam	1379-1383	Maldives
12 Sultana Fatima	785/1383-790/1388	Maldives
13 Tadj Al Alam Saffiyat ed Din Shah	1641-1675	Indonesia (Sumatra)
14 Nur Al' Alam Nakiyaat ed Din Shah	1675-1678	Indonesia (Sumatra)
15 Inayat Shah Zakkiuyat ed Din Shah	1678-1688	Indonesia (Sumatra)
16 Kamalat Shah	1688-1699	Indonesia (Sumatra)

In the prayer or Khutba in the name of Sultan Khadija, who was the Sultan of Maldives, the Khatib used to say (on Fridays and on other days) "Allah make her triumph, your slave you have knowingly chosen among the worlds and made her a blessing for all the Moslems. (Sultan Khadija, daughter of Sultan Jalal-Ad din Ibn as Sultan-Salah-Ad din — from 'Rihla', Ibn Batuta, Dar Beyrath - Beirut 1985 Edition p. 580).

In Sri Lanka, Maulana Maududi of Pakistan, the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami, is held in great respect and it would be useful to know his attitude. His contention was that a woman could not head a nation, because if she were to become a ruler she would neglect her familial responsibilities. In Islam, he maintained that there was a functional distribution of work according to sex and in accordance with this distribution, politics and administration come within the man's sphere of activities. However, in the election of the president of Pakistan in 1962 he supported Fatima Jinnah the sister of Quaidi-Azam against Ayub Khan. The author of this book concludes that this support was based on political expediency and not adherence to any rule of the Shariah."

According to Afghani there was no strict segregation of men and women and according to the Quranic injunction (24: 30-31) all Muslims both male and female were expected to behave decently and the Quranic injunction is clear on this point. He concludes that he sees no justification either in the Quran or the traditions of the Holy Prophet (S.A.L.) to keep women out. He categorically upholds equality of opportunity for men and women in every activity including politics. An awakened woman he adds, will be the best safeguard against a corrupt man.

Afgani quotes:

'Javid Nama (the allegorical poem of Allama Iqbal)

Man alive in heart, do you know what thing life is?
On seeing love that is contemplating duality:
Man and woman are bound one to the other,
they are the fashioners of the creatures of desire.
Woman is the guardian of the fire of life,
her nature is the tablet of life's mysteries;
She strikes our fire against her own soul
and it is her substance that makes of the dust a man.
In her heart lurks life's potentialities,
from the glow and flame, life derives stability;
She is a fire from which the spark breaks forth
body and soul, lacking her glow, cannot take shape.
What worth we possess derives from her values
for we are all images of her fashioning;
If God has bestowed on you a glance aflame
cleanse yourself and behold her sanctity."

A further reference to women and leadership could be derived from Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali, the noted commentator of the Quran. In *Surah Namal* (27) in verses 15-44 there is a reference to a woman named Bilqis, the legendary Queen of Sheba (1100 to 800 BC). At the same time ruled in Palestine, King Solomon who was a mighty King renowned for his goodness and wisdom. His belief was in one God and he was in fact a Prophet and the son of Prophet David. After a series of encounters, Solomon was able to spread to Bilqis the divine message of truth and she embraced the faith. She was referred to as a noble woman, ever solicitous of the welfare of her subjects and ruled by consulting her Council.

Abdullah al Badawi (1801-1873) another commentator on the Quran regarded by some Muslims as the best, holds that in his understanding of the Quran — Allah has preferred man over woman and leadership — even the privilege of electing Chiefs is denied to her, but Abu Muhammad Abdal Malik Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) refers to the Holy Prophet (S.A.L.) as the greatest mover and shaker of the world. He said, The Quran warns us that 'God never changes the condition of a people unless they change it themselves'. Ours is a brotherhood which does not believe in any form of inequalities — tribal, racial, or sexual. In fact Islam came to level things and change should not be resisted in the light of the spirit of the Quran.

What does Asghar Ali Engineer, Director of the Institute of Islamic Studies, Bombay, an internationally reputed scholar and theologian of Islam who has written books, research papers and articles on Islamic theology, jurisprudence, history, philosophy have to say?

He says that there is no Quranic provision or prophetic sunnah against a woman becoming head of a state! The Quranic revelations more often than not are responses to situations that arose but in the Holy Prophet's time no such situation arose, nor did anyone raise such a question. Reference has already been made to queen Sheba earlier in this article — Asghar Ali Engineer adds that Had Allah disapproved of a woman as the head of state or had a woman's rule been disastrous the Quran would have painted the Queen of Sheba in an adverse light and would have shown her inferior to her male counsellors. But it did not and Sheba was spoken of as a legitimate ruler and shown to be wise and sometimes she would overrule her male counsellors and take political decisions which are indeed wise ones.

About the Prophet's hadith which is often used by theologians to argue against a woman becoming a head of state — Asghar Ali Engineer says "When news reached the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) that the Iranians had made the daughter of Cusroe their ruler, he observed "that a nation can never prosper which has assigned its reign to a woman" (Sahih Bukhari Vol. 2 pg. 1053).

It should be noted that the above hadith is from (Ahad) that

is an isolated one and not mutawatir i.e., one repeated more than one companion of the Prophet (O.W.B.P.). It is a well known principle that the former (Ahad — an isolated one) is not binding and it is not necessary to act upon it. Again this author points out that Maulana Uman Ahamad Usmani shows that this hadith existed before the battle of Camel in which Hazrath Aisha, the wife of the Prophet participated and assumed command of the army against Hazrath Ali the fourth Caliph and its strange that it was remembered only after the battle started. In fact the army had many illustrious companions of the Prophet (S.A.L.), and even Abu Bakra the narrator of the above hadith. All this men should have deserted Aisha had they been convinced that the Prophet (S.A.L.) had prohibited women from being leader or head. However, many disciples abstained from participating in the battle because it was in the nature of a civil war and it could divide the Muslim ummah (community). They stood by this principle that it was against the teaching of the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) to take part in a quarrel that would cause internecine strife. It was only Abu Bakra the narrator of the hadith, who made the sex of one of the opponents the reason for his refusal to take part in the battle, after the defeat of Hazrat Aisha — (Fathima Memissi).

