

**LANKA**

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## **WHEN JAFFNA FALLS**

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# WHEN JAFFNA IS TAKEN ....

Mervyn de Silva

A military victory and a snap election. Is that President Chandrika Kumaratunga's grand game-plan? With the mood of the Sinhalese, an overwhelming majority (74%), the P.A. could be certain of a runaway polls victory, say most P.A. activists. Even the less optimistic are quite sure that the eight-party alliance, no grand alliance really, would do far better than the quite modest 50% vote in August last year. It was Candidate Chandrika that made the P.A.'s position far more stable with her unprecedented 62-63%. UNP'ers do attempt to make this record less impressive by emphasising the effect of the Dissanayake assassination. True, Gamini Dissanayake was a formidable challenger and his widow Srimala had rarely addressed a party rally but that fact alone could not explain Candidate Chandrika's mass appeal, in November. Chief Minister of the Western province in 1993, Prime Minister in August 1994 and President in November 1994 is a phenomenon which can be fully explained only in terms of personality.

Of course a politician's extraordinary appeal cannot be explained in the same terms as a Marilyn Monroe or a Mohammed Ali (Cassius Clay). Between the mid-August General election and the November face-to-face, two new factors need to be admitted to the discussion; first, a percentage shift of the not-so committed voter who now decides to join the winning side, a reaction best explained in terms of folk wisdom (*vaasi paththeta hoiya*...). But more crucially in my view, the solid backing of the minorities — the Tamils and the Christians, the north-western Catholic belt in particular. This was a spirited confidence-vote in 'the peace candidate', already the favourite daughter of the US-led coalition put together by the local representatives of the western alliance; after the former Marxist, Comrade Chandrika had been persuaded of course to recognise the proven virtues of private enterprise.

The main plank of this strategy collapsed when the LTTE took the P.A. by

complete surprise to launch another EELAM War.

Numbers, armour, tactics and strategy — a new approach, adopted by Army Commander Gerry Silva and his senior commanders, in this instance Major-General Rohan Daluwatte, Brigadier Janaka Perera etc, from OPERATION LEAP FORWARD, through HANDSHAKE I and 2, THUNDERSTRIKE to the current RIVIRESA (SUNRAYS).

There's a big difference. General Daluwatte is deciding the time-table. He is in no hurry. He has reduced casualties to a minimum by not allowing the LTTE to choose time and place. And quite evidently, he enjoys the fullest confidence of Deputy Defence Minister, Lt. Col. Anurudha Ratwatte who had made a point to visit the front frequently. Morale, we all realise, is vital.

And this time, the 'Tigers' have taken a beating at the hands of the Sri Lankan army. That was not the case in Oct. 1987 when the IPKF launched its first major offensive OPERATION PAWAN (wind) ... "It was a monumental blunder" wrote M.R. Narayan Swamy in the best detailed study of the IPKF's war against a few thousand guerrillas, THE TIGERS OF LANKA (Konark Publishers).

In the first few weeks, the LTTE did try to slow down or halt General Daluwatte and his troops. But advancing on his own modest timetable, and careful not to risk lives, General Daluwatte reached the outskirts of the northern capital to find that the LTTE and its senior commanders had fled the city. Lt. General Denis Perera, the former Army Commander, summed up the significance of the Army's success in a brief comment: "They (LTTE) tried to take on the army head-on. They should have stuck to guerrilla warfare. They are first-rate at that".

The battlefield victories not merely strengthen President Kumaratunga's case — the case she placed before the

international community on her trip to New York for the U.N.'s 50th anniversary celebrations — but keeps the armed forces happy, despite the casualties. The Army has been able to pursue its own strategy on its own terms. And it has made its point. The army's success compelled the LTTE to open a new front — Colombo. The sabotage at the Kolonnawa oil depots and last week's terrorist attacks in Colombo are a definite sign that things have NOT gone the LTTE way — not at all. The LTTE seems to have underestimated the army's resources or over-estimated its own capacity to adopt the methods of conventional warfare. Just as it administered Jaffna successfully enough to believe that it had established a government, the LTTE felt it could take on an army frontally.

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# An Uncertain Triumph

By Tony Clifton, with Mervyn de Silva in Colombo

The Sri Lankan Government's 21,000 troops began advancing more cautiously as they reached the outskirts of Jaffna. There was nothing to gain from rushing in. The Tamil secessionists' capital had become a ghost town. Most of the roughly 10,000 fighters belonging to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had melted away into the jungle. As many as 400,000 civilian inhabitants had fled for their lives, according to international relief workers inside the city. With nowhere else to run, many of the refugees hunkered down on roadsides outside the city, waiting for word they could safely go home. That wouldn't happen until the government troops managed to find a way through the maze of land mines and booby traps the LTTE had planted around the city before abandoning it.

No one expects the fall of Jaffna to end the war in Sri Lanka. The Tigers have fought mercilessly for the last 12 years to create a separate homeland for the Tamil ethnic minority. Since the army launched its latest offensive on Oct. 17, more than 1,000 LTTE fighters have been killed and possibly three times that number wounded. But military experts in Sri Lanka predict those losses will make the rebel group even more dangerous. The government is bracing for a new Tiger terror campaign, including mass murders of civilians, suicide bombings, political assassinations and missile attacks against military aircraft. Security has been tightened at government buildings in the capital, Colombo, and the nation's schools have been ordered shut until the end of the year. Guerrilla bands in the eastern jungles are said to have killed more than 100 villagers in the past month — including five children who were hacked to death in a Tiger attack last week.

The most frustrating part of the slaughter is its apparent senselessness. Late last year Chandrika Kumaratunga took office as president, vowing to make peace

## *The fall of the Tamil 'capital' won't end war*

with the Tigers. She ordered a ceasefire and unveiled a plan to divide the country into self-governing regions, effectively recognizing the Tamils' right to a state of their own. The president's plan would have given the Tigers practically everything they claimed to be fighting for. Instead, the LTTE abruptly and unilaterally broke the truce in April by sinking two naval patrol boats. The war resumed. Yet Kumaratunga insists she remains committed to talking peace with the Tigers. "We still believe the only possible solution to the problem is a political solution," she declared in a recent speech. The army's success at Jaffna could enhance her leverage at the negotiating table — if the Tigers decide they want to talk.

That's far from certain. Like the Khmer Rouge of Cambodia, the Tigers thrive on hardship. The Tamil fighters have earned a reputation for unquestioning obedience to their leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, no matter how bloodthirsty — or suicidal — his orders may be. Experienced observers in Sri Lanka expect him to concentrate more on regrouping his forces than on seeking a peaceful way of reclaiming his comfortable Jaffna headquarters. "He'll make sure the Tigers fight to the last man, woman and child," says one veteran

ambassador in Colombo. "Especially the woman and child."

## Hit and run:

The capture of Jaffna punctured the myth of the Tigers' invincibility and gave the army's morale a badly needed boost. But the government's forces can't count on continuing their roll. The Tigers set themselves up for defeat by their own overconfidence. Flushed with battlefield victories against smaller government forays, the rebels abandoned their usual hit-and-run guerrilla tactics. Instead they massed their forces, trying to stop the army's advance using the methods of conventional warfare. "The LTTE tried to take on the army head-on," says Lt. Gen. Denis Perera, a former Sri Lankan Army commander. "They should have stuck to guerrilla warfare. They're first-rate at that".

Now Kumaratunga and her troops must guard against a similar lapse of judgment. In a survey taken before the Tigers broke the truce last April, only 16 percent of Sri Lankans said they believed in a military solution to the country's civil war. Recently a follow-up poll taken by the same group, Mitofsky International, found that 67 percent favor a military solution. The Tigers' war against the government has already taken the lives of 50,000 Sri Lankans. The president will need both luck and wisdom to keep that toll from climbing even higher.

(Newsweek)

## India won't interfere in Sri Lankan problem

Shamindra Ferdinando

The Indian government has rejected repeated calls for its intervention to bring an end to Sri Lankan military offensive in Jaffna, informed sources said this week. The Indian government has indicated in no uncertain terms that it has no desire to get involved in the northern problem, sources said.

Political analysts and diplomatic sources said that India likes to see an end to the Sri Lankan conflict. "India does not want to see a separate homeland created for Tamils in North-east Sri Lanka just across the Palk Straits," one source said.



## Prabhakaran's extradition report ready by next week

Ravi Ladduwahetty

The Attorney General's Department will finalise the report pertaining to the extradition of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran within the next week, an AGA's Department spokesman said.

He further said: "We have almost finalised the examination of all the documents which will lead to the extradition. We have already examined the material in connection with the application made by the government of India. However, in the event of requirement of further details, we will inform the Government of India".

"Once we submit our documents to the ministry of defence, they will file papers in the High Court of Colombo for the extradition of the LTTE leader. The defence ministry in consultation with the High Court of Colombo will be given "authority to proceed" he said.

However, once the recommendations of the department are submitted to the secretary to the ministry of defence, it will be handed over to President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga who is also the minister of defence. Then it will be a political decision, the spokesman explained.

— Island

## Scholars Tale — 24

*History having exhausted all its options  
Was repeating itself in imbecile explosions  
On the laws of chance, Madras was about enough  
But cyanide and old bras called the bluff*

*In fact our Scholar was entirely shaken  
That his trust in Probability was mistaken  
The Fantasy of Barber Street, Babu and the Blast  
Reduced reality to a dream state and a Farce*

*The time had come prudence told him  
To take stock of situations wracked and reeling  
So he marshalled all his borrowed disciplines  
Yet found his intellect was feebly peeling*

*With this acute cerebral psoriasis  
He shed all responsibility by amnesia  
For each carefully laboured thesis  
(Of consultancy on a Royalty basis)*

*Though intellectual pinion to two Monovirates  
He was just a minion to the Global Dictates  
To whom his Scholarship was as much garbage  
As Market Democracy's two tongued verbiage*

*So he staggered out of the dump of History  
Where recent scrap was already rusty  
And gave himself up to rueful meditation  
On the foul fall-out of his decade of mischief*

*He had manipulated a complex Asian culture  
Till mutation created such misfit creatures  
(As the old Imperial Order had never begot)  
For the New Global Order to be rapidly wrought*

*His re-rendering of Social Norms  
That had weathered flesh pots and brain-storms  
Sold the pass to the Microchip teams  
Pouring in and around to the Pacific Rim*

*His brain beeped out and ceased to tick  
While module and cassette became cerebral brick,  
And the programmed growth on the New Frontiers  
Opened the flood gates of Blood and Tears*

*As in the New Physics there was Anti-Matter  
There was Terror and Anti-Terror  
Arms cartels arranging talks for Peace  
And engineered genes battling Anti-genes.*

