

LANKA

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CHANDRIKA'S TWO-FRONT WAR

— *Mervyn de Silva*

HUGE GAMBLE

— *P. Jayaram*

WINNING TAMIL MINDS

— *Indra de Soysa*

NO APPEASEMENT

— *H. L. D Mahindapala*

SWRD: OXFORD ORATOR

— *Ananda Welihena*

TRINCO, U.S. AND INDIA

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Security Master Plan

After the devastating LTTE attack on Colombo's main fuel storage tanks the government has decided to draw up a master plan to protect strategic installations and also dams and reservoirs.

The Black Tiger hit at the suburban (Kolonnawa) oil installation cost the state Rs 1500 million in fuel lost in the blaze, mainly diesel, kerosene and aviation fuel. The structural damage to the tanks has not been determined yet.

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350 Tigers killed

A military spokesman said that 350 LTTE cadres have been killed and 500 wounded in the on-going operation "Sunray" in the Jaffna peninsula, begun on October 17. The security forces are gradually consolidating their position in the peninsula, the spokesman said.

Enough stocks says fuel corp boss

Ceylon Petroleum Corporation chairman Anil Obeysekera told the media two days after the Tiger attack which destroyed Rs 1500 million worth of fuel that there were enough stocks left in hand. There is no need to panic, he said.

Pro-LTTE campaign

Mr Vasantha Rajah, former Sri Lanka Rupavahini chairman, has been conducting a vigorous pro-LTTE campaign in Canada where he is on a visit after being relieved of his post in the state TV organisation. Sri Lankans in Canada have complained to President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga that the Sri Lankan mission in that country has done nothing to counter the propaganda campaign. A Foreign Office spokesman in Colombo however said that such propaganda is certainly countered "when and where necessary".

Editor charged

The Attorney General has instituted legal action against the Editor-in-Chief of the *Sunday Leader*, Mr Lasantha Wickramatunga and its publisher Mr Lal Wickramatunga for allegedly defaming President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga.

Censorship challenged

The editor of a UNP-oriented weekly tabloid "*Janajaya*" has filed a fundamental rights violation plea in the Supreme Court challenging the government's censorship of war news.

The petitioner has alleged that the censors are extending concessions and exemptions to the foreign media, the state controlled media and the electronic media, thereby subjecting the petitioner to discrimination, unequal treatment before the law, and subjecting the petitioner to a denial of the right to practice the profession of his choice and freedom of expression in violation of Articles 12 (1), 12 (2) and 14 (1) (a) respectively of the Constitution of Sri Lanka.

Tea up

Sri Lanka's tea exports showed an upward trend for the first eight months of this year, compared to the same period last year. Tea packets and tea bags together fetched more than six billion rupees this year compared to four billion last year. There has been a 3 per cent increase in total exports.

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SUNRAYS OVER JAFFNA

Mervyn de Silva

The army is on the way to Jaffna — just a few miles more to the capital of the northern province, and for the LTTE, its main bastion and hopefully independent EELAM's capital. But the Army has two enemies to fight, the LTTE and the weather, before OPERATION SUNRAYS (RIVIRESA) is over.

At the BMICH, the other evening, I asked Mr. Chandrananda de Silva, the Defence Secretary, whether he was satisfied with OPERATION RIVIRESA so far. "Of course," he replied. "We may take some casualties before we reach Jaffna, that is part of war, and our brave soldiers understand this and our commanders are taking all steps possible to minimise casualties. We have also observed that the TIGERS have slipped out of Jaffna, leaving only their cubs to fight the army. Quite frankly, my worries are about Colombo. Desperate men do take desperate measures. Sabotage is what worries me. You saw what happened in Kolonnawa and our main oil depots... desperate men," remarked Defence Secretary Chandrananda de Silva.

But President Kumaratunga has opened a new front abroad. She has charged western governments of not taking "sufficiently serious action" against Tamil expatriates raising funds for the L.T.T.E., which in turn uses these funds to purchase arms. President Kumaratunga was speaking to Barbara Crossette of the *NYK Times* who knows the Sri Lankan scene quite well. "With the army of Sri Lanka inching towards the command centre of the separatist Tamil rebels, in what could be the decisive battle of a 13 year civil war, the Sri Lankan president is calling on other nations to help cut supply lines to the rebels and force them to the negotiating table".

In presenting the Sri Lankan case at the U.N., the influential U.S. Council for Foreign Relations, and the prestigious ASIA Society, President Kumaratunga has done her best to meet the critics at home — critics who have not resisted the temptation to pounce on the fact that she left Colombo with members of her family some hours after the city had been penetrated by an LTTE sabotage squad which hit two strategic targets — the Petroleum Corporation's oil storage facilities in Colombo's suburbs.

Unfortunately for Acting Defence Minister Colonel Anuruddha Ratwatte, President Kumaratunga had issued a communique which established the fact that she had left the island after the event:

"Just prior to my departure I was shocked to hear that the oil complex at Kolonnawa had been attacked by the LTTE...." So the President had no doubt whatsoever about the identity of the mischief-makers. The Opposition is led by a lawyer-politician who has evidently been a diligent student of his former leader, President J.R. a resourceful parliamentary strategist, with a firm grasp of tactical offence and manoeuvre. What's more his old school chum, the young politician who led the SLFP parliamentary group and the Opposition in the UNP-dominated post-1977 assembly is now a UNP frontliner. And unlike Mr. Wickremasinghe, Mr. Anura Bandaranaike is an irrepressible mischief-maker of high quality. Between them, Parliamentary debate is totally dominated by the Opposition. In the weeks ahead Parliament is bound to be more than exciting. Even the most casual observer of an increasingly complex and fast-moving political situation — that is, Sri

Lankan crisis — will have to pay some attention to what's going in our national assembly.

OPERATION RIVIRESA

The army's successes in the current operation has forced the "Tigers" to retreat and field the young recruits so that they, helped by the monsoon showers, could delay the army's advance. And the army is taking its own time in order to keep the casualty figure as low as possible. The LTTE opened a front in Colombo, and the Kolonnawa disaster was a very cleverly planned operation behind the enemy's lines... indeed in the enemy's capital. But neither "operations" in the Eastern province, which the current strategy has left wide open, nor sabotage in the South can stop the army from taking Jaffna. And it is then that the war enters a new phase. Like the IPKF, the Sri Lankan army (to the LTTE ideologue and propagandist, it would be an "army of occupation") will have to fight a different kind of war.

First of all, what is the government's grand design for the north? Will it run the Jaffna municipality and keep arresting or smashing LTTE "saboteurs"? That's the least it can do to demonstrate that its writ runs in the north, and it does NOT discriminate between a Tamil citizen and a Sinhala citizen, only between a law-abiding Tamil and a 'terrorist'.

With Jaffna "pacified," will the Army advance into other areas and establish its authority in those parts too, while never calling a halt to the 'tiger hunt'? If this is the likely scenario, then we must all go back to the IPKF's three years and study how the north-and-east landscape changed.

Slaughter on the Path to Peace

P. Jayaram

It's a small patch of land, just 25 sq km in area. But in the Jaffna peninsula, it's a big enough prize for the Sri Lankan army to talk tough, the LTTE to posture with threats of retaliation. President Chandrika Kumaratunge to hope for another step in trying to swing her battered country towards accepting a radical plan for the devolution of power — a change from a unitary to a liberal federal system — which she is convinced can bring peace. And for the nation to cross its collective fingers yet again for a reprieve from chaos.

Chances of that happening seemed ever more remote with the two big hits the LTTE took early last fortnight. On October 1, the army overran LTTE positions in Jaffna and then retained a stretch of land deep in Tiger territory south-east of Palaly military base. Both sides took losses. And two days later, when the LTTE tried to hit back, the army's Operation Thunder Strike won out — the Tigers suffered over 200 casualties with about 250 injured in one of its worst reverses; the military lost 52 in the entire week. Soon after, government officials claimed dissension in enemy ranks, saying that LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran had fired his trusted intelligence chief Pottu Amman and that Dominic, who runs the rebels' northern administration, was in trouble for embezzlement.

So where does that leave everybody? "Exactly where they were," says a respected Colombo-based political analyst, who declined to be identified. "The LTTE will hit back, so will the army, and so on. This is a no-win war."

That much has become pretty clear after years of severe clashes. But what makes the latest encounters different is that they leave Kumaratunge, more than Prabhakaran, little time to sort out her problems. The LTTE chief has survived numerous internal problems and there is no sign yet of him stopping — the latest setbacks are only expected to bring retaliation, as a similar army victory in July did, having already forced Kumaratunge to clamp censorship on coverage of military news and convince Parliament to extend the state of emergency by another month.

Kumaratunge needs a compromise — fast. Gloom spread in Jaffna after the Government stand, but the President,

who promised to give up her all-powerful executive presidency by July this year, is facing a restive majority-Sinhala population which has had enough of conflict and broken promises. On the other hand, she can't afford to lose military gains — a lesson learnt the hard way last year when a government-led ceasefire and peace talks with the LTTE backfired. She also staved off a crack in the ruling People's Alliance's hold earlier in the month when the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) — which supports the Government — threatened to pull out with its nine seats in a 113-112 situation in Parliament. The pressure of a political-solution-or-else, even as the opposition United Nationalist Party watches from the sidelines, remains. Says EPDP chief Douglas Devananda: "Without a political solution, we can't support this offensive."

A political solution is something Kumaratunge still swears by. Fresh off the offensive, at a meeting of trade-union leaders, she reiterated her stand. "The war cannot be won unless the Tamil people are guaranteed their rights as a community," she told the gathering. "The Tamil youth carry cyanide not because they hate life, but because they want to protect their rights and identify as a community." This pitch may help to keep Tamil parties in the ranks as the devolution package — announced on August 3 — still needs a two-thirds majority in Parliament to become a law.