Asghar Ali Engineer asks — "How could it be said that a woman cannot become leader of a government when her leadership was accepted by such eminent companions of the Prophet? Apart from the Quranic reference to the Queen of Sheba — the Quran says "And the believer both men and women — they are friends of one another, they enjoin good and forbid evil and keep up prayer and pay the purifying due and obey Allah and His Messenger. As for these Allah will have mercy on them. Surely Allah is mighty and wise (27: 32-35). "Now the determination of what is wrong and what is right, is one of the basic duties of the State and here men as well as women who are protectors of each other, have been enjoined to perform this task. How can women then be excluded from being leaders of the state?" asks Asghar Ali Engineer. In fact he continues that both Imam Malik and the eminent exegetist and historian Tabari hold that women could become quadi, quazi (judge). Many women held prominent positions in the administration of an Islamic state. As Philip Hitti says (History of the Arabs 1958) "Not only do we read of women in the high circles of that early period achieving distinction and exercising influence in state affairs but of Arab maidens going to war and commanding troops, composing poetry and competing with men in literary pursuits..."

There is also the instance of a woman becoming head of state during the early 5th and early 6th century hijrah. Harrah Malikah Arwa bint Ahman headed the administration of the Province of Yemen on behalf of the Fatimid Caliphs of Egypt. She was held in high esteem and even given the highest religious offices under the Fatimid hierarchy. Many such instances can be given from history — Raziyah Sultan, Chand Bibi, Nurjahan whose ability to govern and administrate have been recognised by all historians.

There is hardly any sector or profession in the Arabia of those days in which women of the Prophet's time did not participate. In so far as Muslim history is concerned, there is no doubt that "Women have been heads of state in Muslim nations and khutbas in their names have been read in mosques and coins have been struck, bearing their images and titles".

Conclusion

In this paper the case for women's leadership is argued from the writings of some of the foremost scholars and those with wisdom. In Sri Lanka a goal sought by citizens is a Sri Lankan identity and how can this amidst rigid unbending communal obsessions and preoccupations. How does a communal identity overreach, bend, expand to embrace a Sri Lankan identity? It is not impossible — one concrete step would be to understand the difference and explore what links there are to fasten them in a close, but loose union. Rights, rituals, customs are looked at from different perspective and those perspective should be clarified and exposed for a clear understanding.

The objective of this paper is to present one such perspective of leadership from the view point of some leading Islamic scholars. Islam has given women equal rights although there are passionate debates going on about the varied rights of women in all sectors — political, economic, social and cultural. To day there is a tendency among powerful people, to label women who claim democratic rights as confusedly aping western ideas with the view to alienate the community from its traditional purity. This attitude exaggerated by the Western media which thrives on the fact that all Muslim fundamentalists are reactionaries and obscurantists. The truth of course lies elsewhere.

For Islam, however, from its inception 'decadence is despotism accepted in silence' and articulation of opposition and dissension to denial of rights is healthy, because Islam is for 'adala' this is equality and justice for its women as well as men (Imam and Kathib of Al' Utba al Khadra mosque, Cairo -1943).

As regards "riassa" or state leadership, Sheikh Ghazali, Head of the Religious Council of the Amir Abd Al Qadir University, (Algiers - 1971), author (As Sunna an Nabawiya) of the Traditions of the Prophet - (1990) wonders why "all these well intentioned Muslim men are busy quoting a hadith stating women's inferiority, instead of referring to all the verses of the Quran where the equality of the sexes is made crystal clear....

The new Islamic era meant a new status for women. The verse about Queen Sheba (Quran V.23, S.27) raised high the aspiration of women by providing them with the role model of woman as head of state. Fathima Memissi in *Can We, Women Head a Muslim State?* says many women in Muslim history did aim that high and were successful in their endeavours'.

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Re-discovering Ravana

Sasanka Perera

Introduction:

In August 1993 on my way to Anuradhapura I came across an orange colored concrete sign on the outskirts of Wariyapola. As stated in the sign itself it was erected by the Wariyapola Pradeshiya Sabha. It welcomed visitors to the town and stated the following (among other things):

"You are entering the Wariyapola city, which during the reign of King Ravana served as a landing area for the vehicle that travelled at the speed of air —"

Basically, the sign referred to a pre-historic international airport, or in the very least, a military air base! It should be noted that the word Wariyapola, the name of the town, is quite significant in the context of this speculation. "Wa" means air in Sinhala, and "riya" means vehicle, while "pola" refers to a space. Thus the amalgamation of these meanings, in theory could refer to a "place where a vehicle which travelled by air or at the speed of air had landed." Needless to say, I knew what this story was all about, but was nevertheless amazed at the attempted public legitimization or historicization of the Ravana myth. For me, such a public attempt with clear political sponsorship (eg., the sign was erected by a UNP-controlled Pradeshiya Sabha) to legitimize the Ravana myth was a completely new phenomenon in Sinhala society.

As anthropological literature from around the world has shown, certain enduring myths are sometimes resurrected, re-interpreted, historicized and politicized at certain socio-political junctures. What I would like to attempt in this brief essay is to try to understand some of the dynamics involved in such processes by focusing on how the Ravana myth has been used in this manner by Sinhala and Tamils.

Ravana is one of the chief protagonists in Valmiki's epic *Ramayana*. Various versions of the story have also seeped into the folk lore of many peoples, the Sinhala, the Thais, the Tamils, and the Balinese among them. Currently it appears that both Sinhala and Tamils claim Ravana as their own personal ethnic and culture

hero. More precisely, certain sections within these two ethnic groups seem to do so. Why?