*There were sufficient groggy guys all round  
Talking Peace and selling guns  
Propounding the Philosophy of Safe Sex  
With the Virus clearing the population decks  
Numbness and dumbness set in steady and sure  
So that even kept Scholarship was no more a lure  
And when the Apocalypse came to the last Frontier  
The Horsemen trampled down Scholar and Peer.*

U. Karunatilake

## Black July: The Indian Response

K. M. de Silva

The violence may perhaps be called a pogrom perpetrated by the majority Sinhala on the minority Sri Lanka Tamils. Since 1977, there were sporadic instances of violence and counter-violence perpetrated by both the ethnic communities as well as the Sri Lankan state itself. But the actual spark that ignited the ethnic passions was an attack by Tamil militants on a patrol of government soldiers (who were all Sinhala) on 23 July, resulting in the death of 13 of them. The Sinhala reaction was that the whole of Colombo was up in flames in a frenzy of killing and arson directed at Tamils living there, including the infamous Welikade prison massacre on 25 July of 37 inmates that included TELO (Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization) leaders Kutimani and 'Divan'. The government put the death toll at 387, but other estimates of deaths were reported to be in the region of two thousand. About 120,000 Tamils were rendered homeless and were housed in hastily set up refugee camps. Many Tamil houses, business establishments and 70 factories owned by Tamils were destroyed. The violence also spread to all those provincial towns where Tamil businessmen lived, as well as to some plantation areas.<sup>113</sup>

There was sporadic ethnic violence in Sri Lanka in every decade ever since the 1950s. But the July 1983 riots were different not only in its magnitude and implications but also in what appeared to be ominously new. This 'novelty' was reflected in the organised manner of the violence,<sup>114</sup> in the partisan role of the security forces,<sup>115</sup> in the collusion of some prominent party and government politicians,<sup>116</sup> and in the partisan attitude and manner of handling the crisis situation by the government. All speeches by Sinhalese Ministers were addressed first and foremost to the Sinhalese public and not to the victims of the violence. Curfew was declared several days after the passing

of the height of the full fury of the violence. One U.N. Report said that the riots had been made worse by government indifference to the fate of the Tamils. President Jayewardene himself was partly blamed by a critic for letting the rioting get out of hand by not intervening until it was too late. The President's first address to the nation was only on 28 July when he urged restraint but added that the violence was a spontaneous reaction of the Sinhalese who would never agree to the division of the country as advocated and fought for by the Tamil militants.<sup>117</sup>

If the phenomenon of the autonomist demands of the Sri Lanka Tamils in the 1950s turning secessionist in the 1970s was symptomatic of a gradual erosion of national consensus between the two ethnic communities, the 1983 violence was the final blow to the crisis of credibility of the Tamil minority in the central authority. This was, in fact, the culmination of the conflict between the two ethno-nationalisms in the island. Sri Lanka wanted to solve the ensuing ethnic problem by military means and it looked up to non-Indian sources for help, in keeping with its non-conformist India policy. New Delhi reacted sharply and took advantage of the situation in Sri Lanka by making the small island state conform to India's foreign policy and security concerns and agree to an Indian role in its ethnic issue.

**India's response to developments in Sri Lanka.** The horrific carnage in Sri Lanka evoked sharp responses not only in Tamil Nadu but also in the national capital, New Delhi. The reaction in Tamil Nadu was literally wild. The mood there was aptly grasped by one Sri Lankan author who wrote that "a wave of spontaneous indignation swept through Tamil Nadu and life in the state came to a virtual standstill with large numbers joining in public processions and meetings against the killings in Sri Lanka".<sup>118</sup>

India has not only consistently opposed the extension of external presence in Sri Lanka, but has also been desirous of expanding its own influence in the island's domestic matters. India's interest in Sri Lanka's ethnic issue was manifest in the former's concern for the cause of the Sri Lanka Tamils. The general impression in India about the ethnic situation was that the rise of Tamil militancy was the result of a systematic, orchestrated and deliberate discrimination against the minority by the majority. Secondly, the steady flow of the Tamil refugees into Tamil Nadu from Sri Lanka was a concern for India. Thirdly, Sri Lanka's continuing non-conformist foreign policy was a major concern of India which considered the obtaining security environment hostile to its security interests.<sup>119</sup>

The policy suggestions that had emerged from India's parliamentary debates, urging the Government of India to act, were as follows: (i) to raise it in international fora including the U.N. Human Rights Commission, (ii) to mobilise world opinion for an amicable solution, (iii) to prevent others, regional or from beyond, from meddling, (iv) to extend humanitarian aid, (v) to urge Sri Lanka to solve the crisis politically, (vi) to snap diplomatic relations, (vii) to support Eelam, (viii) to intervene politically/diplomatically, offering good offices either unilaterally or multilaterally in association with international organisation(s), and (ix) to intervene militarily, including the naval blockade of Trincomalee.<sup>120</sup> Although most of the parliamentarians urged for a restrained and firm response, several of them were fairly vocal in imploring the Government of India to invade Sri Lanka.<sup>121</sup> In fact, the Government had a contingency plan for invasion in 1983, having put a brigade on alert for the purpose.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, invasion had always continued to be one of India's options as Indian policy-makers at various



times had contemplated military interventions and even plans had been drawn up to that end.<sup>123</sup>

### Sri Lanka appeals for foreign support.

Sri Lanka felt threatened by India's concerns and the reports of its possible military intervention. Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, who accused India of interfering in his country's internal affairs, gravely noted the security dilemma of a small power by saying that "when India expresses concerns, to us it is a threat".<sup>124</sup> President Jayewardene warned his Cabinet of possible Indian invasion. He said, "if India, by some chance, decided to invade us, we will fight and may be lose, but with dignity". M.H. Mohammed, a prominent UNP MP, stated in Parliament that "if there is an invasion, 13 million people will be destroyed and the invaders will have nobody to rule.... Let us die not as cowards nor as traitors".<sup>125</sup>

Under the obtaining circumstances, the Jayewardene government sought on 1 August 1983 military assistance from the United States, the United Kingdom, Pakistan and Bangladesh. While this sensational news was widely reported the following day in most of the Indian national dailies, Colombo denied the report and expelled the reporter, Stewart Slavin, the New Delhi-based West Asian manager for UPI (United Press International).<sup>126</sup> Washington chose its words cautiously while denying the report, and the UK was reported to have had received such "soundings" from Sri Lanka; Pakistan and Bangladesh denied having received a Sri Lankan request for military assistance.<sup>127</sup> Colombo's call for this external help was apparently fraught with dangers for both Sri Lanka and India, but of course for different reasons. For Sri Lanka, because the "SOS" call outraged India beyond repair and for the response of those four countries was lukewarm to negative which was again due to 'India factor'. For India, it was so because the help was asked not from India but from two Western powers and from two pro-Western South Asian nations.

### Notes

113. Dr. Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Sri Lanka After Independence: Nationalism, Commu-*

*nalism and Nation Building*, University of Madras, Madras, 1986, pp. 81-85; Eric Meyer, "Seeking the Roots of the Tragedy" in James Manor (ed.), .....p. 139; Edgar O'Ballance, *The Cyanide War: Tamil Insurrection in Sri Lanka 1973-88*, Brassey's, London, 1989, p. 23; *The Daily Telegraph*, London, 6 August 1983; *Times*, London, 13 August 1983.

114. Dr. Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *ibid.*

115. Some scholars hold the view that the July riots were provoked by the Army men and that it was the Army which indulged in arson, looting and cultural vandalism. See for details, James Manor, "Sri Lanka: Explaining the Disaster", *The World Today*, London, November 1983, pp. 450-459; T.D.S.A. Dissanayaka, *The Agony of Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1984, pp. 74, 81, 84; *The Guardian*, London, 13 August 1983.

116. A. Amirthalingam, the TULF (Tamil United Liberation Front) leader, stated in an interview given to an Indian newspaper that the July riots had been planned by somebody in authority who could have combined the action of the armed forces along with that of groups of civilians who were acting in a very organised way. See *The Hindu*, Madras, 25 August 1983; Cyril Matthew, a government Minister, was alleged to have organised the mayhem. See V.P. Vaidik, *Ethnic Crisis in Sri Lanka: India's Options*, National Publishing House, New Delhi, 1986, p. 17.

117. *Newsweek* magazine, 15 August 1983, pp. 14-15; *Daily News*, Colombo, 29 July 1983; *Sunday Observer*, Colombo, 31 July 1983; the UN Report of 19 August 1983 was quoted in Edgar O'Ballance, *The Cyanide War*, op. cit. p. 21.

118. Dr. Ambalavanar Sivarajah, "Indo-Sri Lanka Relations in the Context of Sri Lanka's Ethnic Crisis (1976-1983)" in P.V.J. Jayasekara (ed.), *Security Dilemma of a Small State: Sri Lanka in the South Asian Context*, Part One, South Asian Publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 1992, p. 516.

119. This is evident from the Lok Sabha Debates, 27 July 1983, Cols. 382-446; 4 August 1983, *ibid.*, Cols. 326-388; 5 August 1983, *ibid.*, Cols. 456-520; and 18 August 1983, *ibid.*, Cols. 391-474. See also *The Hindu*, Madras, 30 July 1983.

120. *ibid.*

121. For example, Subramaniam Swamy, on 27 July 1983, *ibid.*, Col. 373 and on 18 August 1983, *ibid.*, Col. 474; Era Anabarasu, on 27 July 1983, *ibid.*, Col. 396; C.T. Dhandapani, on 5 August 1983, *ibid.*, Col. 460; K.T. Kosalram, on 5 August 1983, *ibid.*, Col. 490. A. Amirthalingam, who met Indira Gandhi and some other Indian leaders, also urged the Indian government to invade Sri Lanka. He said: "I think India will have to send its armed forces.... India will have to guaran-

*tee our safety. We have lost faith in Jayewardene government, we have faith only in India". See Sunday, Calcutta, 4 October 1983.*

122. For details on this see Dilip Bobb, "Sphere of Suspicion", *India Today*, New Delhi, 15 October 1983, p. 36.

123. A.J. Wilson, his 1988 book, p. 203. Subramaniam Swamy repeated his call for Indian invasion in 1984. See Lok Sabha Debates, Seventh Series, 25 August 1984, Vol. LI, No. 24, Col. 146. Dr. A. Kalanidhi, *ibid.*, 8th Series, 9 April 1985, Vol. III, No. 19, Col. 319. The Madras-based PROTEG (an organisation called the Protection of the Tamil Eelam from genocide and other violation of human rights) also made a strong plea in 1984 for India's military intervention. See *The Hindu*, Madras, 17 September 1984. As the 1984 events unfolded themselves, the pressures on Mrs Gandhi to militarily intervene were indeed mounting and she appeared to be prepared for another phase on intervention in the last months of 1984. See Dr. Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Sri Lanka After Independence*, op. cit., p. 89.