But even if that happens, she is stuck. Too much depends on making a point in Jaffna with a stick to force the Tigers to talk peace, as much as devolution of power is a carrot. There is talk in defence circles of capitalising on military gains by making a push for the LTTE bastion of Jaffna town, backed in large part by Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte's statement in the House that government control over Jaffna would be "re-established soon". Meanwhile, the army plans to keep up the offensive right through the north-east monsoons, which many defence analysts see as bad timing. "We are prepared for the monsoons and we are going ahead with the operation," says a senior Lankan defence official, "even if rains and Sea Tigers (the highly trained naval arm of the LTTE) make our supply lines by air and sea difficult."

That, to some observers, is just the sort of attitude government forces should avoid, or pay the price as the army's July move did, when, besides recapturing lost ground and mauling the army, the LTTE scored a major hit by killing Brigadier Nalin Angamma, the army's eastern region commander. "You may plant the Lion flag in Jaffna to please the Sinhalese, but you will have to pull it down and run in two or three months unless you are adequately prepared," says former air force commander Harry Goonetilleke. The entire operation, tailored to the Government's political needs, may go up in smoke, he warns. "I am opposed to the military being used as cannon fodder for a political time-table."

Kumaratunge also runs the risk of her move backfiring if the army does push ahead: a takeover of Jaffna could cost thousands in civilian casualties and create about five lakh refugees, say unofficial estimates. There are already signs of a setback in other ways. The army has relocated thousands of troops from the east to the north. And the LTTE has moved right in. Even officials admit privately that, besides Batticaloa, Amparai and the port town of Trincomalee on the eastern seaboard, most of the region is under Tiger control. Army sources say they were given a cryptic reply by the Government when they pointed this out — as did some MPs in Parliament — last fortnight: "You take care of the north."

It's a huge gamble, and the pressure is only increasing even as the country's newly resurgent and pro-military-solution Buddhist clergy turn up the heat. And there is a bizarre twist, resulting in another front for Kumaratunge. Barely days after the army push began, a letter addressed to 'Sister Chandrika', authored by Dhanu, appeared in the LTTE mouthpiece *Viduthalai Puligal*. Dhanu is also the name of Rajiv Gandhi's deceased assassin. "You who won the elections with slogans of peace," went part of the letter, "are including yourself in the list of Rajiv Gandhi, (former President Ranasinghe) Premadasa, (UNP leader Lalith) Athulathmudali, (former prime minister Gamini) Dissanayake..." Kumaratunge is already trapped in the present. It would be a pity if history caught up with her.

— *India Today*

Low-intensity containment

Indra de Soysa

I have argued why a purely military solution, which can only be obtained at tremendous cost, will fail to solve the underlying causes of the conflict. So, why not a political solution? It is rather clear now that any political solution will have to involve the Tigers who have the balance of power vis-a-vis other Tamil political groups in a rather disproportionate manner. Further, a political solution such as a great devolution of power, or one that does not take into account the aspirations and concerns of the majority of Tamils all over the country (many of whose voices, unfortunately, are still rather muted against the Tigers) cannot be just or a solution to anything. It is also not clear that the Tigers will be willing to participate in any "just political solution" short of Eelam, the only guarantee against extradition to India that Prabhakaran holds; one other option for him, of course, is to continue languishing as de facto leader of Jaffna. Herein lies the solution for the government! Since the armed forces have now fallen back on a somewhat defensible position — and any fool will tell you that a good defensive strategy is the least costly option in war — the government spend its time and energies, not to mention resources, on fortifying these defenses in the most militarily strategic way. This strategy necessitates discarding the illusion "liberating Jaffna town," but contrarily, it will be designed to make life extremely difficult for the Tigers. It is a strategy that would require great patience. In effect it is the way in which the US "won" the Cold War. It is a strategy of "low intensity containment," Jaffna turning into Sri Lanka's Eastern Europe. In effect, the government will have to treat a negligible part of its territory as a giant penal colony indefinitely. Who in the last fifteen years has missed Jaffna?

Before one hastens to vilify me for being cruel and heartless, let me elucidate my strategy further. Are we all agreed that any sort of death is unjust? Accordingly, where do the majority of Tamil people in Sri Lanka stand on the issue of young Sinhalese armed forces personnel dying in the war against the Tigers who do not ostensibly have their sympathy? Do most Sinha-

lese want more dying for the sake of saying that they have now conquered Jaffna, by now a sorry heap of rubble that most Sinhalese will be paying to rebuild? Does any Sri Lankan government want to expend enormous resources to save face and end up at square one? Do the citizens of Sri Lanka, Tamil, Sinhalese, Muslim, Malay, Burgher, and all the mixes thrown in, want to see continued loss of life on the part of both Sinhalese and Tamils in this bloody affair? Do my Tamil brothers and sisters seriously believe that there will be no bloodshed in an Eelam controlled by the fanatical Tigers, that there will be something akin to democratic rule, and that a separate state will be "just"? Clearly, the most just strategy will be to minimize the loss of life on all sides, stop the politically expedient rhetoric of "solving the problem," and follow the least costly strategy. Let me elucidate this strategy further.

Giving Prabhakaran what he already has is not a problem, but it does not mean that he will be recognized in anyway as nothing but a criminal, wanted in Sri Lanka and India. All sorts of brigands and thieves have de facto control of territory but they are not recognized as leaders; after all, many US cities have areas into which no authorities dare venture. This strategy, nevertheless, affords the LTTE even less recognition than what they currently enjoy vide a "negotiated settlement" strategy. The new strategy can criminalize the Tigers and allow a constructive dialogue between the Sinhalese and other Tamil groups for reconstructing a better country. It brings less violence to the Jaffna peninsula, and in the long-run puts pressure on the Tigers vis-a-vis satisfying the aspirations and desires of the Jaffna populace at large and places the onus on them to decide to put down their weapons and come faithfully to the negotiating table. It allows the armed forces to adopt a truly defensive posture and fight only on their own terms, presumably with very little cost in men and materiel. It allows the country to get into a defensive mode, to be vigilant against threats within the rest of the island, given that the Armed forces can truly contain Tiger activity. Presumably the

lone task of the defensive function will be easier to carry out, making the forces more effective, such as they have been in the East. The money saved on fancy offensive war materiel can be used to resettle, educate, and develop new villages and towns for those who flee the Tigers and for reconstructing other affected areas. In other words, a concerted effort at undermining the "center of gravity" of the Tigers must be carried out — with least cost.

At last, the government can put its energies into truly winning hearts and minds of all Tamils in Sri Lanka and abroad. A real strategy of isolating the LTTE, both territorially, militarily, and politically can work. After all, the West spent only forty years to convince the Soviet Union and undermine the "center of gravity" of communism. Surely, even half that time is not too long to wait if it means solving this intractable and costly conflict. In effect, this strategy is purely one of adopting warfare on the government's terms, not on the terms of the Tigers. It will be a painless siege, unlike the bloody affair in Sarajevo, and in the language of history; wait for the enfeebled "Elara" to come out and meet his fate on the stronger Dutugamunu's terms. It will be up to Prabhakaran to decide not to sacrifice his people needlessly, and likewise, for the Sinhalese to accept their Tamil brothers and sisters and build a better society together as Dutugamunu was able to do. A great society can only be built on peace, but a peace that will have to be obtained at least cost, without a bloodbath, which in retrospect, is the most valuable lesson that can be learned from the peaceful ending of the Cold War. Let us try to "contain" violence throughout the land, which in the long-run is the "only solution." As one eminent scholar of politics and diplomacy has recently noted, "the crucial difference between states these days is not, as the political scientists used to think, that between 'strong' states and 'weak' ones, but between the sleepy and the shrewd."¹ Its time to wake up!

Note

1. Susan Strange, "States, Firms, and Diplomacy," *International Affairs* 68, 1 (1992): 1-15.

Tamil oppression of Tamils

H. L. D. Mahindapala

It is quite fashionable in intellectual circles to find a ready-made scapegoat in Sinhala-Buddhists. They are blamed for everything, including the horrors committed by Mr. Prabhakaran. *Bramaganani*, for instance, attributes the birth of the LTTE to the Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinists who are portrayed as "oppressors of the Tamils". This implies that the brutal violence of the LTTE is a mere tit-for-tat strategy adopted to get even with the "Sinhala state oppression". It is also used to justify violence as the only political weapon available to the Tamils to beat the "Sinhala state" and extract the maximum political gains. Above all, this accusation serves as a moral counter for the *Bramagananis* who are hopelessly locked into the megalomaniacal violence of Mr. Prabhakaran. The corroding factor that is eating away the humane values of the Jaffnaite, disturbing his/her conscience, and postponing the dawn of elusive peace, is not Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism or "Sinhala state oppression" but the violence perpetrated in their name. Unable to find an alternative to this dilemma — not to mention an alternative leadership — the *Bramagananis* take the easy way out by chanting "Sinhala state oppression", which has gained a certain amount of political currency. Unfortunately, due attention has not been paid to consider the veracity of this accusation implied in the terminology.

Perhaps, a comparative assessment of the recorded oppression of the Tamils by the Tamils and the "oppression" of the Tamils by the Sinhalese should throw some light on this neglected aspect. As the accusation clouds the issues arising from the terminology, it is of vital importance to step back into history and evaluate the real source of oppression that humilia-

ted and crushed the human spirit in the Tamils for centuries. Even at this late stage the vital question must be asked: who really oppressed whom? Was it the Sinhalese who oppressed the Tamils or was it the Tamils who oppressed and persecuted the Tamils? In the following skeletal outline, I wish to answer this vital question which, for some odd reason, never entered the debate of scholars in any significant way. In doing so, I hope, the difference between oppression and grievances will also be amply clarified.

I begin by accusing the Tamils of being the most inhuman oppressors of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Their oppression of nearly 25 per cent of the lower castes in Jaffna is a heart-rending and a tragic story of a sizeable community of Jaffna Tamils who were denied the elementary dignity of holding their head up and walking as a human being under the cruel and exploitative society ruled by the upper caste. The criminal record of the upper-caste in Jaffna can only be matched by the brutality of the oppressive regime run by the low-castes in Jaffna today. For three centuries, beginning from the Dutch period, the Jaffna upper-caste reduced the non-*vellala* castes to the abject level of slaves. This slavery enabled the upper-caste to exploit the low-castes as cheap labour to increase profits of their tobacco, paddy and other farms.