Constructions of the past (through myths, legends, history or what is understood as history) is essentially a political and moral resource that has become an expedient tool in the hands of politicians, nationalists and scholars (sometimes of course these different agents are the same), who use them for their own political projects involving nationalist, religious or ethnic hegemonic and legitimization processes. In the Sri Lankan context the past is a highly contentious, contested and prized commodity that is often used for contradictory purposes by different, and often mutually antagonistic, groups. This phenomenon is more clearly manifest among the Sinhala and Tamils when they attempt to justify or legitimize the present on the basis of what they consider to be the authentic past.

The past is also sacred. Nationalist interpretations of the past ideally should not be questioned or reassessed by individuals within or exterior to the group. Such individuals would all be branded as traitors in terms of nationalist discourse and rhetoric. This has already occurred in Sri Lanka, and I believe would continue to occur under similar conditions. The possibility of castigation is one of the main reasons why many Sri Lankan scholars have generally been mute regarding key ("sensitive") issues, and this silence is shockingly evident in the social sciences.

The legend of Ravana has been an enduring one. Moreover, it has been at the centre of quasi-historical research of the academic fringe for some time — at least since the latter part of the 19th century. The question we should pose then is whether in the context of evolving sociopolitical realities the legend of Ravana has shifted from the obscure academic fringe into the realm of ethnic politics and nationalist rhetoric of Sinhala and Tamils. In essence this essay will attempt to provide some interim answers to this question.

The Metamorphosis of Ravana in Sinhala Society

I first came across Ravana as a child in grade three or so through a lesson titled "Dandumonaraya" in my Sinhala language reader. The title of the lesson (in Sinhala)

referred to the legendary aircraft Ravana was reputed to have had. This was my first real introduction to the mythical king, as I would assume was the case with many of those in my generation studying in Sinhala. The lesson and the teacher's elaborations noted that Ravana abducted Sita, the beautiful wife of Rama and imprisoned her in Lanka. Rama invaded Lanka with the help of Hanuman, the monkey general and rescued Sita. Clearly, Ravana even though he was supposed to have lived in a place called Lanka (which we were assured was none other than Sri Lanka), was not an absolute Sinhala hero on the model of Dutugemunu or other such kings.

At that time (late 1960s and early 1970s) his characterization was problematic — at least in the middle class conscience. On one level he was perceived as a thug who stole someone else's wife. That was considered to be the kind of thing that decent people did not do. At another level he was a hero because of his heroic military exploits. After all he flew in an aircraft on a secret mission long (really long) before those two Americans called the Wright brothers invented the aircraft. In fact on a number of occasions we were told this. The more clear heroes however, were Rama and Hanuman. They, after all, were the folks who rescued Sita and defeated Ravana. But in an era with no television to visually bombard us with the sleek and airborne exploits of Superman and Batman, Ravana's "Dandumonaraya" surely captured our imagination. I think it was precisely for this reason that he did not completely lapse from our collective memory. What is clear, however, is that except for those in the academic fringe Ravana was not an ethnic hero for the Sinhala in general.

The first impetus for resurrecting Ravana in Sri Lanka emerged in the latter part of the 19th century. The emergence of such interests coincide with the 1870 re-discovery and excavation of ruins which were claimed to be that of Troy, the fabled city of Homer's epic *Iliad*. The man responsible for this re-discovery was Heinrich Schliemann, an amateur German archaeologist. The basic similarities between Homer's *Iliad* and Valmiki's *Ramayana* prompted these early speculations. A much more sustained effort was made to resurrect Ravana later in the context of the Hela Movement in the 1940 and

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1950s. Here, what Hela activists such as Kumaratunga wanted was not so much to resurrect the Ravana myth per se, but to construct a much more ancient and non-Indic genesis for the "true language" of the Sinhala, which was identified as Hela. Current Sinhala was perceivably contaminated with foreign influences such as Pali, Sanskrit, Tamil and so on. The main aim of the Hela activists was to "purify" Sinhala by purging these foreign influences, and recreate its Hela identity which was believed to have been lost. As part of this endeavour, the Hela activists suggested that the real language of the Sinhala (Hela) had a clear Sri Lankan genesis, and that it was not of Indian origin.

These perceptions must be placed in the context of the love-hate relationship that the Sinhala have had with India for a considerable period of time. For instance while many Sinhala accept certain clear Indian influences such as Buddhism, they are at pains to overlook other influences such as the influence of Tamil on the Sinhala language. However, as part of the Hela project it was necessary to construct a respectable history for the Sinhala prior to the perceived arrival of Vijaya, the mythical ancestor of the Sinhala. Current nationalist historiography and popular conventions suggest that Vijaya arrived in Sri Lanka with seven hundred followers on the day the Buddha attained *Nirvana*. Thus as far as Sinhala society is concerned, the resurrection of Ravana came about as an integral part of this overall project. That is, as part of the claim that there was a purely Sri Lankan historical tradition and civilization prior to the arrival of Vijaya and later Indian influences.

Promoters of the Ravana myth have variously identified him as a Yaksha or Raksha king. In Sinhala myth the Yakshas and Rakshas are recognized as the beings inhabiting the land when the first Sinhala settlers landed. They are specifically characterized as non-human and demon-like. In fact, in current usage the word Yaksha and Raksha refer to demons or rather malevolent forms of spirit life who devour or harm humans. Given the nature of this rather strong popular tradition, an attempt has been made by Hela activists to humanize the demonic persona of Ravana in particular and the Yakshas in general (Seneviratne 1991: 49).