124. *Indian Express*, New Delhi, 24 July 1983.

125. *The Hindu*, Madras, 26 July 1983; Dilip Bobb, "Sphere of Suspicion", *India Today*, New Delhi, 15 October, p. 30; *Telegraph*, Calcutta, 2 August 1983; *Parliamentary Debates*, Sri Lanka, Vol. 29, No. 1, 24 May 1984, Col. 154; *The Sun*, Colombo, 1 August 1983.

126. For the report see *Telegraph*, Calcutta, and *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 2 August 1983. For Sri Lanka Government's denial see *Times of India*, New Delhi, 3 August 1983.

127. While denying that Sri Lanka government had approached the United States for military aid, a State Department spokesman said in Washington on 2 August that his country understood that the situation in Sri Lanka was improving and that the government was increasingly turning its attention to the problem of relief. See *Indian Express*, New Delhi, 3 August 1983. A Foreign Office spokesman said in London on 2 August that Britain had received "soundings" from Sri Lanka about possible assistance, and that the informal request was being considered. He declined to say whether the assistance would be military or humanitarian, and stressed that no formal request had been made. *The New Nation*, Dhaka, 3 August 1983. On the denial by Pakistan and Bangladesh see *Patriot*, New Delhi, 3 August 1983. Although it was denied at that time, it later became a matter of common knowledge that the Sri Lanka government did seek such assistance from the four countries.

NEXT: INDIAN DOCTRINE

# A Solution to Karachi

Mani Shankar Aiyar

In facing down an attempted coup by the army, Benazir Bhutto has emerged as the first head of government in Pakistan's history to have thwarted Pakistan's armed forces; she has also emerged as the one leader capable of taking on Pakistan's biggest political party — the Pakistan Army. True, it was not the army as such but a small cabal that was planning her overthrow, and true too that it was probably another cabal in the same army that tipped her off, and, moreover, true further that this coup was not in the traditions of Pakistan — where chiefs of army staff betray their titular masters — but more in the traditions of the Middle-East — where colonels on white chargers bring off the revolution; nevertheless, all said and done, *shabash Benazir!*

Yet, I cannot help the uncharitable thought that Benazir has triumphed over her false enemies. Her real enemy is within. It is Karachi burning.

Although Pakistan is but next door to us, and weighs disproportionately in our foreign and defence policies (and even more disproportionately in our internal security and secularism concerns), few are the Indians who have an instinctive empathy for domestic developments in Pakistan — so distanced have we become, a half-century after Partition, from our distant neighbour.

Yet, ask yourself how we would feel if, say, the Bombay riots of January 1993 had lasted not a few days but for all of the last three years, and you will get an inkling of the trauma Pakistan has been going through and is still caught in, with not the least little light shining at the end of even the longest tunnel.

What is the problem? And is there a way out?

**THE PROBLEM** of Karachi is a paradigm of the problem of Pakistan. However, fissiparous the Indian state has seemed since 1947, the nationhood of India has

seldom been under serious challenge. The Indian nation exists as a great big fact of life because it predated by several millennia the political convenience of a state called the Union of India. Pakistan, on the other hand, achieved statehood long before it attained nationhood. Pakistanis are united over one proposition — that the essence of being a Pakistani is *not* being an Indian. Beyond that, the problem of what does it mean to be a Pakistani — and the related question of why must one be a Pakistani — rears its unanswerable head.

A readymade opportunity, one would have imagined, for an Indian with a *realpolitik* line and hook to fish in troubled waters. Unfortunately for our hawks, their hostility to Pakistan, as a state and as a nation, has rendered India *hors de combat* — that is, pushed us off the battlefield in the Battle for Karachi.

The Mohajir of Karachi are the only segment of the Indian diaspora for whom we can neither give concrete content to our sympathy nor from whom we can expect any call for succour. When it comes to Indians under siege in Fiji, or apartheid in erstwhile South Africa, or the problems faced by the Indian community in East Africa or the West Indies, or the role of Indians in Mauritius, or of the Indian Americans in the US, or of their counterparts in the United Kingdom, or, in recent years, most dramatically of the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Union of India springs to the forefront of their defence — and is generally conceded by the international community as having a legitimate say in the matter.

The one place in the world where we do not appear to have in any way legitimised our concerns — even in the eyes of the victims — is in the province of Sind which is now home to millions of Pakistanis of Indian origin.

**IT FOLLOWS** that there is no purchase for India in stirring the witches' brew in Karachi. Any Indian hand perceived in the disturbances would be the best way of discrediting those causing the disturban-

ces; hence, to demonstrate an Indian hand would be the quickest route to quelling the disturbances. That is why Benazir closed the Consulate-General of India in Karachi. It was a desperate ploy to discredit the MQM (Mohajir Qaumi Movement).

It backfired: Karachi has virtually not known even 24 hours of peace and quiet since our Post was shut down many moons ago. What keeps the MQM at the barricades, with the support of the overwhelming majority of Karachiwallahs of Indian origin, is the widespread knowledge and belief that this is an internal problem of Pakistan, brought upon their heads not by some foreign agency but by Pakistan's continuing failure to define itself as a nation.

The Indian nation exists — and has survived as a nation for thousands of years — because it is based on the quintessential Indian principle of unity in diversity. We can each of us be ourselves and yet be something larger — called "Indian"; indeed, we can be Indian only because that does not stand in the way of our asserting, cherishing and celebrating our particular identity as Hindus or Muslims, Tamils or Bengalis, dhotiwallahs or lungiwallahs.

In contradistinction, Pakistan's claim to nationhood is based uniquely — and assertively — on an exclusivist religious basis. Ironically, it was created not by the Muslims in the Muslim-majority provinces of British India where Pakistan came into being, but by the British-patronised "leadership" (mostly *zamindars* and suchlike) of the Muslims of the Muslim-minority provinces — the breed from whom the beleaguered Mohajir of today's Karachi germinated. They haemorrhaged from India to Pakistan in their millions as "Hajis" (from which comes the Arabic plural "Mohajir") in what they perceived to be a replaying of the Prophet's journey from Mecca of the Darul-Harb to Medina of the Dar-ul-Uloom.

**AND FOR** the first 11 years or so of Pakistan, their wildest dreams and hopes were satiated. They gained power and

*The author, a former diplomat, was first secretary in the Indian High Commission in Colombo.*



wealth from Pakistan on a scale and in a time-frame they could never have attained by staying back in India. Being educationally and otherwise streets ahead of the Sindhis. Baluch and Pathans, they quickly established their dominance over Pakistan, the only challenge coming from an increasingly restive West Punjab that had been under the illusion that it was they who had absorbed the Gujarati Jinnah's movement, not the other way round!

General (later, Field Marshal) Ayub Khan's coup of 1958 put the quietus to the Mohajir dream of capturing Pakistan in the name of Islam. The decline of the Mohajir from dominant element to hunted minority between Ayub Khan and Zia-ul-Haq is one of the saddest and most poignant stories of the post-Partition era.

Pakistan was most emphatically *not* the creation of the Muslims of the areas in which Pakistan was created. Bengal returned Fazl-ul-Haque of the Krishak Proja Party as chief minister in the elections of 1945-46; Punjab returned Khizr Hayat Khan of the Unionists; the Frontier plumped for Badshah Khan's Congress; Baluchistan was denied a vote.

Only Sind — which had backed the Congress-supported Allah Bux Soomro in 1937 (assassinated in 1943 for his pains) — voted for the Muslim League in 1945-46: the victor, Ayub Khuhro, told me quite frankly in 1980 that he had rigged the result in collaboration with the British ICS officers of Karachi; and G.M. Syed, the most articulate proponent of Pakistan was to emerge within two years as the most articulate opponent of Pakistan, spending nearly 40 of the next 50 years in incarceration for publicly regretting having moved the first "Pakistan Resolution" in any provincial legislature. He died in his nineties a few weeks ago.

**NO, PAKISTAN** was entirely the artificial invention of the Muslim "leaders" of that part of India that was not partitioned: i.e., the Mohajir of Karachi, who had no compunctions about leaving behind to the tender mercies of "Hindu" India the poor, the illiterate, the deprived millions of their Muslim brethren. About two million Muslim carpetbaggers (describing themselves — fatuously — as "Mohajir") arrived up in Sind between 1947 and 1949 and, within those two years, completely robbed every city of Sind — Karachi, Hyderabad, Sukkur, Shikarpur, even Jacobabad — of its Sindhi character.

They arrogantly refused to learn any Sindhi, claiming that Urdu was the language of Islam, a claim that infuriates the Sindhi since the Sindhi language is written in the Arabic script (the script of the Holy Koran) while Urdu is based on the Persian script, which was as foreign to the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him!) as Tamil or Telugu. What was worse, the immigrant Mohajir used his superior economic clout and political power to completely marginalise the indigenous Sindhi in his own Sind.

It was in the two decades from the advent of Ayub (1958) to the advent of Zia-ul-Haq (1977) that the Mohajir was delivered his comeuppance — not by the Sindhi (who, despite the Sindhi Bhutto's rise to eminence, continued to remain totally marginalised in his own home) but by West Punjab in collaboration with Pakistan's virtually Punjabi-Pathan army. The Partition of Pakistan in 1971 was the last twist of the knife in the Mohajir's soul: it robbed him of his (always bogus) rationale for uprooting himself from India to move as a "Haji" (ha! ha!) to Sind.

By the time I reached Karachi in December 1978, the plight of the Mohajir was pathetic: rootless, alienated, blatantly discriminated against, and virtually under siege in Fortress Karachi, the post-Partition generation of Mohajir were paying for the sins of their fathers; and each of the original "Hajis" as were still alive were beating their breasts in woe and talking — bizarrely — of the glories of Bans Bareilly and Amroha!

**IN MY** period in Karachi (1978-82), the palpable Mohajir anger was an impotent anger — for three reasons. One, there was for the Mohajir no going back on the "Haj" which he and his immediate forefathers had undertaken in 1947-49. Two, the Mohajir anger was subsumed in the general anger of the people at Zia-ul-Haq's usurpation of democracy.

And, third — above all — was the absence of any political platform for the articulation of Mohajir anger, despite Karachi having defeated Bhutto's candidates in seven out of nine constituencies in the 1977 elections and having then brought down the Bhutto government by relentless Mohajir demonstrations in Karachi's Lalukhet Chowk, the "Stalingrad", as they proudly proclaimed, of the Mohajir movement.

That political platform was supplied a few years after I left Karachi by an NRP (non-resident Pakistani!) Altaf Hussain and his MQM. Karachi today is an impregnable MQM oasis in the desert sands of Pakistan's PPP/PML polity. Neither can the MQM spread beyond Karachi and Sind's other urban agglomerations, nor can the PPP/PML ever breach the MQM bastions in urban Sind.