Let me quote Jane Russell in her excellent study of *Communal Politics Under Donoughmore Constitution, 1931-1947*. "The social status of the non-*vellala* castes in Jaffna was extremely low, compared to the position of non-*goigama* in Buddhist Ceylon. This stemmed from the fact that some of the largest non-*vellala* castes, the

koviyars, *chandras*, *pallas*, and *nalavars* had been slaves of the *vellala* up to the abolition of slavery by the colonial government in 1844. There had been slavery among the Kandyan Sinhalese but it was of the mildest form, slaves being personal bondsmen to the owners. Of the four slave castes, the *koviyars* were the most privileged, as they had been household servants to the *vellalas*; the *nallavas* or toddy-tappers, and the *pallas*, landless labourers, were however treated much like helots or serfs by the *vellala* who formed the powerful landowning class. Their position after the abolition of slavery was not much improved. As (H.W.) Tambiah observed,

"Although slavery was abolished legally, many of the depressed classes remained as de facto slaves of their masters for economical reasons.

"Even by the mid-20th century the status of the *pallas*, for example, was hardly any better than a century before. Tambiah quotes from the Manual of the Madurai District published in 1868 to describe the position of the *pallas* in 1951,

"They are a numerous but abject and despised race. Their principal occupation is ploughing the land of the more fortunate Tamils, and though normally free, they are usually slaves in almost every sense of the word.

"The outcasts or *parayas* had a deplorable social status. Among this group, there was a caste unique to Jaffna, the *turumbas* or washermen to the *parayas*. They were not allowed to be seen in the day light and could only travel by night."

Since *Bramaganani* talks glibly of

"Sinhala state oppression" can this person point out to a more pernicious system than this which subjected the Tamils to the most humiliating conditions of oppression? When and where did any other Sri Lankan community—Muslims, Burghers, Indian Tamils or Sinhalese—institutionalise and persecute their own people the way the Tamils did to their own kind in Jaffna? The Tamil oppression of the Tamils is the most obscene chapter in Sri Lankan history. The *Bramagananis* did not lift a finger to eliminate this cruel form of oppression which went on till the late seventies? Where were the Chelvanayakams and the Ponnambalams when the battle lines between the oppressors and the oppressed were drawn right in the front of the Maviddipuram Temple in 1968? The cry of "Sinhala state oppression" by the political heirs and descendants of Ponnambalams, and Chelvanayakams smack of sheer hypocrisy when, through their fathers' exploitation of caste/slaves, they became the sole beneficiaries of their ancestors oppression.

Besides, the Tamils have gone round the world crying "Sinhala state oppression" which, according to them, began after 1956 when S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike was swept into power, predominantly on a Sinhala-Buddhist wave. From 1956 to 1976 when the Vaddukoddai Resolution was passed it was exactly twenty years. Is it because the *Bramagananis* cannot face their crimes against their own people for three centuries that they seek to divert attention to twenty years (or make it 40 now that we are at the end of 1995) of so-called Sinhala oppression? To come anywhere near the magnitude, the enormity and the extent of the barbaric crimes committed by the Tamils against their own people the Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinists will have to go through several cycles in *samsara*. And yet, for obvious political reasons, the *Bramagananis* single out only 20-40 years of the so-called Sinhala oppression, trying desperately to dismiss from their guilty consciences the unbearable weight of the sins of their fathers and their forefathers before. If they are genui-

ne about reconciliation they should follow the example of the Japanese leaders and beg forgiveness from their own people for what they had done to them in the past right up to the time of the Vaddukoddai Resolution. Reconciliation, like charity, begins at home.

It is not only the Tamil political class that is guilty, the Tamil political scientists, historians, sociologists too ignored (deliberately) the hideous and dark side of Jaffna which was as great a contributory factor to the current crisis as the mishandling of the communal issue by the Sinhala south. If the Tamil intellectuals had turned their heads, just a wee bit away from the South, and peeped into their own backyard they could have enlightened the Tamils about the difference between "oppression" and "grievances". But they never dared to look into darker side of their Jaffna moon. It is by wearing blinkers that the Tamil intellectuals succeeded in feeding myth of "Sinhala state oppression". Their writings targeted only the Sinhala-Buddhists. Their writings vilified and demonised the Sinhala-Buddhists. These intellectuals never balanced it with the other side of the story. To them, there was no other side. There was only one side and that was the Sinhala-Buddhist demon in the South. Emboldened by the vilification and the demonising of the South by the intellectuals, the Tamil politicians ultimately unleashed violence against the Sinhala-Buddhists by endorsing the Vaddukoddai Resolution. It was, in reality, a declaration of war against the Sinhala South by the Tamils of the North. Vaddukoddai Resolution declared that violence is the only way and they let loose the Tamil youth. I think *Bramaganani* is stretching the truth beyond the limits of credibility when he blames the Sinhalese for giving birth to the LTTE. Officially, it is on record in the Vaddukoddai Resolution that it is the Tamil political class which created this monster in the constituency of Mr. S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, the leader of the Federal Party. In peddling these distortions, the *Bramagananis* and their fellow-travellers are as responsible as the opportunistic

politicians (of both sides) for the overflowing blood bath.

One way of getting out of this ideological fixation is to have more Dayan Jayatilakas presenting the unpalatable truth which may, someday, hopefully, shock the *Bramagananis* into reality. Dayan Jayatillaka has homed in on a sensitive but a realistic assessment when he said: "Dual power and peaceful co-existence between the two (i.e. Colombo and Jaffna) is impossible. One will have to go; and one will." This is inevitable because, from another point of view, a democracy in the South and a dictatorship in the North are incompatible. Besides, the two cannot co-exist because the intrinsic nature of dictatorship demands a mythical enemy. The overblown personality cult of Prabhakaran represents the mythical protector who guards the Tamils against the evils of Sinhala-Buddhism. Mr. Prabhakaran cannot, and will not, exist without the demonised Sinhala-Buddhists. He exists even today only on the bitter hatred up by him and his *Bramagananis* demonise their mythical enemy.

In their eyes, the Sinhala-Buddhists are the equivalent of the Jews in Hitler's fascist state. Hitler orchestrated this hatred on a Gobbelsian scale to justify his violence against his own people. What is more, fascism can sustain its momentum only on aggression. Mr. Prabhakaran cannot justify the denial of fundamental rights to the Jaffna Tamils in a state of peace. Violence is the only means of proving his political usefulness. He has never shown any skills in the democratic process. So any attempt to mollycoddle or pacify fascists with negotiations are bound to end in disaster. Neville Chamberlain and the rest of the world learned it the hard way. No amount of appeasement will win the day for democracies fighting fascist regimes. In short, democracy and fascism cannot co-exist. One will have to go. And history records that it is the fascists who went into oblivion.

The Trincomalee base controversy

K. M. de Silva

There were speculations that the Jayewardene government had offered facilities to the American Navy at Trincomalee. These were given rise to by two factors. The first was Colombo's lifting in 1981 of a nine-year old ban on foreign warships using facilities at the Trincomalee harbour, following which the U.S. Navy sent a number of warships to this Sri Lankan port on various missions.¹⁰⁰ And the second was a 1981 report that America had naval access to this port. General David Jones, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, reportedly referred to the possibility of Trincomalee being considered as a potential U.S. base in the Indian Ocean.¹⁰¹

It was reported in a New Delhi-based newspaper that the Pentagon project report for 1980-81 allegedly argued for such a naval base and that the "Washington Post" expressed an opinion appreciating Trincomalee as an ideal stopping place for U.S. ships in the Indian Ocean.¹⁰² It was also reported in the Indian capital in 1980 that some U.S. Congressmen, reportedly with the blessing of the State Department, had approached officials at the Sri Lankan Embassy in Washington for "rest and recreation" facilities at Trincomalee for U.S. sailors in the Indian Ocean region.¹⁰³ The fact of the matter was that there was no U.S. base at Trinco.¹⁰⁴

However, given the general orientation in Sri Lanka's foreign policy and the global and regional developments at the time, India's security concerns were understandable.

A hue and cry was raised by the power elite in India over the possibility of Trinco turning into a U.S. base. They considered

the existence of any foreign military base in the region a threat to its peace, tranquillity and security.¹⁰⁵ One Indian scholar put it rather bluntly as he said "how mistaken is the Sri Lankan President with regard to Trincomalee. No Government of India can ever permit Trincomalee to fall in unfriendly hands. India has to feel concerned about the damage an irresponsible government in the island can cause to India's security by a false move and must, under all circumstances and irrespective of the consequences, counter such a move".¹⁰⁶ This virtually summed up India's position which was to deny external power involvement in Sri Lanka and to ensure that the Colombo government kept in line by appreciating New Delhi's security susceptibilities in the region.

The Oil Tank Farm saga

In 1981, the Jayewardene government decided to revive the Oil Tank Farm at Trinco. Although the decision had economic underpinnings, its politico-strategic significance was much more important to the Indo-Sri Lanka relationship. The Coastal Corporation, a Texas-based oil company operating through a subsidiary in Bermuda, was to obtain a 29-year lease and exclusive control of the OTF. It would make a down payment of \$35,000, and annual rent which would start at \$30,000, and increase by 10 percent each year. The American company would be free to use or hire out the facilities at its discretion, although the Colombo official spokesman said that the government had reserved the right to prohibit foreign naval vessels and customers using the tanks. But official sources privately admitted that the attempt to prevent the diversion of oil to military purposes was illusory.¹⁰⁷ India

protested against the deal and it was cancelled.