The demonic persona of the Yakshas is a strong component of the popular tradition dealing with pre-Vijayan times. On the other hand, while the Hela tradition suggests that Ravana was a Yaksha King, the popular tradition does not always

make this connection. However, the demonic characterization of the Yakshas, and the perceivably unethical behaviour of Ravana (exemplified by his abduction of Sita) are two main reasons why Ravana and Yakshas have not been a strong part of the Sinhala heroic tradition. This has been the case irrespective of the fact that certain place names (eg., Wariyapola and Sita Eliya) allegedly referring to the Ravana story, and some localized myths can be found in various parts of the island. Thus when I asked the villagers in Wariyapola to show me where Ravana's aircraft had landed, they told me that there was no such place, and that the sign referred to above was the work of a group of local politicians. So much for pre-historic airports, not to mention the attempted resurrection of Ravana in Wariyapola.

Ravana has been presented as the most famous of these early Hela (or Yaksha) kings. It has also been suggested that Ravana's mythical capital Lankapura was located within Sri Lanka. One of the main endeavours of activists involved in historicizing Ravana has been the attempted location of this capital. While many names have been suggested, by far the most favored is Sigiriya, the 5th century AD rock fortress believed to be the work of Kashyapa the first. It is suggested that Kashyapa built his fortress among the ruins of Ravana's Lankapura (Seneviratne 1991: 130-136). Interestingly however, a colleague from the University of Colombo who undertook six months of field research in the Sigiriya area did not find any references to Ravana in the numerous oral histories and folk stories that he collected.

Thus in practical terms the Hela project was launched by a group of Sinhala educated middle class elites, and its appeal was rather restricted as a result of its vehemently anti-Sanskritic and anti-Indian bias as well as a result of its vehement criticism of established tradition. Thus the resurrection of Ravana as part of the language nationalism of the Hela activists was relatively unsuccessful. However, the timing of the project is important. It emerged at a time that Sinhala culture and traditions were subverted and devalued in the context of the dominant colonial culture by both the imperialists and their local agents.

I would suggest that, in general, myths in the heroic model are likely to be resurrected at times when a society or a specific group is experiencing sustained stress. Thus when the Indian armed forces intervened in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict by sending troops to the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka, at least

a few attempts were made to resurrect the Ravana myth. Under these circumstances the "hate" component of the love-hate relationship with India which I referred to above was triggered off, and many Sinhala became overtly anti-Indian. It was in this context that Ariyadasa Seneviratne published his book on the Ravana kingdom in 1991. In it he states that the book was published to honour President Ranasinghe Premadasa. He made a direct association between Ravana's perceived anti-Indian sentiment and that of Premadasa. He states that Ravana's heroism and sacrifice three thousand years ago was essentially similar to Premadasa's heroism:

"— With a war of words his Excellency Ranasinghe Premadasa chased away the foreign forces (Indian) sent to this country by the modern Indian avatar of Rama under the false pretext of ushering in peace —" (Seneviratne 1991).

The reason for this attempted resurrection of the Ravana myth had another significant dimension, which is in fact referred to in Seneviratne's statement above. One reason for the Sinhala's love-hate relationship with India is the strong collective memory of numerous and destructive Indian invasions of Sri Lanka in the island's historical and mythical past. Hence Seneviratne's reference to Rama's avatar. Sinhala have always been wary of a possible Indian intervention or history repeating itself, and on this occasion their fears seemed to have come true.

On the other hand, the conventional belief among Sinhala has been that they are descendants of Vijaya, the North Indian prince. At least to some individuals this Indian connection in the origin myth of the Sinhala became problematic when Indian troops (many of them from North India) were occupying parts of the country. However, this and other attempts at resurrecting the Ravana myth or modifying the Vijaya myth was not strong enough in dislodging the Vijaya myth in the long run. Even at this juncture, when there was some political space for its possible success, the attempt to resurrect the Ravana myth has not been successful. The reason clearly is that the Vijaya myth is too strongly etched in the popular consciousness of the Sinhala, and that the Ravana myth has never occupied such a preeminent position in the Sinhala consciousness or imagination. Thus among the Sinhala the politics of Ravana is still predominantly an activity of the academic fringe and a minute section of the middle class.

(Next: *Metamorphosis of Ravana in Tamil Society*)

Tracking Fundamentalists

Bruce B. Lawrence

There are also two further thematic issues that undercut the rhetorically freighted but logically suspect conclusion to this otherwise magisterial article: one is gender, the other is science.

Let us imagine that religious identity is so variable that Al-Azm turns out to be correct in his prediction: even though Protestant/Catholic fundamentalists fail, their Islamic counterparts succeed. What would be the components of the success of Islamic fundamentalism? At the very least it would have to confirm gender hierarchy, a subject hinted at in the Al-Azm article but never developed. It is, however, developed in a companion piece by Val Moghadam in *South Asia Bulletin*.⁴ Hers is a restricted, country-by-country comparison of Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. She provides a wide range of data to demonstrate how patriarchy persists under the guise of development in all three countries, with the result that all three continue into the 1990s as postcolonial, neo-patriarchal states opposed alike to the educational advancement and occupational opportunity of women citizens. Yet Moghadam, like Al-Azm, strikes a radical note of hope in her conclusion. She posits that socio-economic change will continue apace in all three countries, indeed, "mass female education, the entry of women into the work force, and the expanded activities of women's organizations will be the strongest challenge to patriarchy and the neopatriarchal state" (p. 132). She labels her utopian conclusion "determinist," perhaps because it will turn out, as Sharabi, whom Moghadam cites, has argued, that gender will prove to be the last redoubt of patriarchy, that instead of marking the success of patriarchal norms veiling and seclusion signal their near term dissolution, that the very accent on women's roles is a prelude to their likely reversal and the consequent overthrow of patriarchy. Many would like to believe this argument but its inevitability is, at the least, open to question. More importantly, it is not the argument that either Moghadam or Al-Azm advances with reference to the empirical evidence of their articles, whether derived from extant literature (Al-Azm) or field data (Moghadam). It may be that in his conclusion, Al-Azm intends to suggest by the metaphor "bursting through" that the gender asymmetry which now prevails will

break down, but such a reading, like the outcome it suggests, remains elusive.