Faced with a similar situation in the Darjeeling Hills, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi rejected both Subash Ghisingh's violence-prone extremism for the partitioning of West Bengal for the creation of a new state of Gorkhaland (the exact parallel of the MQM's Karachi demand) as well as the blinkered chauvinistic crackdown of Jyoti Basu's West Bengal which termed Ghisingh's demand for justice as "anti-national" (the exact parallel to the PPP/PML/Pak Army's response to the MQM).

Rajiv Gandhi found, instead, the "middle way" of an Autonomous District Council for the Darjeeling Hills, forestalling the break-up of either West Bengal or India, while giving the Gorkhas a real share in the determination of their destiny.

**IT IS** the obvious example for Benazir to follow in Karachi. But she cannot — because the nationhood of Pakistan is founded on the denial of the primordial principle of unity in diversity. Since religion is held to be the *raison d'être* of Pakistan, and since virtually all Pakistanis profess the same religion, consolidating the unitary nature of the Pakistani state has become the religious duty of all sections of the Pakistani leadership, whatever their other differences.

If Karachi is burning, and the fire cannot be put out, that is because Pakistan is paying the price for the atavistic equation of religion with nationhood which lay at the root of the Two-Nation Theory.

There is no need for our Hindu communalists (read the *sangh parivar* and its political organs, the BJP and their sisters-in-sin, the Shiv Sena) to gloat over the plight of the Mohajir. For, the real lesson which Karachi has to teach India is that Pakistan's fate will overtake Bharat Mata if Bharat Mata is ever overtaken by "Hindutva".

# SWRD: Making of a scholar

Ananda Welihena

The question for the second debate on India was "that the indefinite continuance of British sovereignty in India was a violation of British Political Ideals". He argued that British political ideals were inspired by freedom without which civilization was not possible and such a nation would become paralysed and nervous. He concluded with this appeal to British India.<sup>16</sup>

Mr. Bandaranaike was now known as a pro-Indian advocate. His standpoint on India and criticism directed against the British policy toward India pushed him to an embarrassing situation. As he writes:

*"I now found myself in rather an embarrassing position at Oxford. I was looked upon, both at the Union and outside as the foremost spokesman of India".<sup>17</sup>*

However, he explained that he had never been to India and that his knowledge of India had been gained from secondary sources. Nevertheless, he interpreted the problems of that country in terms of those of his own:

*"I, however, interpreted the problems of that country in terms of those of my own, and the general similarity between them, combined with the racial and cultural kinship between Ceylon and her neighbour, enabled me to present the Indian point of view with sympathy and fairness" (Ibid.).*

He recounts his experiences with the *Majlis*, the club of the Indians modelled on the form and structure of the Union. The *Majlis* provided a forum for distinguished Indian personalities among whom T.C. Goswami and K.P.S. Menon have been remembered. Mr. Bandaranaike was its President which accorded to him opportunities to know Indian personalities such as Sir Ali Imam, Lala Lajpat Rai, Saklatvala, Srinivasa Sastri. Of the women, he recalled Leilamani Naidu and Sarojini Naidu and Annie Besant. He made a special reference to the last named. In the weekly debates that the *Majlis* organised, the issues were more relevant to India's struggles and aspirations. He has discussed the issue of Federation as a conflict resolution strategy to ensure India's unity in diversity:

*"I recollect that I suggested Federation as the solution of India's difficulties at this debate. The idea of federation for*

*India was new at the time, and I cannot refrain from taking pleasure at the subsequent trend of events" (Ibid., p.48).*

His writings included his impressions about Indians:

*"My memory of my Indian friends at Oxford, with all their weakness and all their impulsive friendliness and kindness, is a tender one. For they were very near to me" (Ibid., p.49).*

## OFFICES HELD AT OXFORD

In the summer of 1923, he was elected Secretary of the Union by 171 votes, over his nearest rival gaining 146. The remaining four candidates received fewer than 90. Some of them subsequently became leaders of the Conservative, the Liberal and the Labour political parties; two of them became Members of Parliament. For two months he suffered from paratyphoid, which deprived him of time and opportunities for work. He then, represented the Union in a debate against Cambridge. In 1923, the centenary of the Oxford Union was celebrated. A debate was organised at which several ex-presidents spoke; it was followed by a sumptuous dinner at which he met several very important persons of different social status:

*"It was an occasion that brought to me an acute realization of the true importance of the Union. The Church, the bar, politics, letters, in almost every important walk of life, so many distinguished men had been ex-officers of the Union".<sup>18</sup>*

He had by then spent four years at Oxford as an undergraduate. In the Michaelmas term of 1923, he served as Secretary. In the following Trinity term, he was elected Junior Treasurer of the Union in 1924. The duties of this post were not arduous. He also contested the post of President but was defeated by Scrymgeour Wedderburn, the first conservative President (Hollis, 1965, 169). The reasons were many. First, that Wedderburn was contesting for the second time. Second, he was a defiantly imperialistic conservative. Third, he was a junior librarian and fourthly, the old life-members of the Union formed a block to vote for a white President. Mr. Bandaranaike was marked as an advocate of the Indian cause, despite the fact that in February, 1923 he spoke against the motion "that development of the Eastern races

of the empire lies in development on eastern and not on western lines".

## HIS LIFE OF SILENT REFLECTION AND ACTIVE LISTENING

Mr. Bandaranaike was yearning to practise deep silent reflection and active listening, which are indispensable for a busy statesman and politician.

His emotional experiences of his success after success in the debates revealed that he was "in the widening circle of a ripple on the surface of a pool". However, he did not lose his balance but learned to retain his equanimity. He longed for "for ease and quiet". He expressed this yearning for silent reflection:

*"Sometimes, I yearn with a fierce yearning for the calm content of a priest, sheltered in his cloistered temple, or the care-free happiness of some jungle-dweller with the singing of the birds about him and the blue sky above him, or even the hum-drum life of the average man with its small delights and small troubles. But alas! it cannot be".<sup>19</sup>*

On wonders whether Mr. Bandaranaike had specific techniques of mental culture or meditation to gratify such a deep-felt need for rest and relaxation. Perhaps, he did not. His desire was not fulfilled. Nevertheless, he was not critical or hostile towards those who practised this art of relaxation. As a politically minded person, he was appreciating the power of an alternative oratory (it differed from his art) which can emerge from the intense cultivation of a specific technique or practice of transcendental meditative culture.

This becomes clear from his description of the "remarkable woman" called Annie Besant born on October 01. The lady whose ex-husband was an Anglican clergyman, was formerly a Fabian socialist in the company of George Bernard Shaw. She subsequently became a Theosophist and an Indian independence leader who founded the Indian Home Rule League in 1916. She was the President of the Theosophical Society until her death. The eminent thinker, J. Krishnamurti of India owes to Annie Besant what he was able to achieve.

Mr. Bandaranaike wrote about this lady, who visited Oxford in the course of a lecturing tour on Indian affairs. In appreciation of her abilities he wrote:



"She was very old and frail, and one sometimes had the shocking feeling of listening to a voice from a sepulchre. But there was yet an echo of the old power, and much of the old consummate skill. She stood cold and aloof, no single gesture emphasized a point, and the words came deliberate and passionless. I understood for the first time the true meaning of Homer's phrase regarding Odysseus, 'words fell from him like thick flakes of snow'. It was quiet and unobtrusive, but it gradually and relentlessly covered and overwhelmed everything. It was what might be called a subjective, as opposed to an objective, form of oratory: the speaker communing aloud with her own soul, rather than consciously speaking to an audience that she wished to convince".<sup>20</sup>

### HIS NATIONAL POLITICAL OPTION FOR THE COMMON MAN

As an undergraduate at Oxford, he was preparing for his future political career by involving himself in the activities of the University. The last moments prior to his departure from Oxford revealed his love for his native country:

"The typically English scene, subdued and mellow in the evening light, faded from my eyes, and the glare and dust of my country took its place: blue skies, and dancing sunlight, with a white road winding amidst coconut groves and green paddy fields; dak, cool nights, with star be-jewelled skies, alive with the cries of innumerable crickets; the pathetic, huddled village huts, the dirt, the poverty, the disease. My country, my people. Aye, it was there that my work lay, and Oxford had revealed to me my life's mission".<sup>21</sup>

He was critical of those who denigrated the Oxford University as a centre for study only and "a refuge from the world and its claims" (Hollis, 1965, 105). But his view of Oxford was different. It was a nursery for aspiring statesmen:

"There is a view held by some people that politics at Oxford means nothing more than a little relaxation for a set of boys in their idle moments. It may be realised from what has been stated above that there is far more seriousness and purpose in Oxford politics than these critics would like to concede".<sup>22</sup>

His speeches and writings on Oxford life substantiate the argument that his academic career had contributed enormously to his political role in his native country. He says:

"It may also perhaps be understood how Oxford, and particularly the Union, influenced profoundly my entire career and outlook" (Ibid.).

On his return home, the residents of Udugaha Pattu in Siyane Korale, received him respectfully. In his speech he expressed his commitment to serving the people:

"There is one thing I would have you remember, that I consider myself entirely as one of yourselves, and if fate has decreed for me a prominent place among you, it is not that I may be your master but that I may be your servant".<sup>23</sup>

He placed before them an alternative vision and mission which the existing United National Party (UNP) had hitherto failed to do. As Prof A.J. Wilson has emphasized:

"Bandaranaike was the Olympian aristocrat who sought to identify himself with the poor in his country. This was quite unlike the UNP who perceived of themselves as the natural rulers".<sup>24</sup>

According to certain writers Mr. Bandaranaike's national political option for the common man could be attributed to "insular prejudices" of the Union which prevented him from winning the post of Presidency in 1924. Hollis recorded it as "a manoeuvre of complete legality but of doubtful propriety" (Hollis, 1965, 169). He refers to the role played by a group of life-members, who "formed themselves into a block to vote against a candidate" and certainly "... Bandaranaike believed that there was such a block against him...." (Ibid., 170). As He wrote:

"... and this belief was at any rate one of the influences which caused him in his closing months at Oxford to reject his father's 'loyalist' political principles to renounce Christianity for Buddhism and to become a very strong nationalist. His political career in Ceylon was, of course, built on the nationalist principles of which he remained the champion right up to the time of his final assassinations" (Ibid.).

Evelyn Waugh endorsed this view when he wrote of Mr. Bandaranaike:

"Certainly, the only oriental whom I met, the Cingalese (sic) Bandaranaike, returned to Colombo fiercely anti-British. (This sentiment did not save him from assassination by his fellow countrymen when he lost the protection of the British Crown). At the Union these emergent politicians made themselves at home and introduced a vehemence

that was normally lacking in our debates" (Waugh, E. 1964, 184).