A fresh tender was called. And on 23 February 1984, the OTF was leased to an International Consortium by the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation. This Consortium consisted of three firms — the Oroleum (Pvt) Limited of Singapore, the Oil Tanking of West Germany and the Tradinaft of Switzerland. These firms were controlled by Western interests, and the last one was said to have major shares of a Pakistani business house.¹⁰⁸ India was incensed by the reported deal. She suspected foul play in it because of the way it was struck. The Consortium was floated only in 1982 with a view to getting the Trincomalee deal. Although seven other firms submitted their tenders, the Consortium obtained the contract. The tenders submitted by the British, Indian and Soviet firms were rejected, although, according to an Indian analyst, commercially the Indian proposal was much more profitable to Sri Lanka.¹⁰⁹ Although the agreement again fell through under pressures from New Delhi, it was apparent to India that Sri Lanka had more of a strategic objective in the whole Trinco episode. There was a concern in India that the facilities under the deal were to be made available to the U.S. in exchange for a defence pact¹¹⁰ and that Colombo could not in times of crises prevent the U.S. company from supplying fuel to bases like Diego Garcia; these were a set of potential developments that India regarded as a morbid danger to peace in the Indian Ocean.¹¹¹

The Voice of America relay station

Sri Lanka, under an agreement in 1951, granted broadcasting facilities to The Voice of America (VOA). But the new agree-

ment signed on 10 December 1983 regarding the expansion of the same facilities in Sri Lanka excluded the jurisdiction of the Colombo government over the administration, operation and maintenance of the facilities. The Sri Lanka government earlier had the right to evaluate the VOA transcripts before they were broadcast. This crucial right had now been abandoned in favour of an assurance from the U.S. that it would "use it best endeavours" not to broadcast any programme detrimental to the national interest of Sri Lanka.¹¹² India feared that the U.S. with its satellite connections might use the facilities for spying in the Indian Ocean and for other strategic information and military communications. As such, India was closely watching its impact on her own military communications system as she was planning to have wireless communication frequency in order to give greater security to communication links and achieve strategic naval mobility. What was implied in India's concern was that it was New Delhi's security interest and not Sri Lanka's exercise of its sovereign will that was to be accorded preference in Colombo's pursuit of its external relations. India has not only disapproved of Sri Lanka's divergent foreign policy and opposed the extension of external presence in the island, but it has also been desirous since the beginning of the 1980s of expanding its influence in the small neighbour's domestic affairs pertaining to the Sinhala-Tamil ethnic conflict.

Sri Lanka's Ethnic Crisis and the continued Strategic Non-Conformity, 1983-87

Sri Lanka experienced such horrendous events in July 1983 that could well be called apocalyptic in terms of their impact on the Sinhala-Tamil as well as Indo-Sri Lanka relationships. The island's ethnic conflict snowballed into national crisis, leading to a state of civil war and seriously straining its relations with India.

(To be Continued)

Notes

100. Times of India, New Delhi, 6 May 1981.
101. See Annual U.S. Military Posture, prepared by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 7 February 1981, USICA, New Delhi, p. 7; The "familiarisation tour" of Vice-Admiral C.A.H. Trost of the U.S. Seventh Fleet and the visit of a team from the Manila-based U.S. Naval Intelligence Service Resident Agency (NISRA) to Colombo in 1980 were construed as missions to press hard for base facilities in Trincomalee for American Navy. See Tribune, Chandigarh, 8 July 1980.
102. Times of India, New Delhi, 5 January 1981 and 5 January 1982.
103. Reportedly, the U.S. State Department intervened and the talks were aborted. See Tribune, Chandigarh, 8 July 1980. See also Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), Colombo, Vol. 18(2), 1 December 1981, Col. 310.
104. See for U.S. denial, the statements of Jeanne Kirkpatrick, the U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, and of John H. Reeds, the U.S. Ambassador to Colombo, Patriot, New Delhi, 8 March 1982 and Ceylon Daily News, Colombo, 16, 29 August 1981 and 10 May 1984.
105. Statesman, New Delhi, 28 November 1981; for similar but more strident views of MPs from the Parliamentary Opposition, see Patriot, New Delhi, 28 November 1981; Bhola Prasad, a Communist Party, was of the opinion that the U.S. move was part of U.S.-China-Pak attempt to encircle India; Dr. Subramaniam Swamy of the Janata Party told the Lok Sabha that "the United States has just recently got a rest and recuperation centre base in Sri Lanka.... It is not a base. But it is a foot-hold..." See Lok Sabha Debates, 7th series, Vol. XXVI, No. 25, 25 March 1982, Col. 384.
106. Dr. M.G. Gupta, Indian Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice, Y.K. Publishers, Agra, 1985, pp. 306-307.
107. Sunday Times, London, 24 January 1982.
108. V.P. Vaidik, Ethnic Crisis in Sri Lanka.....?
109. *ibid.*
110. Rita Manchanda, "Sri Lanka Crisis: Conflict and Intervention", Strategic Analysis, New Delhi, Vol. X, No. 5, August 1986, pp. 576-78.
111. Hindu, Madras, 27 February 1982; for a comprehensive discussion on the OTF deal see Sreedhar, "Anatomy of the Trincomalee Deal", Strategic Analysis, New Delhi, IDSA, 1984.
112. *ibid.*

Waiting — 11

Into the Sunset

Sixty seven, and an old man

The verdict I accept with grace

The realization was not too sudden, really

I had sensed the process, felt Time's hand

Apologetically touch my shoulder

But then you put it cruelly with your silent flight

No matter

Your Ulysees will voyage these oceans of light

And arrive again as a beggar in your new realm's abode

Will you have him, or another

Bright, handsome and bold?

U. Karunatilake

Law and Sexuality; the amendments to the Penal Code

Neelan Tiruchelvam

The Hon. Minister for Justice must be complimented for introducing the most comprehensive reforms of the Penal Code since its enactment in 1865. Our Penal Code is in turn modelled on the Indian Penal code which was introduced in the Legislative Council in 1836. The author of this legislation was Thomas Babington Macaulay who was the first Law Member of the Legislative Council who believed that law reform in general and "codification in particular should be animated by the principle; uniformity where you can have it; diversity where you must have it; but in all cases certainty". Vasudha Dhagamvar has pointed out "the Indian Penal Code is an astonishing piece of work, even more so when one realises that it was drafted in two years by a young man without prior experience of drafting, and virtually single-handed".

The Penal Code embodied the moral standards and social perspectives of an early Victorian age. There are several profound changes in contemporary mores and values relating to gender equality which must be reflected in the law. The first development relates to the growing global consciousness with regard to the phenomenon of violence against women and the need for concerted international and domestic action to address the causes and consequence of such violence. These concerns are reflected in the Vienna Declaration in 1994, the Beijing Platform of Action, and the decision of the U.N. to appoint a Sri Lankan lawyer Radhika Coomaraswamy as its Special Rapporteur with a global mandate on this issue. The second relates to the growing sensitivity to the reproductive health rights of women and the right of an individual to have control over and to decide freely on matters related to her body and to her sexuality. A related concern relates to the health risks to which women are subjected

to as a result of unsafe abortions which threaten the lives of particularly the poorest and youngest. A third development relates to the need to be responsive to alarming incidence of sexual exploitation of children including the phenomenon of child pornography. And finally the need for the law not to discriminate and punitively deal with person with different sexual preferences, and to move away from puritanical attempts by the law to legislate morality.

Our law relating to abortions is in urgent need of reform. There is no other aspect of our criminal law which is so discriminatory in its impact on different social classes. The more affluent social classes are able to have recourse to a simple surgical procedure performed by an experienced practitioner to terminate an unwanted pregnancy. The predicament of the poor and the unmarried who have to turn to illegal abortion clinics or quacks is deplorable. One gynaecologist has concluded that such illegal abortions are one of the major causes of maternal morbidity and mortality. One estimate is that atleast 20% of the hospital beds in gynaecology wards are occupied by women who have developed complications as a result of unsafe abortions. I therefore strongly favour the liberalisation of the law on abortion, and would go much further than the proposed amendments. I would in this regard commend the approach of the United States Supreme Court in *Roe v Wade*, where the majority ruled that prior to the end of the first trimester of pregnancy the attending physician is free to determine, without regulation by the state that in his medical judgment whether the pregnancy should be terminated. From and after the end of the first trimester the state may regulate abortion procedures to the extent the regulation reasonably relates to the preservation and protection of maternal

health. I would support the decision to decriminalise abortion law and to repeal the existing provisions in the penal code. We need assurance that a more humane and realistic regulatory framework will be very shortly introduced by the government with a focus on the questions of reproductive rights and maternal health.

One of the important changes introduced by the law is the creation of the new offence of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment in the workplace and elsewhere has become an increasingly important issue on the agenda of the womens movement. Several legal scholars have struggled to frame an adequate definition of sexual harassment having regard to diverse behaviour which is ordinarily sought to be regulated by that concept. Radhika Coomaraswamy has emphasised two important ingredients. First it is conduct which is unwanted by the recipient, in other words, unwelcome sexual attention. Second, it is conduct which from the recipient's point of view is offensive or threatening. The German Penal Code and the Penal Code of Denmark have focused on contexts of subordination or financial dependence where authority is abused to extract sexual favours. The present amendment is not so limited, and women walking in public places, travelling in public transportation are often subjected to a great deal of harassment. Several foreign researchers and tourists have written to the press on this issue. In Canada employers are encouraged to issue a sexual harassment policy including procedures to investigate complaints and to discipline transgressors. Clearly this problem cannot be dealt with only by recourse to legal strategies. The community needs to be sensitised through public education programs. The Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission engaged in a poster, magazine and radio

advertising campaign entitled SHOUT (Sexual Harassment is OUT). We need to engage in similar public education programs.

Clearly one of the key provisions in the amendments relates to the reform of the law relating to rape. Feminist writers have rightly pointed out that rape is an instrument of control in a patriarchal society, and that women's vulnerability to rape is one of the main factors which constraints her empowerment. "Rape occurs in the family as a form of marital rape or incest, rape occurs in the community, and rape occurs in situations of armed conflict and in refugee camps." Nonetheless the law relating to rape has been inadequate, the prosecution of offenders lax, and the response of the police to victims generally callous and indifferent. The present amendment endeavours to more precisely define what constitutes 'sexual intercourse' and the circumstances in which "consent" cannot be presumed. It further defines circumstances in which enhanced punishment would be applicable such as custodial violence, rape of a pregnant woman, rape of woman under 18 years of age, rape of a disabled woman, and gang rape. While there can be no objection to increasing the maximum penalty for such heinous offense, one remains concerned as to whether in these and other circumstances judicial discretion should be curtailed by the imposition of a mandatory minimum sentence. A new element is that which enables the court to order that compensation be paid to the rape victim.