Equally problematic for his sweeping affirmation of a future "success" for Islamic fundamentalism is the ambivalent role that science would have to play. Consistent with Al-Azm's project throughout his productive scholarly career has been the firm accent he himself puts on science, i.e., modern-day science, as a liberating force. The present article continues that project. For instance, in commenting on Mawdudi's fear of science, and Shukri Mustafa's obsession, or pure phobia, about it, Al-Azm adds:

For a better appreciation of this fear, I would like to remind the Western reader here, that scientific inquiry, knowledge, conclusions, applications, and generalizations still carry, in the context of present day Muslim societies, significant traces of that intellectually and socially liberative and liberating charge that once characterized the modern scientific enterprise in the days of Rabelais, Galileo, Descartes and the Encyclopedists; along with the attendant sense of excitement, fascination, wonder, curiosity, discovery, novelty and, above all, empowerment (Pt. I, p. 119).

In other words, science will always be a challenge to religious certainty, which is the inverse of the same point that he made in *Critique of Religious Thought*, namely, that "religion as it enters the core of our life and affects our intellectual and psychological makeup is in opposition to science and scientific knowledge — heart and soul, literally and figuratively."⁵

But for whom? Not for all fundamentalists or Islamists, certainly not for Ayatollah Mutahhari, whom Al-Azm treats at length only in one quote that suggests the Ayatollah's disparagement of modern science. But a closer reading of Mutahhari, and of Shi'i fundamentalism in general, leads to a different conclusion. As I indicated in *Defenders of God*,⁶ Mutahhari, unlike his Sunni counterparts, simultaneously denies and affirms evolution. Rejecting the Biblical notion of a single act of creation, Mutahhari affirms a continuous 'evolutionary' process of creation, which he derives as the teaching, the "marvelous logic" of the Koran. He even goes so far

as to acknowledge different scientific models of evolution, distinguishing the gradualist model of Lamarck and Darwin from its successor, the punctuation model formulated by Ernst Mayr. In short, Mutahhari is not dogmatically against evolution or evolutionism, as Al-Azm implies.

Unraveling from this difference are a spate of other differences that have to be introduced into Al-Azm's article in order to balance its clear *obiter dicta* with some competing data. There is not a single Islamist or integralist or fundamentalist world view or world picture, as he calls it. There are rather multiple views, and they often compete with each other, not merely on the authority of personal leaders and their idiosyncratic readings of Koran and Prophetic reports (Sunnah), but on the very nature of religious categories and collective norms. Hence, unlike their Sunni counterparts, Mutahhari and other Shi'i fundamentalists, embrace ideology as a useful category. Going beyond the dichotomy of religion/science, they perceive two kinds of ideology. The one, all too well known, mobilizes limited group interests for material gain. But the other, which they clearly favor, aims at nothing less than "the salvation of the whole human species". Islam, in their view, conforms to this second kind of ideology, advocating as its ultimate aims "the victory of humanity over animality, science over ignorance, justice over injustice, equality over discrimination, virtue over iniquity, piety over dissipation, *tawhid* over *shirk*."⁷

The issue at stake, of course, concerns not only the distinction between Sunni and Shi'i fundamentalism but also the factors increasing or limiting their success. In the current debate about global fundamentalism, it is true, as Al-Azm has aptly and repeatedly noted, that America has provided the paradigmatic case, but it is equally true that Iran has provided the driving force for the present upsurge of interest in Islamic fundamentalism. Since the role of Iran has been downplayed in this article (it is only hinted at in the names of a few Iranian Islamists), Shi'i sources need to be revisited with the same intensity as the Sunni Egyptian documents that Al-Azm quotes so fully and adroitly, indeed, to better effect than any other scholar to date.⁸

I propose the following addendum to Al-Azm's project. Global fundamentalism is a novelty of the last two decades. Without Islamic fundamentalism we must retreat to what was supposed in the 1970's, namely, that Protestant American fundamentalism stands by itself *sui generis*. From the vantage point of the mid-1990s, the role of Islamic fundamentalism can and must be reassessed. It is at once pivotal and catalytic: it provides the linchpin, the *sine qua non*, for the comparative study of fundamentalism. And among all the case instances adduced for Islamism, integralism, or Islamic fundamentalism, Iran and the Iranian revolution occupy center stage. Indeed, the debate about Islamic fundamentalism takes shape as an earthquake. It reverberates outward from Iran. It presupposes or highlights Iran, and then the Middle East, the Arab world, the Muslim world in expanding concentric circles. But they all come back to the epicenter. And the epicenter is Iran. Iran outpaces all other contestants for the laurel "flagship of Islamic fundamentalism"; others are considered by virtue of their ideological, which is also often their geographic, proximity to Iran. Put negatively, if one excludes Iran, Islamic fundamentalism dissolves.

Let me restate my *amicus curiae* addendum to Al-Azm's article without images or metaphors. While supporting almost all of Al-Azm's original and provocative critique of fundamentalism, I would expand his thesis to include Iranian evidence as follows. Global fundamentalism was 'invented' after the Iranian revolution. It is a very recent phenomenon. Eliminate the Iranian revolution and you cannot talk about Islamic fundamentalism. (Of course, you can try to talk about it, but only as a series of circumstantial, unrelated isolates.) Eliminate Islamic fundamentalism in comparing fundamentalisms, and you remove comparative or global fundamentalism as a viable topic of analytical inquiry or academic labor.