Christopher Hollis who was a former president of the Union introduced Mr. Bandaranaike as "the son of a very distinguished Ceylonese Christian of strongly imperialist sympathies" (Hollis, 1965, 168). He makes two important remarks about him: first,

"From his first arrival he threw himself with enthusiasm into the Union debates. He was a brilliant speaker and popular among the members of the Union. He spoke at the beginning of his career, as was but natural, as his father's son, generally on conservative side" (Ibid.).

Secondly, that he was far ahead of his Indian undergraduates at Oxford who attended the debates on motions concerning India and voted. They did not "attempt to play a prominent part in its debates", because of difficulties of language. "But Bandaranaike" he stressed "was by his upbringing less inhibited" (Ibid.).

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# The Return of the Multisaws

K. Palasanthiran

Memories are short. It may have been forgotten by many, even perhaps those directly involved, that the Bibile-Wickremasinghe Report on the correct use of drugs was stubbornly opposed by the Health Ministry officials at that time, and much valuable time was wasted at the outset in the implementation of these reforms. In this situation Dr. S. A. Wickremasinghe and Professor Senaka Bibile were compelled to take their recommendations to the Ministry of Industries. The major thrust of the Bibile-Wickremasinghe reforms was aimed at making a poor Third World Country self-sufficient in essential drugs by implementing a well thought out plan for their local manufacture the Ministry of Industries acted swiftly on all the main proposals.

The State Pharmaceutical's Corporation, set up under the Ministry of Industries and the Formulary Committee, composed of the Country's foremost Pharmacologists trimmed down an Old Mother Goose medley of Medicines under a myriad brand names to a rational Formulary and a list of Essential Drugs. The WHO which was following Sri Lanka's adoption of its Health policy with great interest hailed this as the World's First list of Essential Drugs. The Essential Drugs list is now an official document of WHO and items are added to or deleted from it as scientific knowledge and practice advances.

The SPC now moved in to monitor the import of drugs and the inconsistent and irrational waste of valuable foreign exchange caused by pseudo-scientific promotion of brands and unethical prescribing.

The Bibile-Wickremasinghe report had very prudently highlighted the country's already existing potential and knowhow in drug manufacture brought in by four internationally connected drug firms which were already in production with locally subscribed capital. One of them, Dumex had commenced as early as 1956, with 25% DFCC equity. Dumex was a Danish Co-operative Pharmaceutical venture with a wealth of knowhow in the formulation of antibiotics, hormones and other biologicals for oral, ophthalmic, and parenteral use. They had a sterile products facility and fully equipped laboratory including animal testing and microbiology. With his usual charm and pragmatism Professor Bible drew all these Companies into a scheme of manufacture under the new Drug rationalization policies.

This was a scheme of Contract Manufacture of Essential Drugs where each firm's special knowhow was utilised to make part of the Essential Drugs list so that together about forty essential items were being produced locally within two years of the establishment of the SPC.

The SPC purchased on Worldwide tender all the raw material needed for this scheme, supplied them to contract firms free of charge and purchased all the finished drugs back at a very reasonable manufacturing fee.

Items that were locally produced in sufficient quantities to meet the country's entire requirement could not be imported under disguised brand names.

The importers who were agents of

foreign brands sided by interested Medical Practitioners manipulated a chorus of protest during this time exploiting the ignorance of consumers who were told that absence of particular brands meant a shortage of drugs.

Actually the new scheme apart from solving the problem of periodic shortages of drugs due to erratic private inventory control of Brands provided a continuous supply of all needed drugs under their generic names. This solution however was not popular with those who promoted brands. Fortunately there was a solid phalanx of enlightened medical men who backed Professor Bibile and turned the tide in favour of the reforms. By 1976, though Senaka Bibile had passed away in Guyana in active follow-up of his policies on a WHO assignment in the Third World, Drugs Rationalization in Lanka had proved to be a great success. Apart from its Health aspect its impact on a Third World economy was significant. All the local manufacturers were utilising their excess capacity in producing Essential Drugs saving the Country a substantial Drug bill and providing employment for many times the work force they had originally.

One of the corner stones of the Bibile-Wickremasinghe plan was the provision of a Central facility for Quality Control of the Drugs that were produced locally. This was a fully equipped Pharmaceutical Control Laboratory functioning under the direct supervision of the Ceylon Hospital Formulary Committee and the Medical Laboratory Services.

This laboratory had been donated by Japan to serve Lanka's swift march to self-sufficiency in essential Drugs. It was



a fully equipped Pharmaceutical Analytical Laboratory. All up-to-date instrumentation had been provided. This laboratory had been placed under the direction of a Public Analyst seconded for service from the Government Analysts' Department where all analyses of Pharmaceuticals sampled under the Drug Act had been performed till then.

Both Prof. Bibile as well as the head of the Laboratory recommended that the Assistant Analysts be also recruited from the Government Analysts' Department. This rule was followed for the short time that Prof. Bibile was able to keep his eyes on the working out of his proposals. As soon as he had left on his new assignment, this laboratory which was very vulnerably situated within the Health Ministry domain of the Colombo General Hospital was crammed full of the overflow of Hospital Pharmacists from the Health Department. These were certificated pharmacists trained for Hospital Pharmacy work with absolutely no analytical experience, or theoretical grounding in Chemical Analyses. They were a total liability in a laboratory with delicate instruments. The Head of the Laboratory resigned as the staff provided was deliberately unsuited for the work. However the Medical Laboratory Services continued to supervise the functioning of the laboratory.

When the local Drug Companies participating in Government Tenders or manufacturing directly under the contract scheme completed a production batch the Company would pay in the Analysis fee to Medical Laboratory Services. And Officers from the Quality Control Laboratory would come to the factory concerned, draw samples and take them back to their laboratory for analysis. Batches for the Public Sector or the Private Sector had to await the report from the Drug Quality Control Laboratory. This laboratory was able to

draw samples and effect speedy analysis of all drugs made by the local drug firms supplying drugs on contract to the SPC. There were no delays and the entire scheme operated smoothly. There were no drug shortages and Government tender supply of these drugs was dependable.

Thus the operation of State Quality Control enabled all local firms to supply almost all the bulk requirements of essential drugs.

In fact the scheme was working too smoothly for Health Ministry liking. The entire scheme collapsed under three blows of Fate — Prof. Bible's tragic death in Guyana, the fall of the Government that had ushered in the new Drug Reforms and the taking over of the SPC by the Health Ministry.

These events signalled the beginning of the end as far as Drug Rationalization in Lanka was concerned.

Import Control and Price Control of Drugs was stretched into meaninglessness. The Contract Manufacturing Scheme was abolished, and local companies manufacturing to full capacity suddenly found themselves idle. To save themselves manufacturers became importers overnight, said their machines were idle and retrenched their workforce.

With reimport of Essential Drugs, brand names flooded the market and drug rationalization was cast to the winds.

However, some companies stuck firmly to local manufacture on tender, by importing their own raw material. This was next thwarted by the State Control Laboratory stating they were unable to cope with the large quantities of samples from tender batches, though they had

been actually analysing all locally made batches on Tender and Contract just previously. In a classic case of the right hand not knowing what the left hand was doing, the Government still insisted on State Quality Control release for all Tender batches. Thus local Tender supplies were seriously delayed or disrupted. On top of all this the staff at the Japan Gifted State Control Laboratory succeeded within a short time in rendering unfunctional nearly all the valuable instruments in this laboratory.

Chaos prevailed, and a Western Aid Agency gifted a new Laboratory complete with a foreign expert who said straight away that a State Laboratory should only look into Quality Assurance by only randomly checking samples. Since Tenders could not be serviced on random batch reporting, local Tender supplies collapsed, and nearly all Tenders were awarded to importers. So much for local manufacture.

Thus whereas Rational Drug Policy generated as a by-product an entire Pharmaceutical Industry much employment, and a research backed industrial sector the aftermath of its collapse in Lanka has seen the return of all the evils that rationalization was meant to combat.

Identifying the villains in this drama as the drug MNCS' and Free Market Economics does not shift the blame from those who are most culpable — even though they may prepare papers for conferences on Health for All by 2000 A.D.

With MNC monopoly, devaluation of local currency imposed by the Free Market, and the proliferation of aggressively promoted drug brands the recipients of Health for all in our part of the world will be in the eye of raging epidemics by 2000 A.D.

## 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.

*Public education in drug use will increasingly become a part of mass education via the mass media. The knowledge and skills thus acquired will still not provide adequate protection to the public if the items in doctor's prescriptions are effectively disguised by various brand names and promoted for indications which have not been fully validated.*

**Generic Drugs are those known by their pharmacopoeial names and can be prescribed only for their established clinical indications.**

*Most Pharmacopoeias now carry a section on Patient information giving a brief account of the indications, benefits and risks in use of a particular drug. Thus Generic naming and identification of use is a vital part of this public education programme advocated by WHO which aims to prevent brand name promotion making medication revert to being one of the Black Arts.*

**Generic Drugs from MSJI**

**FOR RATIONAL USE OF DRUGS**



**MSJ Industries (Ceylon) Limited**

Factory and Laboratories,

P.O.Box 430,

Colombo.



# The Past in the Present in Sri Lanka

Jonathan Spencer

Steven Kemper, *The Presence of the Past: Chronicles, Politics, and Culture in Sinhala Life* (Wilder House Series in Politics, History, and Culture). Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics, and Violence in Sri Lanka*. Foreword by Lal Jayawardena. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

All happy nations are alike, but an unhappy nation is unhappy after its own fashion. Sri Lanka's own style of unhappiness captured the world's attention briefly in the early 1980s but has now slipped quietly out of the limelight. Even the assassinations of the country's president and its leading opposition politician, within weeks of each other in 1993, failed to catch the headline writers' attention for long. For many people, though, Sri Lanka has become loosely but indelibly associated with intense ethnic conflict and very high levels of political violence. Although the history stretches further back, this association was primarily established by the anti-Tamil rioting of 1983, further strengthened by the subsequent civil war between the majority Sinhala-dominated government and the militants of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE, or simply "the Tigers"), and then fixed by the military intervention from India in 1987 and the appalling death toll within the Sinhala community during the anti-government rising of the leftist Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) in the late 1980s.

These two important books both offer the promise of new interpretations of the conflict, as well as suggesting comparative lessons that may be drawn out of the particularities of the Sri Lankan tragedy. They both discuss the alleged deep historical roots of ethnic identity in Sri Lanka and the place of Theravada Buddhism in modern politics. The important general question behind these concerns — which is of relevance for the study of all postcolonial polities — is the extent to which political choices and political practices in the present are constrained by collective understandings derived in some way from the past. Put most simply and most generally the question is this: What do we mean by a political culture? Just how unique, culturally, is Sri Lanka's unhappiness; and how much of this unhappiness can we explain in cultural terms?