The conceptual recognition accorded to marital rape represents a significant breakdown in the public/private distinction which had hitherto constrained an effective response to domestic violence. However the importance of this change is negated by its limitation to judicial separations. I would urge that this limitation be removed in an acknowledgment of the seriousness of marital rape. To do so would be to fall in line with several Commonwealth countries. In 1991 the Court of Appeal in the United Kingdom ruled that

marital immunity is an anachronistic and offensive common law fiction which no longer represents the position of a wife in present day society. In many jurisdictions rape has been redefined to emphasise the demeaning and violent aspects of rape rather than its sexual character. The present amendment adopts a more sounder approach by creating in section 365B a new offence of 'grave sexual abuse'.

The present amendment relating to rape closely follows the very progressive report of the Law Commission of India in 1980 which subsequently resulted in the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 1983. The Law Commission of India in its report referred to the "radical and revolutionary change in the approach to the offense of rape; its enormity is frequently brought into prominence and heightened by the revolting and gruesome circumstances in which the crime is committed;" The Commissions report dealt with in detail with matters of procedure — such as arrest, detention medical examination, interrogation, and trial in camera — and evidentiary rules.

In many jurisdictions the reform of the law has been accompanied by several gender sensitive support networks. These have included mandatory examination by victims by women doctors, the enlisting of units of policewomen in each station to deal with rape cases. In other countries rape crisis centres have provided integrated services to women victims of violence including legal services, counselling and support.

The offence of gross indecency between persons still renders homosexual and lesbian acts between consenting adults unlawful. The law should not seek to penalise adults for their sexual preferences, and section 365A should accordingly be amended.

Section 286A deals with the problems of child pornography, while section 360B deals with the problems of sexual exploitation of children. Here again we do not seem to have reliable statistics although

clearly the problem has reached alarming proportions. Some official estimates place the figure at 30,000 of children who are exploited as sex workers in resort areas. A non-governmental organisation PEA-CE has estimated the number of children between the age of 8 to 14 who are sexually exploited at 10,000. There is an urgent need for a more systematic study of the problems of child abuse. Only a small fraction of these cases are reported and followed up. In 1990/91 only 421 cases of child abuse were reported and complaints filed in 327 cases and resulted in turn in 76 convictions.

LETTER

Political Satire

I commend Kamalika Pieris for throwing some light on the political and social satire contributed by the Sri Lankan journalists (*LG*, Oct. 1). In the USA, those who have mastered such a literary genre, like Art Buchwald and Andy Rooney, have a high profile among the reading public and their syndicated columns are well received. Considering the low tolerance politicians in countries like Sri Lanka have for such literary writing, we should tip our hats to the creators of such works.

I would like to add, that Kamalika Pieris should have included the name of Regie Michael in her list of journalists who wrote political satire. The pungent editorials Regie Michael wrote for the *Ceylon Daily Mirror* in the 1960s were a class of its own. In addition, if my memory has not faltered, he also contributed political satire columns for the short-lived *The Independent Weekly* in the mid-1970s, under the pseudonym 'Ravi'. In these columns, Michael commented on the ethnic politics and issues such as standardisation.

Sachi Sri Kantha

Japan Institute for Control of Aging,
Fukuroi City,
Japan.

SWRD: Making of a leader

Ananda Welihena

The Union threw a political career to Mr. Bandaranaike just as it did for William Ewart Gladstone who became the Prime Minister of United Kingdom. He was described by Hollis as an Union ex-president who was:

"... tall, handsome, with coal black hair and resistless eloquence, proved himself at the Union able to dominate an assembly as probably no other member of it has ever done...an undergraduate who looked at the Union as a stage on which he can prove to the world his immediate fitness for public life" (Hollis, 1965, 44).

CONTACT WITH SUNTHERALINGAM

His earliest recollection of the Union was the debate he had attended, perhaps out of curiosity, to see and listen to Mr. C. Suntheralingam: the fourth speaker scheduled for the evening. Incidentally, his hundredth birth anniversary fell on 19 August, 1995 (see *CDN*, 19.08.1995).

Mr. Suntheralingam entered Balliol College, Oxford in 1918. On 6 November, 1919, he took part in a debate on the motion "that this house considers direct action an unjustifiable attack on the rights of the community". He wrote about this debate:

"I knew the Oxford tradition that one had to be quick at dealing with hecklers. (I had plenty that evening) and that every speech to be regarded as successful had to be a judicious mixture of the grave and gay and that flippancy of speech was those days, by no means a vice at a Union debate" (Ibid.).

After his return from Oxford Mr. Suntheralingam served as Vice Principal of Ananda College, Colombo for a year during which time he was appointed lecturer in Mathematics at the Ceylon University College where he remained for eighteen years. In 1940, he took to politics and law. In 1947, he contested the Vavunya seat and was appointed the first Tamil Minister of Trade in D.S. Senanayake government. The *Hansards* of this period recorded his constant interventions in Parliamentary debates. In 1954, he moved a resolution in Parliament calling for the restoration of *Tamil Ilankai* which refers to a Tamil separate state called by him the *Eelam*. His Tamil colleagues jeered at him this motion. He was "called a mad man" by the leaders of the *Tamil Arasu Kachchi*. However, it was not his intention to achieve this separate state by a violent armed struggle. He advocated that those who represented the *Eelam* Tamils in the Central Legislature should subscribe to the principles of *Panchaseela*:

"We believe that it is expedient and unwise to resort to any form of violence to achieve our aim of Eelam Tamil Free State" (Ibid.).

Mr. Bandaranaike had an interest in Mr. Suntheralingam and the acquaintance with him could have provided him with the ideas about Tamil ethnic issues. He might have thought of a future constitution for Ceylon during his Oxford career. This was likely as he had already suggested a Federation for India with a view to preserving its unity in diversity.

Prof. A.J. Wilson argued that Mr. Bandaranaike was "much alive to the ethnic divisions in the island's polity". Though he advocated a Federal system during his Oxford days yet "he had dropped the idea by 1928. But the concept of de-centralization and devolution of powers died hard in his mind".

Mr. Bandaranaike, in his writing has indicated what he noted of Mr. Suntheralingam as an Oxford debater:

"I remember him with a formidable array of documents before him, holding forth at great length. It was no doubt, a very learned speech but failed to interest the House".

Mr. Suntheralingam was aware of the issues of Tamil politics which eventually motivated him to introduce the term *Eelam*. Likewise, Mr. Bandaranaike was aware of the issues of Sinhalese politics, which spurred him to seek a solution to the concept of separate state of Eelam by substituting it for the system of Regional Councils. The origin of conflict between *Eelam* and the Union of Regional Councils could be traced back to the days of the above relationships between Bandaranaike and Suntheralingam.

HIS SUCCESS AT THE UNION

Mr. Bandaranaike's success at the Union debates and its politics made him feel that he was "in the wider arena of life" or "in the widening circle of a ripple on the surface of a pool".

He participated in numerous debates, all of which earned him enormous recognition and applause. *The Isis* referred to his first speech as the "best of the evening". The motion of the second debate held on December 1, 1921 was "that in the opinion of this House the reaction from Victorianism is the curse of the age". *The Isis* reported that his speech was "long and fluent" and the *Oxford Magazine* referred to him as "showing great promise".

On 22 February, 1922, he participated in

a debate on the motion "that in the opinion of the House the present disorder in India is due to the policy of H.M. Government". His speech was reported by *The Isis* as "extremely fluent, able and moving" (Ibid.). *The Oxford Magazine* commented:

"One of the finest debates since the war. Mr. SWRD Bandaranaike held the House from the beginning to the end of his speech in which he demonstrated a delightful fluency, and big capacity for debate" (Ibid., p. 63).

He participated in several debates and gained debating skills. The motions proposed were: "that the Russia-German Treaty is a menace to the peace of Europe (4 May, 1922); "that the Government should adopt at once a Foreign policy based on the League of Nations" (18 May, 1922); "that this House deplores that recent policy of the Government in the Near East and regrets that the solution of the question involved was not trusted to the League of Nations" (19 October, 1922); "that indefinite continuance of British sovereignty in India is a violation of British political ideals" (2 Nov. 1922); "that the welfare of Eastern Races of the Empire lies in development on Eastern and not on western lines" (8 Feb., 1923); "that this House envies its grand children" (24 May, 1923); "that this House would rather have been a Cavalier than a Roundhead" (12 Feb., 1924); "that this House would welcome the disappearance of the Liberal Party" (21 Feb., 1924); "that civilization has advanced since this society first met (28 Feb., 1924). "The maintenance of coloured barriers is constant with the progress of civilization" (8 May, 1924); "that at the next general election this House would prefer the return to power of the Labour party to that of the Conservative party" (8 June 1924).

ATTITUDE TO INDIA

Mr. Bandaranaike's outlook expanded beyond the university milieu. This was partly because he cultivated a keen interest to express his solidarity with India. He wrote about "India and Oxford" and always defended cogently India's political struggle for self-rule. He was critical of the policy pursued by the British Government toward India, for it did not recognise the aspirations of the Indian people. He argued that it spawned discontent, diffidence and moderate rebellion in the form of non-co-operation. He admitted that this debate offered him his "first big chance at the Union" and it was just the foil needed for his "own style of oratory". Two Indians took part in the debate, one of whom eventually became a progressive Muslim leader.

Why is Cuba harassed?

Sergio Corrieri

Declaration

We, 163 delegates, attending the Cuba Solidarity Conference of Asia Oceania Region representing 102 organisations as well as in our individual capacity from 12 countries.