Equally important to stress, along with the link to Iran, is the many colored quality of Islamic fundamentalism. There are several, often competing notions of loyalty to an authentic Islamic *praxis*. Nor are all Muslims who stress *praxis* intrinsically, inescapably fundamentalists. While Al-Azm defines well the most radical core group of Sunni fundamentalists, he is less clear either about their Iranian counterparts or about the fringe elements that do not fit well into either a fundamentalist or integralist or Islamist profile. For instance, in accenting science as autonomous from faith, he places Seyyed Hossein Nasr in the Islamist camp. But Nasr is much more a Muslim modernist in traditio-

nalist garb. Despite his effort to retrieve science from "its secular and humanistic matrix," he firmly believes in the right of science and scientists to be above the judgment of *ulama* and *fuqaha* who would, in the name of Allah, deride all science as out of bounds for the faithful. Nasr repeatedly tries to argue that in principle there should be no division between science and Islam, and that it is the effort to separate off modern science from premodern or medieval science that has brought about the clash of religion and science. One can dispute Nasr's notion of good and bad science, but one cannot place him in the same cadre of anti-scientists as Mawdudi, Brohi or Cardinal Bellarmino, Galileo's "adviser."

Finally, I want to demonstrate how Al-Azm's nimble and multi-tiered arguments would be bolstered by a stronger, deeper probe into the relationship of postmodernism to fundamentalism. Only in Part Two (p. 79) does he allude to postmodernism, and then he brackets it with the radical antisecularism of Shukri Mustafa. Indeed, in a stroke of ironic reversal, he credits Mustafa "with a lot more credibility, consistency and authenticity than his Western deconstructionist counterparts" (Pt. II, p. 79).

While it is fashionable to lampoon the new critics, and while I would not want to attempt their full throttled defense in these pages, they do have more of a contribution to make to the debate on global fundamentalism than Al-Azm allows. Consider the following observation by Anthony Appiah in the still fresh article, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?"⁹ Like Fredric Jameson, the leading Althusserian exponent of postmodernism, Appiah takes seriously context as well as text. He questions Weber's notion that rationalization is the core of Western civilization and Western world control. Appiah stresses the pivotal difference between the universal *significance* of the West, which is clear, and its universal *value*, which is less clear. Postmodernism, in his view, underscores the degree to which the Weberian vision has not been fulfilled.

There has not been the triumph of Enlightenment Reason — which would have entailed exactly the end of charisma and the universalization of the secular. There has not even been the penetration of a narrower instrumental reason into all spheres of life. (Rather) the penetration of a scientific vision of things describes at the most the tiny — and in the United States quite marginal — world of the higher academy and a few islands of its influence. What we have seen in recent times in the United

States is not secularization — the end of religions — but their commodification; and with that commodification religions have reached further and grown — their markets have expanded — rather than died" (p. 344).

In other words, all the exponents of an inevitable march to global economic development and with it universal secularization have proven to be short-sighted. That is a major premise of postmodernism.

What then becomes the revised trajectory of global history? And what are its religious dimensions likely to be? At the very least, it will interconnect religious actors and movements in ways that seemed previously unimaginable, and at the same time it will foster more rather than less expression of radically public religion, i.e., fundamentalism.

It is on this narrower point, the future of religious fundamentalism, that I think that the new critics and postmodernism have a contribution to make that would be especially helpful for Al-Azm's project. Consider the diachronic flow chart of Fredric Jameson. By his reckoning, postmodernism succeeds modernism for specific socio-economic factors that are linked to the development of late global capitalism. In a much quoted article, Jameson argues that postmodernism is precisely the cultural logic of late capitalism, dependent, as it is, on routinized labor, innovative forms of technology and also expanding markets (most recently Eastern Europe and USSR) where consumer appetite for capitalist commodities grows unabated.¹⁰ And even when capitalism itself seems not to change on a dramatic or critical scale, the cultural practices linked to it in any given period do change, often with startling speed, though without what Jameson calls "utopian compensation".

It is the separation of the postmodernist project from its modernist antecedents that parallels the critical perception of religious fundamentalism or integralism. Integralism, like postmodernism, must be related to historical antecedents but outside a diachronic pattern. As Al-Azm has convincingly shown, the most strident fundamentalists disavow all history except for select moments from the ideal past that inform and legitimate their own view-point. In their radical reading of the divine plan, they relate to the challenges of the present rather than the glories of the past. Yet they cannot escape the dilemma of present-mindedness: while they may lay claim to transcendent timeless Truths, they in fact re-evaluate and recast these same Truths in light of the present or High Tech Era. The God of History becomes the God of

Now, stripped of the authority of tradition and also its defenders.

Precisely because religious fundamentalism is, in Al-Azm's words, a counter-reformation, it is very much a product of global history in the twentieth century, as much as are the literary/artistic/cultural movements called modernism and post-modernism. Far from being an ahistorical mindset or a cyclically recurrent phenomenon, religious fundamentalism reacts to the greatest challenge of the present era, namely, the logic of scientizing culture: from Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley to Carl Sagan and E.O. Wilson, the advocates of a godless cosmology, by replacing Genesis, Creation and the Creator with the Big Bang, Chaos, and now Infinite Expansion, have provoked the fundamentalist counterattack. Integralism has been shaped by the forces of modernization but especially the emergence of that form of modernism which excludes religious autonomy. In that sense, fundamentalism is at one with postmodernism: *functionally they are historical products of our recent history, even though in both grid and group they reflect that history at near opposite poles.*

The functional affinity between post-modernism and fundamentalism has not been lost on Fredric Jameson. Jameson, more than any other theorist, has re-worked the puzzle of capitalist culture and global redirection. His stylistic opacity is more than balanced by his ecumenical grasp. For that reason alone he bears fruitful juxtaposition with Al-Azm in reviewing the two-part *South Asia Bulletin* article.

But there is also another sense in which Jameson contributes to the same project of situating fundamentalism in a postmodern orbit. Like Al-Azm, he is not merely interested in the evidence of religious data; he also probes the limit of what actors themselves can tell us about their own motives, interests and outcomes.