As the Sri Lankan conflict has intensified, so the centre of interpretive activity has shifted gradually from political science, which has had less and less of value to say in the past decade, to history, and thence to anthropology. The authors of these two books are both cultural anthropologists, and their work also allows an opportunity to assess the strengths and weaknesses of anthropological approaches to postcolonial politics. Tambiah is a Sri Lankan Tamil by birth, with an American Ph.D and a distinguished record as ethnographer and interpreter of Theravada Buddhism, especially in Thailand (Tambiah 1970, 1976, 1984). One of the most important themes in his work on Thailand has been the identification of a distinctive worldly project in Theravada Buddhism, based on the symbiotic relationship between the order of monks, the *sangha* and the figure of the king. The 1983 violence in Sri Lanka drew his attention back to his homeland, and this is the second of two useful books in which he has provided a judicious and accessible synthesis of recent scholarly work on the conflict. The first concentrated on the politics of ethnicity, whereas the new volume looks at the role of Buddhism in the conflict.<sup>1</sup> Kemper is an American anthropologist whose earlier publications focused particularly on the institutional history of the order of Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka, the *sangha*. His monograph is more obviously addressed to specialists (and some of its most important themes are summarized by Tambiah in his book). It traces the history of a history — the version of the past recorded by Buddhist monks in the chronicles of the *Mahavamsa* — through the twists and turns of pre-colonial, colonial, nationalist, and anti-nationalist interpretation. It stands out from other recent anthropological work in the quality of its empirical evidence, much of it derived from Sinhala books and pamphlets unearthed and translated by the author. The two books together provide

a fascinating example of the accommodations and changes Buddhism has had to make, as a political force, in order to survive in an era of mass politics and popular sovereignty.

## Scholarship and conflict

The *Mahavamsa* exerts a particular fascination in Sri Lanka. It forms a continuous chronicle of the island from the coming of the Sinhala people, Vijaya, up to the present day. The first section of the chronicle was written in the fifth century CE, although it purports to describe events up to 1,000 years earlier. Subsequent sections were added at intervals in the years that followed, always composed by members of the *sangha*, usually at the behest of a unifying and reforming king. The colonial government commissioned an update in the late nineteenth century, and a monk added a further section in the 1930s on his own initiative. In the late 1970s the government of President J.R. Jayawardene, in self-conscious emulation of the precolonial kings, commissioned a further major updating. The chronicle itself fulfils two explicit functions: It displays an exemplary model of the relationship between religion, as embodied in the *sangha*, and polity, as embodied in the king; and it provides a structure of authority for present practices by linking them and their agents through a line of descent to the practices and teachings of the Buddha himself.

Many scholars have gone somewhat further than this. The German orientalist, Heinz Bechert, for example, has argued:

A form of nationalism originated in ancient Ceylon which was rather close to modern nationalism with its conceptions of a united nation with common linguistic, cultural and religious traditions. The chronicles served as educational works to cultivate this consciousness of national identity (Bechert 1978:8).

While no one would deny that the chronicles, or certain episodes from them, have been used for this purpose in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this sort of interpretation (widely accepted in Sri Lanka itself), which identifies conscious processes of nation-building in the distant past, has recently been challenged by liberal historians and social scientists in Sri Lanka.

The problem for Kemper is to allow for cultural difference without succumbing to cultural determinism. Despite the misleading claims of his publishers' jacket description,<sup>2</sup> he swiftly and deftly sidesteps the unacceptable choice between the radical primordialist claim for a 2,000-year-old Sinhala nationalism and the equally radical constructionist version in which nationalism is a pure product of the colonial period. He is concerned to rescue the cultural peculiarities of Sinhala nationalism without falling into the trap of describing the present as an inevitable outcome of the past. He chides writers like Gellner, Anderson, and Kedourie for failing to take seriously the role of "culture and consciousness" in nationalist movements while distancing himself from the controversial determinism of Bruce Kapferer, who claims to have located a common pre-reflective "ontology" behind the surface manifestations of nationalist myth, political violence, and religious ritual (Kapferer 1988). Instead, nationalism is presented as "a conversation that the present holds with the past" (Kemper 1991:7); this requires the appearance in nationalist argument of both continuity with the past (for the authority it provides) and disparity from that same past (in order to motivate actors to *restore* what once was there) (Kemper 1991:17).

This felicitous perspective opens up a remarkably broad and interesting area for investigation. Kemper moves from a discussion of the context and purposes of the original chronicles to an interpretive teasing out of key themes, particularly the central place accorded to heroes and the concern with unity. He then discusses the colonial discovery of the island's history, a theme recently explored by other authors (Nissan 1985; Rogers 1990), and the fatal effect of ideas of race for subsequent readings of the chronicle. His closing chapters weave together the issues already explored with more material from the speeches and writings of contemporary politicians and monks. These are the most interesting and challenging sections of the book, not least because he uses many Sinhala sources for the first time,

a sad novelty in an area of academic argument still dominated by English-language scholarship. Moreover, Kemper's command of modern literary Sinhala allows him greater interpretive freedom with this material; his argument in the sections on precolonial historiography is inevitably constrained by his dependence on secondary sources (like the work of the scholar-monk, Rahula) often written from a point of view he is attempting to criticize. Nevertheless, this book represents a major advance in our understanding, not just of Sri Lanka but also of the historical constraints on all postcolonial politics.

As in his previous book, Tambiah takes a more direct line on the primordialist claims for an ancient Sinhala nationalism, reflected and promoted in the chronicles. After the 1983 violence, these claims were opened up to public criticism by a small group of Colombo-based liberal intellectuals. The most important revisionist interpretation of the history of Sinhala identity was provided by the distinguished historian of medieval Buddhism, R.A.L.H. Gunawardana. Gunawardana's work was the centrepiece of a group of essays published by the Colombo Social Scientists' Association (SSA 1984) in the wake of the 1983 violence. This volume attracted a great deal of criticism in the Sinhala press (Tennekoon 1990), although a detailed scholarly response to Gunawardana's argument has only recently appeared in Sri Lanka (Dharmadasa 1992).<sup>3</sup> Tambiah ends his book with an epilogue, reviewing the controversy between Gunawardana and Dharmadasa before, politely but firmly, questioning the historical assumptions in Kapferer's work. Sadly, at the time of writing, Tambiah's book has itself become the subject of controversy in Sri Lanka, with some Sinhala zealots apparently calling for it to be banned, and a cast of distinguished academics defending Tambiah's right to speak on these matters.

Tambiah's review of the arguments about the historical depth of Sinhala identity is possibly the most interesting section of his book for specialists, for whom (as Tambiah himself acknowledges) much of the rest of the volume will be already familiar. Nevertheless, Tambiah has performed a valuable service in assembling a lucid account of the role of Buddhism in twentieth-century politics, bringing together material from a wide range of secondary sources, many of them inaccessible to readers outside Sri Lanka. The book will provide a useful complement to Gombrich and Obeyesekere's magnifi-

cent *Buddhism Transformed* (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988), which for all its empirical richness largely eschewed the discussion of religion, politics, and ethnicity.<sup>4</sup> Together, Tambiah's two books form our best introduction to the complexities of the Sri Lankan situation and to the growing academic literature it has attracted.

### Modernity, buddhism, and democracy

Both Tambiah, discussing "political" Buddhism, and Kemper, more narrowly focusing on the interpretation of the chronicles, bow to the need to recognize some sort of rupture in the passage from precolonial to postcolonial. In an important argument, Tambiah detects a change in the development of Buddhism on the island. He describes modern political Buddhism, with its attendant outbreaks of collective violence, as a transformation of an earlier "doctrinal Buddhism" in which the "affirmation of collectivity" replaces "the religious core and inspiration" (Tambiah 1992:58). Tambiah is not alone here: Another distinguished Sri Lankan anthropologist, Gananath Obeyesekere, has advanced the similar argument that modernist Buddhism, over-abstract and individualistic, has lost its "Buddhist conscience" of compassion and loving kindness, a conscience which used to be transmitted in now forgotten folk tales and abandoned village rituals (Obeyesekere 1984:158).<sup>5</sup> This may be true and certainly would repay closer empirical attention, but it poses two problems. For Tambiah, any talk of an essential "doctrinal Buddhism" would seem to put him in the camp of those he describes as "Pali text puritans" whose version of Buddhism he has so long and eloquently contested. For Obeyesekere, the argument implicitly gives causal primacy to religion in assessing the aetiology of violence. Yet we know from abundant evidence, in the chronicles and elsewhere, that there was violence in Buddhist societies before Buddhist modernism ever appeared and that there would seem to be no necessary reason to explain its modern manifestation as a product of religious change.

Kemper also recognizes important discontinuities in the modern response to the past. The most important of these is the Victorian notion of race, which recurs through the middle section of his book as a kind of *deus ex machina* to explain changes in Sinhala understandings of the past. His examples of "race talk" from Sri Lanka are striking and alarming but do not in themselves explain why Victorian racial theory was enthusiastically adopted by Sri Lankans (and other South Asians) and



continues to thrive, long after its scientific demise in Europe. At one point he suggests that Western ideas of race gave added legitimacy to the traditional practice of deriving descent from some ancestral group in order to claim status (Kemper 1991:123). Even so, it is hard to accept the implicit force in his statement that "a modern language of race has appropriated and changed a variety of genuinely ancient practices in Sri Lanka" (Kemper 1991: 135). Again we are confronted with a contrast between a foundational past — "genuinely ancient practices", "doctrinal Buddhism" — and a recent deviation from it. Both cases demonstrate how difficult it is to tell story of nationalism outside the reassuring framework of the tradition — modernity dichotomy.

Nevertheless, Tambiah is careful to avoid the trap of nostalgia for a lost, Buddhist tolerance. Alongside its emphasis on collective identity, political Buddhism has also a more "positive" side, as ideologists have drawn on historical and textual models in order to construct ideas of Buddhist democracy or Buddhist socialism (Tambiah 1992:60). Both Tambiah and Kemper explore these attempts so build a distinctively Buddhist political culture within the institutional framework of the postcolonial state, and their discussions converge on a few important themes: the need for unity, the importance of sovereignty, and dismay at the divisive consequences of party politics.