1. *Reiterate* unequivocal and total support for the brave and unrelenting struggle of the Cuban people against the more than three decades old economic blockade of their country by successive US administrations. The First Regional Meeting of Solidarity with Cuba being held at Calcutta in India which coincides with the death centenary of the Cuban national hero, Jose Martí, who fell fighting colonialism on the battlefield, condemns the unjust blockade, which violates all established legal and humanitarian norms.
2. *Call on* the peoples of Asia and the Oceania region, who constitute the bulk of the world's population, to stand firmly by the people of Cuba in their hour of need and in their efforts to preserve their hard won freedom and sovereignty. The struggle waged by the Cuban people epitomises the right of nations to freely choose their own path of development and determine their destiny independently. It is both our privilege and duty to mobilise moral and material support for the struggling people of Cuba.
3. *Condemn* the economic blackmail by the US, otherwise the votary of unhindered free trade, when it serves its interests by imposing this blockade on a small country, which poses no threat to anyone. Moreover, the attempts at further tightening this blockade by the American Congress, as through the Helms-Burton Bill, which if passed, will further violate the Human Rights of the Cuban people and will set a precedent for the USA to undermine the sovereignty of other countries, particularly developing countries, with impunity. All such US laws already passed by the US Congress should be scrapped forthwith and adequate reparations be paid for the billions of dollars lost by Cuba as a result of the blockade.
4. *Demand* that the illegal and inhuman economic blockade which has been condemned overwhelming in various international fora, including the UN General Assembly, be lifted at once.
5. *Rises to the occasion of meeting the challenges* posed by the radically changed international scenario, where US imperialists which imposes its will on others, particularly the developing countries makes it all the more necessary that solidarity with the heroic resistance being put up by the Cuban people be strengthened considerably. Cuba is struggling to maintain its independence and develop Cuban society in line with the interests of its people. That is what everyone wants for their own countries too. So the US intervention in Cuba is an attack on the right of everyone in the world to develop in their own way. The continuing endeavour of the Cuban people at this critical juncture of their history to safeguard their significant social achievements calls for global solidarity as never before. Let us all urge our governments, economic enterprises organisations and individuals to forge even closer links in different fields with the brave people of Cuba. Let the US imperialists know that Cuba is not alone and that we will not spare any effort to ensure that the Cuban revolution, which became a source of inspiration for the people fighting for national liberation and in defence of independence and sovereignty will continue to have the full support of the people of Asia-Pacific region.

It is a great privilege for any Cuban to address this Assembly in the first solidarity with Cuba meeting to be held in Asia, said Sergio Corrieri, a prominent figure on the Cuban cultural scene.

First of all, we would like to thank our friends of the Indian Solidarity with Cuba

Mr. Bernard Soysa, Minister, and eleven MP's from the P.A., U.N.P., and Tamil parties attended the conference organised by the Indian Committee for Solidarity with Cuba.

Committee for taking on the complex task of organizing this gathering, thus complying with a decision of the World Solidarity with Cuba Meeting held in Havana in November 1994.

We know from first-hand experience how difficult it is to prepare a meeting such as this.

It is extremely encouraging and stimulating to have here with us participants from the countries of the region.

Let me from the very first express our acknowledgement for the encouragement your presence here gives us, with it you give further evidence that Cuba is not alone in its long and difficult battle and that there are millions of people throughout the world ready to support and defend the equity and justice that must guide normal coexistence among nations, regardless of their wealth, size or population.

With some of these countries, Cuba has

old, fraternal relations. With others, as is the case with India, we have waged arduous battles together within the Non-Aligned Countries Movement in the struggle for a better, more equitable world. Many of us are Third World countries, or more benignly put "developing countries". We are all moved by the desire to have closer relations and to promote friendships among our peoples.

In Asia and the Pacific, in this vast geographic space, of diverse, ancient cultures, lives more than half of the world's population.

It is expected that in the next few years this proportion will increase.

Granting the economic and political diversity of the region, there is, nonetheless, a constant increase of its economic weight in the world economy. Politically, the developments and decisions that transpire here increasingly influence today's world and will be decisive for the world of tomorrow.

Asia is a concern of Cuba, just as Cuba is a concern of Asia.

Cuba needs world solidarity. Cuba is being attacked, even if no bombs are falling. Cuba is harassed and besieged, even if there are no stone walls. We are the only country in the world that has suffered a blockade for more than 30 years, practiced by the world's strongest superpower.

When one hears about the blockade against Cuba, one might think that it is only a group of measures prohibiting economic relations between the two countries, but the blockade is, in fact, a global aggression system, a new type of warfare, which includes travelling restrictions for American citizens and Cuba emigree wishing to visit Cuba, a systematic misinformation campaign about Cuba's reality, all kinds of pressure on third countries and on firms and businessmen who want to do business with Cuba.

The blockade also conditions U.S. rela-

tions with other countries to the type of relations the latter have with Cuba, for example, they withdraw their aid from countries that help Cuba. It also restricts free navigation rights. Ships that stop at Cuban ports are banned from U.S. seaports for a period of six months.

The harassment is absolute. It keeps us from having access to international financial institutions and do not only hinder our foreign economic relations but also communications, tourism, cultural relations, scientific and academic exchanges, etc.

What is the reason for this harassment, unparalleled in modern history?

The plans for annexing and dominating Cuba were part of the U.S. rulers intentions from the very inception of that country and this was repeatedly and openly expressed by officials of the highest rank and relevant American figures, under the hypothesis of the so-called "manifest destiny" which they feel they are called to fulfill in the region.

During the past century, they encouraged and promoted annexationist trends in Cuba, which were finally defeated by the ideas of independence brought about by the struggle against Spanish colonial domination.

After many years of bloody war with Spain, when military victory was practically in our hands, the United States, using a shady pretext, interfered in the struggle, ignored the Cuban patriots and obtained an easy victory together with the control of the country.

During those years more than 1,200 new industries were created the country was provided with seaports, airports, a wide network of highways, 94% of the national territory was electrified, dozens of hospitals, scientific research centers and thousands of schools were built, among other facilities.

In the social sphere, Cuba attained achievements unprecedented in our con-

tinents and in the underdeveloped world in general: an eight-grade educational level on the average, schools and teachers for all, a college graduate for every 20 inhabitants and a mid-level technician for every 15. Our people's culture and training is our greatest wealth.

The achievements in public health have also been impressive: free medical assistance, a consistent practice of prophylactic medicine, a doctor for every 200 inhabitants and figures so noteworthy as a 9% infant mortality and a life expectancy of more than 75 years. Just to mention two important aspects of social development.

Cuba's economic relations with the socialist countries and the Soviet Union were an integration mechanism which comprised a price and credit system, which was complementary for certain highly-reliable productions and commitments, based on which a stable projection of the economy was made possible.

The sudden demise of the socialist countries and the disintegration of the Soviet Union led Cuba into a very critical economic situation.

These relations represented 85% of our trade. It was to these countries that we exported 63% of our sugar, 73% of our nickel, 95% of our citrus fruits and 100% of electronic parts and components.

As to imports, we received 63% of foodstuffs, 86% of raw materials, 97% of fuels, 80% of machinery and equipments and 74% of manufactured goods. The drop of the gross national product from 1990 to 1994 can be estimated in from 35 to 45%.

Between 1989 and 1993, the importing capacity of the Cuban economy fell 73%, going from more than 8 billion dollars in 1989 to a little over 2.2 billion in 1992 and hardly 1.7 in 1993.

I think very few governments in the world could have endured such adversities.

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No Serious Plays

Kamalika Pieris

The Sri Lankan dramatist has not excelled in writing 'serious' plays. Most are deadily dull. In the style that is now emerging, there is too much focus on theme and too little on dramatic interest. The dialogue is often cerebral. There is a precedent for this, as for example in the work of Pinter, but it does not come across effectively in the Sri Lankan situation, because in this country, the locals speak English very colourfully, with plenty of gestures and unless this is reflected accurately on the stage there cannot be a distinctive Sri Lankan theatre in English.

If we think in terms of effective theatre, then the most effective plays are the humorous farces and playlets, and the musical offerings, but these are not considered substantial contributions to drama. However these are well worth examining in terms of dramatic potential, specially with reference to dialogue. The best known of the early plays, categorised as 'light entertainment' by Goonetilleke (14a) are the clutch of comedies by H.C.N. de Lanerolle and E.M.W Joseph, such as 'Well Mudliyar' and the adaptation called 'He comes from Jaffna' by Lyn Ludowyke. Critics tended to look snootily at these plays, but they did contain elements of the basic social relationships to be found in Sri Lanka. One example would be the arranged marriage, usually complicated by individual preferences on the part of all involved.

Today, these plays are joined by the contemporary work on Indu Dharmasena, who has produced a prolific amount of short plays and farces. These plays are generally humorous, and do not deal in depth with serious themes, but she now has a considerable following and at the performances I attended, she played to a discerning audience which contained people who were familiar with serious theatre. Her work contains two elements which a local play in English should invariably carry. Firstly there is a mixture of English and Sinhala, local English idioms and slang, and local rhythms of speech.

In Indu Dharmasena's play 'A room to let' we have:

"හොර පුසා" "විසෙ" "කුටා පිදුරු"
"Really. පව අපෙන්න."
"Ammo thank God he left"

"Who the hell is using my cooker?"
"I'll make myself a cup of tea and boil this bathala alle and eat it and then I think I'll go far a small loaf"
"I'll just go to the junction kade..."
"How do you like her bloody cheek..I am going to teach her a jolly good lesson, she won't forget in a hurry"
"You know machang, this is not really our fault, no"

In "My wife is trying to!" there is:

"Otherwise I don't want to be disturbed, understand"
"I mean how can you eat thora malu everyday. So now and then I just look and admire karola"

"වැරදි පැන්තෙන් කැහිටලා, අපි පලි."
"මෙන්න වැඩක්. විහිළුවක් වත් කරන්න වෙද නේ"

"A room to let' deals with two people unwittingly renting the same room, one using it during the day and the other during the night. It is a farce, but moves quickly, and has a hilarious sequence including a boiled yam and a boiled egg. It got laughs at the correct places. The Sri Lankan speech was delivered effectively and came across clearly, and that leads to the second point of relevance — the delivery of Sri Lankan speech idiom from a proscenium arch stage.