In Jameson's case, the issue of categories — their naming and invocation — was piqued by his reading of Robert Bellah's *Habits of the Heart*, one of the most celebrated books on American religion in the 1980s.¹¹ Modern religion of the kind that Bellah and his colleagues investigated, belongs, in Jameson's view, to the category of weak religion. It is weak religion because it is religion unrelated to underlying socio-economic structures. It is religion expressive of individualism, yet individualism itself remains unexamined. Bellah engages in conceptual slippage from one theoretical model to another, so that Biblical and Republican moments of

individualism become elided. Conversely, the blighted concept of community among Bellah's subjects is never addressed. Also absent are what Jameson calls "genuine left alternatives," with the result that Bellah and his collaborators tumble "into the confines of that familiar old idea, American exceptionalism." Bellah never critiques either late capitalist society or the powers of contemporary religion. His shortcoming is at once systemic and generational: he mirrors what right-wing intellectuals want to hear about religion, namely, that it is private belief system, that it is self-ministering therapy, that it is publicly non-threatening.

Jameson then goes on to decry the fact that bourgeois American religion today is little more than the simulacrum of religion, religion transformed into its shadowy image lacking both substance and authenticity. In its stead, Jameson would like to see the emergence of religion on the left, religion of the sort that contributed to the Iranian revolution, that informs liberation theology, or even the dynamics of the synchronicity of the non-synchronous that Ernst Bloch adumbrated but which has yet to be discovered "in the Anglo-American language zone."¹² In short, Jameson harbors muted hope for religion: to be vital actors in the late capitalist maelstrom, religionists must try to reinvent a new form of the utopian project, one which exceeds, and so replaces, the thin, therapeutic building blocks detailed, and commended, in *Habits of the Heart*.

Jameson's seeming imprimatur of the Iranian revolution — and by implication, Islamic fundamentalism — is qualified in a recent, still unpublished essay "Modernity after Postmodernism." In this essay he examines religious fundamentalism as a case instance of that proliferation of micropolitics which he had alluded to as a characteristic social feature of postmodernism in his 1984 essay, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." Citing John Howard Yoder, one of the most strident critics of theological modernism, Jameson dubs him a fundamentalist. Why? Because Yoder, in common with other fundamentalists, rejects all the literary critical devices that have sought to explain scripture as remote rather than immediate, its directives from the past only acquiring relevance through modern readings. Against such interpretive relativism Yoder advocates a synchronicity of imagination, intention and will with the originary Biblical audience. Specifically, Yoder maintains that one can literally engage the teachings of Jesus as did his first-century Palestinian contemporaries. Hence deduces Jameson:

What fundamentalism asserts is that there exists no Great Divide (as Bruno Latour puts it) between the modern and the ancient, between the West and the rest, between the bourgeois era and the society and culture of the scriptures. Belief in that Great Divide, that radical break, that radical Difference, was what authorized figurative and allegorical interpretations of the Bible. But if that belief or convictions weakens or vanishes, then a literal relationship to Jesus's teachings is no more impossible for us, the citizens of the superstate and of multinational capitalism, than for the Middle Eastern subjects of the Roman Empire, something like this new relationship to the past would also seem to characterize the other "fundamentalisms" of the present day, most notable Islam.

If fundamentalism then becomes part of postmodernist determinations, it only reinforces the vise-like grip of capitalism. For capitalism lies at the heart of what is meant by the West, modern times, reason and science. And capitalism remains a brutal hegemonic force, as "the blood of innumerable colonized peoples attests. The fact is that postmodernism does not mark a break with the dynamics of capitalism that once expressed itself in modernism (and in modernity and in modernization) but rather a restructuration and new stronger form of that on a now global scale." Religious fundamentalism, instead of marking new possibilities for a revitalized utopian project, reinforces the fragmentary micropolitical outcomes of late multinational capitalism.

Still another postmodern critic who contributes to the debate on religious fundamentalism is Stanley Fish. Especially valuable is Fish's notion of interpretive communities. Without confirming rank subjectivism and cognitive relativism, Fish maintains that it is interpretive communities who determine what texts mean. And they determine meanings not by reading texts objectively but by responding to "the bundle of interests, of particular purposes and goals" that inform every text. Yet such readings are not subjective, according to Fish, because the meanings, as also the texts, which interpretive communities produce, reflect "public and (often quite) conventional points of view."¹³

It is this distinctive twist by Fish on the old debate about interpreting literary texts that makes his approach of value in looking at religious fundamentalists. Precisely because he refuses to look at the truth or falsehood of competing claims advanced by different interpretive communities, Fish observes and analyzes the interests

at stake in each proffered reading. It is ironic, therefore, that an arch secular-humanist — Fish worships only at the altar of ACC Basketball — can provide fundamentalist readers a point of access to the arena of critical academic discourse.

But Fish goes even further: he notes that determinate reading is one of the principal ways in which one can read a text, especially a scriptural text. Determinate reading implies the suspension of the very exercise of critical judgment since that very exercise, it is alleged, will lead inexorably to bias and impiety. In his own way Fish affirms the inerrantist reading of Scripture, collapsing, as he does, the chronological space between Biblical and contemporary history. His is a move similar to the one by Howard Yoder that Jameson analyzed as postmodernist fundamentalism. To Fish such a move is above either evaluation or condemnation; it merely exemplifies the peculiar nature of determinate reading. As he once remarked:

To someone who believes in determinate meaning, disagreement can only be a theological error. The truth lies plainly in view, available to anyone who has the eyes to see; but some readers choose not to see it and perversely substitute their own meanings for the meanings that texts obviously bear.¹⁴

In other words, religious fundamentalists by their intrinsic nature can accord no validity to other readings. Nor can they show awareness, much less appreciation, of the new stages in critical theory that have brought parts of the academy to the point of admitting, without confirming, the fundamentalist view of scripture. The result, ironically, is that "it would be literally impossible for a fundamentalist to credit the theories of a Fish or a Foucault, for in so doing, the fundamentalist would cease to be a fundamentalist."¹⁵ In other words, the critical enterprise becomes a one-way corridor: Fish or Foucault, Jameson or Al-Azm can be used to validate fundamentalist readings but no fundamentalist would recognize their value as critical observers or astute analysts.