Kemper devotes an early chapter of his book to the analysis of ideals of unity and community in premodern Buddhism. From the chronicles he identifies a strong emphasis on unity as embodied in the figure of the conquering hero who establishes a unitary sovereignty over the whole island. But he also discovers a second, somewhat different, model of unity, based on consensus and the power of collective action. This is described in one of the popular *Jataka* stories of the Buddha's past lives and is concretely embodied in the institutional order of the sangha with its emphasis on regular collective meetings. Tambiah, using material from the crisis years of the 1980s, describes the insistence on unity and sovereignty in one recent Buddhist political movement. The problem is how to assess the causal power of such apparent continuities. Modern Buddhist activists certainly refer back to the same textual models as Kemper — the hero-kings Dutthagamani and Parakramabahu are rarely far from the front page of the Sinhala newspapers — but are they referring to the same thing as the chroni-

clers when they talk of unity? And how are modern Sinhala discussions of unity different from those, say, Ulster Protestant or Hindu nationalists in India?

Whatever else, a nationalism that celebrates the warrior kings who brought the island under the "umbrella of a single sovereignty", will have difficulties accommodating calls for devolution or secession, such as those made by the Tamil population of the North and the East. But both Tambiah and Kemper draw out fundamental differences between the political context of the chroniclers and that of modern Buddhist activists. In his critique of Kapferer, Tambiah queries the promiscuous use of the term, state, to describe alike the precolonial and postcolonial polities in Sri Lanka. Precolonial kingship followed the pattern of the "galactic polity" he has described elsewhere in Southeast Asia: Focused on the king at the ritual centre but with fuzzy boundaries, it is based on the hierarchical replication of power at lower-level, peripheral centres, with only spasmodic capacity for mobilizing the population (Tambiah 1992:173, compare Nissan and Stirrat 1990). Not the least of the features of this sort of political organization was its ability to incorporate new, often culturally diverse, groups within its framework.

The crucial difference with the colonial and postcolonial state can be illustrated by the changes in historical writing which Kemper discusses. When the chronicle was updated by a monk in the mid-1930s, the "common people" emerge for the first time as a category worthy of attention (Kemper 1991:100). In the version commissioned by the Jayawardene government, the "heroes" of the past have disappeared to be replaced by "ordinary people":

Sri Lanka has become a democracy, and the era of the ordinary person has arrived. That ordinary person is assumed to be male, Sinhala, Buddhist, and middle-class, but the chronicle begins from the assumption of the dominance of such people in the national culture. Participatory politics creates a cultural shift as well as a political one, and with its emphasis on equality, nationalism itself assumes the same cultural transformation (Kemper 1991:190)

If there is a decisive moment in the history of Sinhala nationalism, it is 1931, the year in which the Colonial Office introduced elections based on universal adult suffrage, to the dismay of the coalition of ambitious elite figures that passed for a

local nationalist movement. But ideas of popular representation had been built into the framework of the late-nineteenth-century colonial state, and the enthusiasm for the idea of race was in large part a product of colonial divisions of the population into "natural" communities to be addressed through the medium of their equally natural leaders.

So those contemporary monks, whose visions of a properly Buddhist political order are described and analysed by both Kemper and Tambiah, are not so much reproducing a political culture as attempting to create one to fit changing circumstances. In this process, the chronicles jostle alongside other less obvious sources of inspiration, such as Soviet experiments in planning or popular dissatisfaction with modern elected politicians. Party politics are seen as a crippling source of disunity, while the sangha attempts to represent itself as a source of disinterested unity, rising above the interested squabbling of the politicians. The themes may sound familiar enough, but their implications in Sri Lanka have been quite distinctive. Both the JVP, whose struggle against the government cost the lives of thousands of young Sinhala people in the late 1980s, and the LTTE, whose guerrilla war continues into its second decade, are movements based on a strong cult of leadership, the expressive use of exemplary violence, and the moral force of a young constituency who feels betrayed by the politics of its elders. In some sense, both movements echo the monks' visions of a radical egalitarian democracy, based in a strong sense of collective identity but somehow purged of the moral failings of "normal" politics.<sup>6</sup>

It is too early to expect these authors to deal with the politics of the JVP uprising (see Moore 1993), while Tamil politics are obviously outside their remit. But the continuing lack of attention to the pathological politics of the LTTE is the greatest weakness in the literature on the Sri Lankan conflict. Our occasional euphemistic allusion to Tamil militants fails to do justice to the extraordinary political force that has been built in northern Sri Lanka since the mid-1970s. Perhaps because of the volume and accessibility of its various statements, Sinhala nationalism has now received a relatively large amount of academic attention. Comparison with the differing styles and fortunes of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka and India is long overdue, as is renewed attention to the similarities and differences between the Buddhist politics of Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos.

And to understand these phenomena we need rather more than the analysis of "nationalist discourse" (the title of Kemper's concluding chapter). We also need more, and better, analyses of nationalist politics. In particular, since the demise of modernization theory, anthropologists have been very slow to assess the cultural implications of democracy, whether as political theory or institutional complex. It is telling that Tambiah ends his book with some brief comments on the political structures of the Sri Lankan state, while in his foreword, the distinguished economist, Lal Jayawardena, draws attention to the stagnation of its economy. Kemper performs a valuable service in pointing out the close connection between democracy and nationalism, but if there is a weakness in his excellent study, it is a relative inattention to the social and political context of the arguments he is analysing. In this he is following a more general trend in recent American anthropology in which nationalism has been analysed as an ideational structure, or "discursive formation" and post-Foucauldians have enthusiastically dissected the politics and poetics of almost everything, except mass politics themselves.

What anthropologists like Tambiah and Kemper bring to the understanding of Sri Lanka's unique unhappiness is, paradoxically, a remarkably sophisticated and subtle sense of the historical. This now needs to be complemented by a return to the old anthropological strength of an understanding based on detailed familiarity with the everyday lives of the ordinary people who are at once heroes and victims in this story.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, a revived ethnography of the political will have to escape from the dead hand of 1960s political science and political anthropology to build, instead, upon the historically sophisticated work of anthropologists like Kemper and Tambiah.

## Notes

1. The earlier book was *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy* (Tambiah 1986). For an assessment of Tambiah's work on Thailand, see the relevant articles in the special issue of *Contributions to Indian Sociology* dedicated to the work of Sri Lankan anthropologists (Madan 1987).
2. The jacket claims: "By taking up the contention that Sinhala nationalism antedates the rise of nationalist movements in Europe by over a thousand years, Kemper's analysis offers challenging implications for our interpretation as a modern European phenomenon." Unfortunately, the argument in this form does not even survive Kemper's preface, in which it becomes clear that Kemper does not believe that Sinhala "nationalism" "antedates" European nationalism by a thousand years (Kemper 1991:x).
3. Gunawardana's essay originally appeared in a Sri Lanka academic journal and was reprinted in the

Social Scientists' Association collection; a revised version was published for the first time outside Sri Lanka in 1990 (Gunawardana 1990). The publications of the SSA, as well as the excellent journal *Pravada*, can be ordered from the Social Scientists' Association, 129/6A Nawala Road, Colombo 5, Sri Lanka. Dharmadasa's reply to Gunawardana has been circulating for some years in typescript but has now appeared in the journal of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (Dharmadasa 1992a). Its argument is alluded to in his own interesting, if politically naive, recent monograph (Dharmadasa 1992b). Other relevant material can be found in two recent, edited collections (Seneviratne 1989; Spencer 1990a).

4. Partly because the research for the volume was mostly carried out before the escalation of the crisis in the early 1980s; see the authors' comment on this (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 199:x-xi).
5. Almost all commentators recognize important changes in Sri Lankan Buddhism as a result of colonial conquest and missionary attack in the nineteenth century. The resulting strains of reformed Buddhism have been variously described as Protestant, modernist, and recently post-Protestant (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988; cf. Spencer 1990c).
6. The connection is, of course, only direct in the case of the JVP.
7. There have been some recent attempts to provide a more locally grounded ethnography of nationalism in Sri Lanka, although these have mostly concentrated on peripheral areas, where nationalist ideology accompanies growing state penetration; we know much less about the social roots of national feeling in more central areas. See, e.g., Brow (1988, 1990a, 1990b); Woost (1990, 1993); Tennekoon (1988); Spencer (1990b).

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## Prabhakaran Compared

As a Prabhakaran-watcher, I thank H.L.D. Mahindapala for bringing to my attention, the *New York Times* feature (May 28, 1995) of John Burns on Prabhakaran (LG, Oct. 15). In it, Prabhakaran's blood-thirstiness in dealing with opponents has been stated as comparable to that of "some of the cruelest figures in recent Asian history, including Pol Pot". Even if one takes this opinion on its face value, one wonders who are the other cruelest figures in recent Asian history, whom John Burns had in mind. If one takes a body count of innocent victims (not military opponents), Mao Ze Dong, Indira Gandhi, Suharto, and Ranasinghe Premadasa should enter this cruel leaders Hall of Fame without any difficulty. Isn't Prabhakaran, then in good company?

Unlike Mahindapala, I do not consider the *New York Times* as the oracle of the twentieth century. I provide a few examples where this venerable newspaper had to eat crow. These are culled from the book, *The Experts Speak; The Definitive Compendium of Authoritative Misinformation*, by Chris Cerf and Victor Navasky (1984).

A *New York Times* editorial ridiculed in 1921 the attempts on rocket propelling by space science pioneer Robert Goddard as one who "seems to lack the knowledge ladled out daily in high schools". In Nov. 5, 1932, the same "unimpeachable source" of Mahindapala, predicted the re-election of the then President Herbert Hoover over Franklin Delano Roosevelt. On July 14, 1972, the same *New York Times* commented that Senator Thomas Eagleton as a "casting director's ideal for a running mate". Few weeks later it was revealed that he had undergone psychiatric shock therapy and was dropped by the Democratic Presidential candidate George McGovern. If the *New York Times* could not predict developments correctly about the events within the USA, how reliable is its assessment on events in Sri Lanka?

As to verbal abuse from opponents, Prabhakaran is not the first rebel leader to be sneered at by his contemporaries. Almost 200 years ago, the father of America George Washington was roasted by *Philadelphia Aurora* as follows: "If ever a nation was debauched by a man, the American nation has been debauched by

Washington. If ever a nation was deceived by a man, the American nation has been deceived by Washington. Let it serve to be a warning that no man may be an idol". Does Mahindapala know that quite a large segment of American citizens who were loyal to the British Crown were chased by Washington's patriotic gang to Canada and West Indies? One who cites *New York Times* for support should also bother to learn the revolutionary history of America.

I applaud you for providing a proper balance by publishing Mahindapala's critique to Bramagnani and the Galle ethnic violence committee report in the same issue. Mahindapala's legitimate question, "Who are the oppressors of Tamils?" has been eloquently answered in the report you have published on the Galle ethnic violence. Those who suffered at Galle had no links to Prabhakaran's dictum. They suffered because they had the misfortune to have an ethnic identity as Tamils.