Rasika Abeysinghe in "Family bonds' uses the idiomatic English favoured by young people, in the first half of the play. "Hallo machang" "The go and cook something, will you" "Can't you hurry up, your just talking rubbish" The dialogue loses this quality as the writer moves on to a more lofty plane. The work of Nedra Vittachi is dramatic and imaginative. She, unlike the other writers can also deal with music and lyrics, and is able to relate to the theatre preference of the audience.

In 'The loneliness of the short distance traveller' Ernest Macintyre has the following lines" Please don't give your name because the chances are that it will be either Silva, Perera or Fernando, Gooneratne, Goonesekere or Jayatilke". The first part of this sentence is typically Sri Lankan, but the addition of the last three surnames, extends the sentence unnaturally and destroys the effect. However, "A mad and grotesque comedy' by

the same dramatist, deserves more recognition than it has received. Critics have found inconsistencies in this play, but in theatre terms, this is one play which has a range of directorial possibilities, including radio theatre. "Bus to Mulleriyawa' by Regi Siriwardene, ignored by the critics, was an excellent cameo, with economy of dialogue, a lot of suggestion (something our plays usually lack, everything is pointed out) a certain effective westernisation, and the names and implications were brought out well in the production directed by Nirmal Hetharachchi.

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Poets, Critics and Elites

Regi Siriwardena

ESSAYS ON SRI LANKAN POETRY IN ENGLISH, edited by Neloufer de Mel (English Association of Sri Lanka, Rs. 150).

When Rajiva Wijesinha produced his anthology of Sri Lankan poetry in English, he came to the conclusion that there was no poetry written before the mid-sixties that was worth preserving: the only exception he made was for Patrick Fernando. I think his judgment was right. On the other hand, if you look at the contents of the present symposium of essays, you'll get the impression that the most important Sri Lankan poets who have written in English are George Keyt, Lakdasa Wikramasinghe, Yasmine Gooneratne, Anne Ranasinghe, Patrick Fernando and Jean Arasanayagam. To put George Keyt in that company seems to me manifestly unfair to the other five. I'm sorry that Ashley Halpe has allowed himself to believe that the diffuseness, verbosity and incoherence of Keyt's poetry are marks of transcendent and ineffable mysteries. Nothing he says, and none of the poems he quotes from, convince me that Keyt's poetry is much better than my painting would be, if I were to attempt to paint.

But my criticism concerns mainly the editorial decision to include in the book this essay, a promotional exercise written for a volume published by the George Keyt Foundation. In a book where so many contributors strike anti-elitist postures, this pandering to a cult made fashionable by an upper-class elite is an abdication of critical responsibility. I am very unhappy with the double standards in this book, where Jean Arasanayagam or Yasmine Gooneratne are subjected to relentless criticism, but Keyt is a sacred cow to be treated with reverence.

The rest of my review will be concerned

with five younger critics. I want to concentrate on them because they presumably represent the growing trends in academic criticism and teaching of literature in Sri Lanka. First, Arjuna Parakrama, whose salvo of heavy artillery is strategically placed at the beginning of the book. In a single paragraph, Sri Lankan poetry in English is written off as perversely preoccupied with the petty and the personal, narrow, insular, self-righteous, individualistic, parochial, escapist, esoteric, and so on. Every one of these generalisations, Parakrama asserts, can be substantiated, but that isn't his purpose; instead, he invites writers who disagree to refute him. How, I wonder, can one respond to such a challenge? It's rather like being put in the dock, charged with a dozen different offences under the Penal Code, for which the prosecutor says there is plenty of evidence though he hasn't time to produce it, then being called upon to defend oneself. I could think of one possible refutation: I could quote a poem by Jean Arasanayagam or Anne Ranasinghe to which the indictment wouldn't stick. But Parakrama has foreclosed even that possibility. On the second page he admits that there are a few remarkable, memorable or interesting poems by... (he names eight poets), so he could easily say the poem I cited was one of those. But what surprises me most is the charge of being esoteric. In general, Sri Lankan poetry hasn't been either recondite in its subject-matter or obscure in its expression, and one would think that a writer whose poetry as well as prose have often been difficult would think twice of tossing the word 'esoteric' at others.

Lilamani de Silva critiques Yasmine Gooneratne's poetry in the context of a discussion of the English-educated elite. Her account of this social group is seriously flawed by black-and-white simplifications. To her the changes of 1956 and after involved only a dislodgment of that elite from power: the anti-Tamil and generally

anti-minorities thrust of Sinhala nationalism is wholly erased. And though in her preface to her reading of Yasmine's poems she speaks of 'differential reading of texts', in practice this seems to mean only 'different from that of the author'. Her tone is so authoritarian that the possibility of an alternative reading by other readers is excluded. A case in point is that of the poem 'Peradeniya Landscape'. Here I would suggest that the poet is aware that the enjoyment of the landscape's beauty is a luxury not open to the students for whom 'the future dawns less brightly', so that the 'well-kept lawns' are now incongruous. It's a perception for which Yasmine Gooneratne deserves a little credit instead of being rapped on the knuckles.

The other three critics I'm concerned with are Neloufer de Mel, Suresh Canagarajah and Ruvani Ranasingha. Though they share certain ideological positions with the other two, their essays aren't marked by the same dogmatism and arrogance; they are more aware of complexities and nuances; and they also pay more attention to the medium they are writing about. And, unlike Lilamani de Silva, they aren't ethnically blind.

All this is true, but there is nevertheless a contradiction that is common to these five critics. All of them are critical of the English-educated elite, but it doesn't seem to trouble them that they are not only part of that elite by their education and social position, but also belong to an even smaller sub-group by virtue of their particular intellectual stance and the critical language they use. Their ideology is radical but their writing is for initiates. It would be interesting, for instance, to take a poll among readers, and ask how many people know the meaning of the word 'imbrications' found in the book. But this, of course, is only one item from the post-modernist vocabulary currently in vogue that is cultivated in these five essays. Another contradiction: Parakrama, Canagarajah and

Lilamani de Silva are very critical of Sri Lankan creative writers who stick to standard English or near-standard English. But they, as well as the other two, deploy standard English in their essays with great competence: this apparently is a privilege of the critic that shouldn't be extended to the creative writer. But actually, both Parakrama and Canagarajah — the only two of these five who, to my knowledge, have published poems — have also written *poetry* in a fundamentally standard English idiom. Indeed, Canagarajah in his poem 'Dirge for Corporal Premaratne' does exactly what he blames Jean Arasanayagam for doing — inserting single words from the vernacular into a poem written essentially in standard English.

I'm sorry, incidentally, that Canagarajah misquotes and seriously misrepresents what I have said in an article titled 'Which English?' on the question of the Sri Lankan writer and the English language. I shall be dealing with this elsewhere, in print, so I don't want to take up space discussing it now. But I would like to respond to what Ruvani Ranasingha says about one poem of mine — 'Lying Awake, Thinking of Dead Friends'. She writes quite generously about it, but says that in joining Serena's death with those of Richard and Rajini, the barbarity of the two

killings is under-played, 'thus muting their political significance'. In the first place, she has confused two poems: Richard's death doesn't figure in 'Lying Awake...'; he wasn't even dead when that poem was written. Secondly, doesn't the first half-line, 'The gunman's hand is as blind as the virus', carry a political judgment? Thirdly, there is another poem about the killing of Rajini which brings out its barbarity: 'They shot you like a dog in the street'. Fourthly, 'Lying Awake...' was written in Jaffna a few hours before joining in a peace march and meeting at which I spoke, expressing opposition to every kind of political violence. Had I no right, before participating in that political act, to express my personal grief at the tragic waste of youth and talent, which is what ties together in the poem the deaths of Rajini and Serena? I would like to say to Ruvani what Macduff says to Ross when the latter urges him to action after the murder of his wife and children: 'I shall do so, But I must also feel it as a man'.

The five essays I have been discussing are in line with an international academic trend (call it 'post-modernist' if you like as a piece of shorthand) which is dedicated to questioning established hierarchies and canons of literature and dislodging authority and power. That's fine, but in

the way the operation is practised, it isn't as liberating as it seems. For the trend of the contemporary literary academy is to overthrow the authority of the creative writer and replace it by that of the critic. Literary theory and critical practice have come to acquire the prestige once possessed by creative writing. And when that theory and practice are articulated in a language that's accessible only to a minority educated in a special way, then power is again a monopoly. That's why this kind of discussion is so unfair to at least some of the poets, because to engage in it you need to have gone through a particular kind of academic training, to be able to cope with a certain critical language. And poets who haven't acquired that equipment may well feel intimidated, but that doesn't mean they are necessarily inferior as poets — not unless you think criticism is the master discourse to which everything else must yield.

I think criticism should be democratised. We should write literary criticism in the way George Orwell wrote it, so that it's open to any intelligent and generally educated person. Of course, that would be the end of academic criticism as we know it and have always known it, but then, all the better.

TRAVEL: AS OTHERS SEE US

Hoppers, spice and all things nice

In between elephant rides and studying Buddhas, Claire Franke samples the gastronomic stockpot in Sri Lanka

The taxi driver from Colombo airport clucked that it was a pity we had not arrived yesterday. "Nayan Perehera holiday, you know...150 elephants in parade." Then followed the swerving madness of plunging hand-no-horn through a tangle of bicycles and mopeds, vintage Morris Minors and shiny Japanese models, motorised rickshaws and the occasional team of bullocks pulling a load of bamboo.

Elephants would certainly have completed the landscape.

On earlier trips to India we had excluded Sri Lanka because of the violence. In Madras we once again checked with Sri Lankan friends.