The contribution of Fish to the debate then becomes a negative one: it shows the extent to which, as Appiah reminds us, there is but a minority of persons who still believe in a Post-Enlightenment, post-Modernist project, and for that very reason the project will never achieve a global consensus. The utopian vision announced by Al-Azm, even were it to succeed, would never be acknowledged by his Islamist subjects, yet his article still

serves a valuable purpose, for it does finally make a difference that those attuned to the dilemmas and ambiguities of a postmodern world of global fundamentalists will listen to all voices, especially when the voices themselves will not listen to each other.

Or do they listen without acknowledging that they listen? For one of the indisputable changes of late capitalism has been the role of mass media, at once much more intrusive and inclusive than ever before in human history. "The mass media," Gianni Vattimo reminds us, "have assumed in the life of each individual an infinitely more important role than in any other era of the past."¹⁶ Hence, those who advocate determinate readings have to share equal space with advocates of indeterminate or pluralist readings. The implicit message is that readings which take account of other readings are finally more valuable than those which do not. That may be the greatest lesson from the interface between critical theory and the latest stage of global capitalism.

It also helps to understand the milestone that Al-Azm achieves in the present article, for what he has done is to take fundamentalist logic to its outer limits in several traditions. To the extent that anyone in the future wants to depict a fundamentalist mindset she will have to consult this article and, following its several detours into the reading of unknown Islamic texts or obscure pontifical tracts or Protestant sectarian treatises, she will come out more aware of how richly varied is the worldview of the single-minded patriarchs of the Unknown God.

Future Studies of Fundamentalism

On the future of scholarship about global fundamentalism, one can say, without fear of contradiction, that what now passes for scholarship on Islamic fundamentalism in particular and comparative fundamentalism in general is doubly flawed. Most approaches fail on two accounts: they either match their own analysis too closely with the statements of fundamentalist advocates, or else they neglect the larger context of both the modern world and the postcolonial nation-state. The major opportunities for future study lie in opposite directions. One points to gender-specific approaches to the role of women and sexuality in fundamentalist cadres. It is no accident that the Egyptian journalist, Faraj al-Fauda, assassinated by modern-day Cairene Kharijites in June 1992, had exposed the sexual peccadilloes of his Islamist countrymen. Further studies of Islamism, or Islamic fundamentalism, will reveal the limits but also the suggestiveness of patriarchal norms for

religiously devout women. The other direction for future research is at once cross-creedal and cross-cultural. It signals the need for more numerous, and also more nuanced, comparisons. It requires close readings of the different motivations and expressions of fundamentalist protest. It suggests that the optimal strategy would be to bombard the popular media as well as academic bookstores with indeterminate readings of the High Tech era, that is to say, with more books that reflect the scope and depth, the rigor and challenge of Al-Azm's article on Islamic fundamentalism and its Christian clones.

Notes

- Valentine M. Moghadam, "Patriarchy and the Politics of Gender in Modernizing Societies: Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan," *South Asia Bulletin: Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, Vol. XIII Nos. 1&2 (1993), pp. 122-133.
- Sadik Al-Azm, "A Criticism (sic) of Religious Thought," in Donohue and Esposito (eds.), *Islam in Transition*, p. 114.
- Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt against the Modern Age* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1989).
- Morteza Mutahhari, *Fundamentals of Islamic Thought: God, Man and the Universe* (translated by R. Campbell) (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1985), pp. 53-54, quoted in Bruce Lawrence, *Defenders of God*, pp. 221-222.
- Perhaps the most extensive, and certainly the most controversial, assessment of the major ideologues of the Iranian Revolution is Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent* (New York: New York University Press, 1993). Dabashi examines not only the writings of the eight principal thinkers, secular as well as clerical, who paved the way to revolution, but also the personal, professional and historical context that shaped both them and their audience. His thesis is bold: without the ideological foundation forged in the decades preceding the revolution of 1978-79, the collective consciousness of the Iranian people would have failed to coalesce. However, it is only in retrospect that one can examine both the process of this new formation of consciousness and also its limits.
- See *Critical Inquiry* 17/2 (Winter 1991), pp. 336-357.
- Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* No. 146 (1984), pp. 53-93.
- Robert N. Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), reviewed in Fredric Jameson, "On Habits of the Heart," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 86: 4, (Fall, 1987), pp. 545-565.
- Jameson, "On Habits of the Heart," p. 563.
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 ENRICHING RURAL LIFESTYLE

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

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

Here, with careful nurturing, tobacco grows as a lucrative cash crop and the green leaves turn to gold... to the value of over Rs. 250 million or more annually, for perhaps 143,000 rural folk.

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

For them, the tobacco leaf means meaningful work, a comfortable life and a secure future. A good enough reason for laughter.

 **Ceylon Tobacco Co. Ltd.**
*Sharing and caring
for our land and her people.*



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In 1961 People's Bank ventured out in the challenging world of Banking with a staff of only 46... and a few hundred customers.

Today, just 30 years later

*People Resource exceeds 10,000
Customer Listings at a staggering 5.5 Million
Branch Network in excess of 328, THE LARGEST
in Sri Lanka*

In just three decades People's Bank has grown to become a highly respected leader in the Sri Lankan Banking scene. Their spectacular growth is a reflection of the massive resources at their command dedicated to the service of the common man — a dedication that has earned them the title "Banker to the Millions"

PEOPLE'S BANK

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