Their response was, "Come now and see for yourself." So we did just that. The

turbulent areas of the far north are still road-blocked and visibly guarded, but this proves no impediment to the full enjoyment of most of this exotic, complex, tropical island.

A few days mooching around the historic, religious and commercial sites of the sophisticated capital were enough, and we moved on. In a country the size of

Ireland, travel is easy. We drove to the southwest coast from Colombo over the well-maintained coastal Galle road running parallel to seemingly endless acres of unspoiled, palm-fringed beaches. Christian cemeteries, large Buddhas and kovils (Hindu temples) live in easy juxtaposition with crumbling Dutch ramparts and British cantonments.

Tourism is booming in the coastal resort of Hikkaduwa, the lion's share coming from sun-hungry Europe, Germany in particular. Magnificent coral reefs, brilliant sunsets and guaranteed tan are an unbeatable recipe for flaking out. Small emporia sell everything from colourful batik and leather goods to indigenous sapphires. Crazy, German and Austrian restaurants proliferate, while hotels cater to every taste and pocket. Beach life (including elephant rides) was part of our usual, pre-sightseeing routine.

The sightseeing started with the drive to Habarana, which is north of Hikkaduwa and a base for day trips to ancient sites. Through the lush Dry Zone (so called because it is dryer than the Wet Zone) rice paddies are still fed from huge reservoirs, called tanks, hollowed out by Sinhalese kings 2,000 years ago. Rolling tea covered hills, acres of spice, rubber and coconut plantations, scrub jungle and primeval rainforest compete for living space with red, yellow and white-blossomed "temple" trees, sweet jasmine and vibrant bouganvillea. Nature is stupefyingly exuberant with 3,000 varieties of plant life and 300 bird species.

We stopped to try durian, a smelly, highly prickly fruit about the size of a cantaloupe. Do not be put off by the odour. Obliging quartered by the owner of the stand, the durian has large seeds covered by soft white pulp with the consistency of ripe avocado. As we toured through the groves of bananas and pineapples, we pulled in at another shack which specialised in "Ask me", a Sinhalese sweet which

looks and tastes like airy vermicelli with drizzles of molasses on top. "I'm fed up and fulfilled," sighed our Lankan friend as he dipped into his newly acquired kilo of cashew nuts.

Indian, Arab, Malay, Portuguese, Dutch and Indonesian influences blend together in Sri Lanka's gastronomic stockpot — not surprisingly, given that spices, a big export, induced the entry of the foreigners. Our days began with hoppers, which are made of rice flour and have a gentle, soft pita-like quality. They are served for breakfast with a poached egg on top; whenever we were lucky, stringhoppers, woven nests of angel hair-ish dough, came hot and steaming. "These are hot, hoppers", our Colombo friend announced one night. This meant they were especially fresh. Meals are vast and dominated by rice and curries. Like Indians, many Sinhalese eat with their fingers.

The market in Kandy, the ancient capital of Sri Lanka and a short journey from Habarana, overflows with curious cooked sweets and spices of all kinds. But pathetically little remains of the town's former glory. Disappointing, too, is the famous pink, moated temple of the Tooth, where the rarely seen Buddha's Tooth (always capitalised) is said to be housed within seven graduated gold vessels.

Winding, British-laid roads head north through visitable spice gardens and rice paddies surrounded by hills. Makeshift wooden ladders lead up to one-man platforms from which firecrackers are thrown to scare off marauding elephants. We stopped for a chicken sandwich and a beer at one of the numerous, British-inspired "guest houses", sat on the cool, breezy verandah and gazed at the ironwood trees, a bit like orange laburnum. Across the road was the extensive botanical Paradeniya Gardens (nearly 150 acres) where scenes of "Bridge on the River Kwai" were shot. We hardly minded being charged for admission while our

native friends got in free. It was common practice.

One of the pleasures of Habarana is The Lodge, an oasis of spacious, casual luxury spread over 17 leafy acres. One-bedroom suites in separate cottages are connected by stone walkways which lead to a huge blue-tiled pool. The days became a splendid pattern of sightseeing in the cooler mornings and late afternoons, interspersed with lunching and swimming at The Lodge. At nearby Polonnaruwa is the Cal Vihara, a group of four sculptures of Buddha cut from one solid stone; the reclining Buddha alone is 46ft long.

Fifth-century Sigiriya (meaning lion rock), which is 10 miles south of Habarana, offers the most dramatic possibilities. Vertigo sufferers, however, should forget it. Across an ancient moat filled with lotus blossoms, a gradual incline through meticulously laid geometric "Pleasure Gardens" leads up to the 600ft rock which dominates the area. Twelve hundred enmeshed spiral steps lead straight up to a plateau. As I hesitated, my thoughtful guide said, "Just think of a 60-storey building".

I thought, and decided to read the guide book instead. Frescoes of bejewelled, bare-breasted maidens, 22 of the original hundreds, remain sheltered from the sun, followed by a wall of 1,000-year-old graffiti — Sinhalese poetry in praise of the paintings. If poetry vanquishes panic and you have tramped up this far, continue round to the north face of the rock where the remains of the lion's enormous paws guide you up to the summit where the proud, granite sky palace once stood.

In addition to memories of beaches and Buddhas, jasmine and gem stones, are those of a delightful warm people. Stopping at a roadside, we asked if a very cold Coke was available. The attendant cocked his head and smiled broadly. "Not very cold," he said, "but high cool".

Generic Drugs ?

The World Health Organization recommends that people should be kept informed about the facts on medication and provided with the knowledge and skills to protect themselves from the inappropriate use of drugs.

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The only Jew in Sri Lanka

Wendy Brandmark

Anne Ranasinghe, *Desire and Other Stories* (English Writers Co-operative of Sri Lanka, 1994).

Anne Ranasinghe knows the sound of one hand clapping. She was an only child, the only survivor of her family, and now she declares herself the only Jew in Sri Lanka. Born in Essen in 1925, the cosseted and much-loved daughter of middle-class German Jews, she left Germany for England in 1939. Her parents were never able to join her. Her entire family — her parents, grandmother, aunts and uncles — died in the camps. In England she quickly cast aside her native German; English was to become her adopted language. She trained as a nurse, married a Sinhalese graduate student and went to live with him in Sri Lanka.

Her book reflects her many identities. The first part consists of stories set mainly in Sri Lanka; the second of autobiographical essays about her childhood in Germany, her return to her Jewish and German roots. But the division is deceptive for the stories resonate with the nightmare she left behind in Germany.

In 'Desire', one of the most powerful stories, she writes of a violent collision of cultures in cool, uncluttered prose. Two western women tourists in Sri Lanka accept a boat ride with a native fisherman. The Young one smiles and jokes with the fisherman, not realizing that her friendliness will be interpreted as more than mild flirtation. The other woman, an elderly American widow, senses the danger to come but allows her pride in being an adventurous older woman and her arrogance towards the fisherman to overcome her better judgement. The fisherman lures

the young one away, rapes her and then has to kill them both. He seems to have no remorse; these women, these foreign creatures, are as unreal to him as he is to them. Ranasinghe moves from the fantasies of the fisherman to the doubts and fears of the American widow. Her omniscience, which in some of the other stories tends to diffuse the narrative, allows us to step back and understand rather than immediately condemn. The tragedy of the story, that the fisherman and the two women have come to see each other as some-how not human, is one which Ranasinghe, with her memories of once friendly neighbours in Germany turning to vicious strangers, understands very well.

'The Stepmother' and 'The Castle' both gain power from being told by a single character. Though the protagonists cannot see beyond their own anger and fear, Ranasinghe cleverly gives us a glimpse of the wider picture, so that their intensity is balanced by her greater authorial knowledge. In 'The Stepmother', a young boy rages against a woman who dares to usurp the place of his dead mother. In 'The Castle', a young woman sent to a mental institution fears she will be locked up in the insane asylum for her rebellious behaviour. The story echoes Ranasinghe's experiences in Nazi Germany: the narrowing of boundaries, the restrictions, the repression, the young girl's terror of entrapment.

The essays in the second part are even more spare, almost severe in their tone as Ranasinghe shares her journey back. 'A Question of Identity' begins with her life in Sri Lanka. Although she never denied her Jewish roots, for many years she lived happily in this multicultural country, her memories of seders and sabbaths distant ones. She had children, became part of the small group of Sri Lankan authors who wrote in English. Anti-Semitism did not really feature in Sri Lanka; when she told someone she was Jewish, they asked: 'What kind of Christianity is that?' But an

anti-Semitic remark by a French friend 'sheared off the lethargy of twenty years'. In 'A Woman and Her God', she remembers the joyful holidays she spent in her father's native village, her sadness when her beloved synagogue was burned and her school closed, her mother's despair: 'I shall never fast or pray again, until all this stops and I can again believe.' Ranasinghe who was only twelve, still a child with a child's sense of awe, was badly shaken by her mother's rebellion. She looks back on this fierce and premature coming of age and her parents' terrible fate with the sad irony of an adult: 'She challenged her God, she paid the penalty and lost in the end anyway. But so did my father. And he fasted on every Yom Kippur and never once missed out on his prayers'.

In 'Everything in the Ghetto Is Rosy' Ranasinghe moves between past and present in a loosely written essay about her life in England, her return to Essen in the 1980s. Though she finally discovers where and when her parents died, her past cannot be reclaimed. The Nazis not only

killed all my family, destroyed my childhood, deprived me of my country, home and possessions and severed my roots — but they had also robbed me of my language... No language can really replace the mother tongue... There is a gut feeling which comes with the mother tongue and however competently one learns a new language, it can never give that same inner experience of completeness and association.

Perhaps this lack of confidence accounts for some of the unevenness of the collection, the rather stilted dialogue, the description which is not always as fresh as it needs to be. But her adopted language is also a source of her strength as a writer, for it allows her to distance herself from her stories of passion, rage and fear, from her anguished memories of a lost childhood and family, from her righteous anger at the Germans who would like to forget.

Wendy Brandmark's articles and reviews have appeared in the *New Statesman*, the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *London Review of Books*. She lives in London.

 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.

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