Sachi Sri Kantha

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

## Ajith: The Enlightened Pen

The last time Ajith Samaranayake's father gave him a clip on the ear, it was over Lake House. Ajith had defied Samaranayake Senior and bought the *Daily News* at a time when J. R. Jayawardene was leading a boycott of Lake House newspapers. This was in the heady days of 1973 when issues like press freedom were on everyone's lips. It was fortunate that Ajith began his writing career in this period when the intellectual space for dissent was still available.

He was still a schoolboy when his mind and his pen began to roam the whole gamut of contemporary issues. Ajith's writing has been prolific; covering literature, generational issues, political events and concepts of culture. His writings always reflect his wide reading and his serious

reflection on issues of profound social significance. His access to the best material in English and Sinhala make him one of an increasingly rare breed—a bilingual dilettante.

He inherited the best of Anglicised middle class values. Not only did he like his father attend Trinity College Kandy, but he literally grew up in its shadow. His boyhood home was adjacent to the college, overlooking the playing fields of Trinity. Consequently he acquired a sensitivity to liberal values, to the best in English Literature and the more enduring aspects of Western culture and values. It bestowed on him the modesty, rectitude and belief in fair play that sets him apart from others.

Nevertheless in his writings he strives to recapture all that is rich and beautiful

in our oriental culture; he searches for deeper meaning in the works of contemporary Sinhala Literati. And he wants to be part of the reaching prospects for change that lie dormant in the womb of our society.

Ajith survived the traumatic Eighties when the freedom to think, to speak, to write were fraught with danger. When violence consumed the tolerant, the gifted, the different. And now he is back at Lake House, at the helm of the oldest English newspapers east of Suez—the *Ceylon Observer*. Ajith has been a commentator on the major issues that his society has confronted in the last two decades. Now may be he will be more than an observer—perhaps a player himself.

Jayantha Somasundaram

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# Gananath Obeyesekere and Captain Cook

Ron Brunton

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## How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, For Example by Marshall Sahlins

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More than most disciplines, contemporary anthropology seems susceptible to moral posturing and its attendant vice, moral confusion. The posturing focuses on predictable suspects — colonialism, Eurocentrism, racism, the rights of indigenous peoples. Little can mitigate the outrage the virtuous anthropologist feels when she considers the brutal excesses white men have perpetrated on the natives of Asia, Africa, the Americas and the Pacific. The excesses these natives frequently inflicted on each other are another matter, however. Even when acknowledged, they are usually explained in terms of venerable cultural imperatives, or as departures from traditional practices occasioned by the horrors of contact with white men.

Certainly, this selective outrage might be partly justified by arguing that Europeans' ostensible commitment to a universalist moral code made their barbarity more reprehensible than similar — or worse — behaviour from members of cultures whose moral horizons were far more limited. But such an argument would depend on the idea that in a significant way the cultures of the West are superior to these other cultures. It is therefore ruled out from the start.

So when Gananath Obeyesekere published *The Apotheosis Of Captain Cook* in 1992, which asserted that European myths about indigenous people and their propensity to non-rational thought were being perpetuated in the writings of Marshall Sahlins, a distinguished American anthropologist with leftist views, the ground was prepared for a nasty battle.

Obeyesekere, a Princeton-based Sri Lankan anthropologist, claimed that his own "native" background gave him a better insight into Pacific cultures. The situation was made worse — and moral confusion made manifest — by a bizarre insinuation that Sahlins was somehow complicit in the "culture of terror" European explorers such as Captain Cook unleashed upon the world, and which had claimed one of Obeyesekere's friends in Sri Lanka, killed because he would not reveal the whereabouts of his son, an alleged terrorist. *How "Natives" Think* is Sahlins's crushing response.

The central empirical question between Sahlins and Obeyesekere is whether Hawaiians saw Captain Cook as a god. In a series of books and articles dating from the late 1970s, Sahlins has developed the thesis that Cook's death at Kealahou Bay on February 14, 1779, was a consequence of the Hawaiian belief that he was a manifestation of Lono, a major god associated with human and agricultural fertility.

According to Sahlins, Cook arrived off the main island of Hawaii around the time of the annual Makahiki ritual cycle. The Makahiki took place over a four-month period and involved a cosmological struggle in which the king appropriated the powers of Lono for the benefit of humanity, thus renewing his own sovereignty as well as revitalising nature and the social order. At one phase of the cycle, a wood, tapa-cloth and bird-skin image embodying Lono was carried on a 23-day circuit of the island. This phase was a time of popular celebration marked by taboos on fighting and certain other activities. The climax of the Makahiki was a ritual battle, the *kali'i*, between Lono and the king. After the king defeated the god, he reinstated the worship of the military god Ku, with whom he was personally identified, and the image embodying Lono was dismembered and hidden, to reappear the following year.

Sahlins argues that Cook's arrival began a remarkable series of coincidences which led the Hawaiians to believe that he was a manifestation of Lono. Though these coincidences did not always involve an exact correspondence to the events and expectations of the Makahiki, they were close enough to allow the Hawaiians to assimilate Cook creatively to the Makahiki tradition. The sails of his ships, *Resolution* and *Discovery*, resembled the image of Lono. Cook carried out a right-circumnavigation of the island for seven weeks before landing, following the same direction that Lono's image took on its Makahiki circuit, when he finally anchored — to the tumultuous welcome of at least 10,000 Hawaiians — he innocently chose a place opposite the major temple of Lono, from where the image usually left on its journey around the island, and to where it returned. And when Cook left less than three weeks later, on February 3, he "made a near-perfect ritual exit", as the Makahiki rituals would have ended a day or so earlier.

Out at sea, however, a severe storm disabled *Resolution's* foremast, and Cook limped back to Kealahou Bay on February 11 for repairs. In returning, Cook upset the ritual cycle. The time of Lono was over; it was the time of Ku's ascendancy. The Hawaiians' attitudes had changed, and on the night of February 12, the cutter from *Discovery* was stolen. The next morning, Cook tried to take the king hostage against the return of the boat. As Sahlins tells it, this was like *kali'i* in reverse, with Lono "wading ashore with his warriors to confront the king". Cook's death was a ritual murder enacted by a large number of Hawaiians, who snatched the iron dagger from each other so that they could all play a part. But even after his body had been dismembered, he was expected to come back: priests and other Hawaiians asked the British when Lono would return, and what he would do to them when he did.

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*The reviewer is a senior associate in anthropology at the University of Melbourne.*

In *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook*, Obeyesekere accepted that the Hawaiians called Cook "Lono", although he said that this was merely a name. He also acknowledged that they prostrated themselves before Cook, but claimed that this was because they made him a *chief* to incorporate him and his officers into the Hawaiian political structure, and thus bring order into the relationships between Hawaiian commoners and the British. Obeyesekere argued that Sahlins was unwittingly continuing the long-standing Western myth — going back to the time of Cortes, and perhaps even Columbus — of "the redoubtable European who is a god to savage peoples". In opposition to this supposed slander, Obeyesekere presented a literalist critique in which the "practical rationality" of the Hawaiians would have quick made them recognise that someone who did not speak their language or look like them was no manifestation of Lono. He further accused Sahlins of scholarly sins, including an uncritical attitude towards sources, the selective use of information according to its agreement with his overall argument, and the manipulation of evidence. (Sins these certainly are; nevertheless, they are widespread among anthropologists and their colleagues in related disciplines.) Obeyesekere also made clear his distaste for Cook. Far from being the humane embodiment of the Enlightenment, by his third voyage the great man had supposedly become like Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

Sahlins's rejoinder is a relentless and compelling work, presented with wit and panache. Obeyesekere's view that the Hawaiians were "consistently practising a bourgeois rationality" while Europeans have been reproducing "the myth that 'natives' take them for gods" for more than 200 years is an inversion of common understandings that has a certain political appeal in the contemporary academy. But it can be sustained only by failures of scholarship that are far worse and more extensive than those he supposedly found in Sahlins's work. Sahlins demonstrates the contradictions, the misrepresentations, the selective use of evidence, the unwarranted speculations and the considerable ethnographic ignorance that characterise Obeyesekere's book. And in any case, he shows that Obeyesekere's whole

project is futile. For in claiming that Cook was installed as a chief, Obeyesekere stated that Hawaiian chiefs possessed "divine qualities", and he argued that the Hawaiians deified Cook *after* his death. So what has happened to "the certainty that making gods out of European explorers is a European myth"?

Sahlins will not let his adversary impugn his progressive credentials and jeopardise his moral standing in anthropology. The tables of virtue are turned around. The Sri Lankan protector of Hawaiian dignity, the champion of the "non-literate peoples who cannot strike back", has himself silenced the Hawaiian by dismissing the indigenous testimonies about the perception of Cook because they were collected under the auspices of a Christian Missionary. And by basing his defence of the Hawaiians on their supposed expertise in practising the *Western* intellectual virtues of a critical rationality, Obeyesekere has actually delivered them "intellectually to the imperialism that has been afflicting them economically and politically". So there.

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However, though Obeyesekere's work is beset by moral paradox, here is some intellectual irony in Sahlins's book. The original intention behind Sahlins's research on early Hawaiian — and other Polynesian — encounters with Europeans was to develop a theory which would introduce human action and cultural change into structural anthropology, which had hitherto assumed autonomous, formal and relatively stable systems of cultural classification. Recognising that cultural systems are the products of human actions over time — actions which are themselves informed by cultural values and understandings — he wanted to reconcile structuralism with history by showing how peoples' attempts to reproduce their cultures could bring about cultural transformation. But Sahlins scores his knockout blow against Obeyesekere because of his fine-grained historical and ethnographic analysis of the Hawaiian material, and this analysis is essentially independent of the theory that it is possible to obtain accurate knowledge about the past and about other cultures throughout scholarship, a position that is not easily reconciled with his espousal of the cultural

construction of experience and his reluctance to privilege Western forms of knowledge.

Sahlins justifiably criticised Obeyesekere for intellectual ad hocery, and for his inability to provide consistent theoretical explanations of the circumstances in which "common sense" or "mystical" dispositions might predominate in any particular people's beliefs. Yet Sahlins himself is not immune from this kind of attack. To show that Hawaiians were not unique in placing a supernatural interpretation on the advent of Europeans, he presents many similar cases from other Pacific islands, especially from New Guinea. However, as is also the case for Hawaii, he has to acknowledge that there is evidence that individuals in several New Guinea societies were sceptical about the divinity of Europeans, even in the early stages of contact. Nevertheless, this scepticism did not readily become part of these societies' collective understandings, and when Sahlins attempts to explain this, he falls into a hole. In New Guinea, scepticism supposedly failed because of the lack of a "centralised or hierarchical order". But this is the exact opposite of the reason he gave earlier in the book for why scepticism was marginalised in Hawaii, where "the powers-that-be had unique possibilities of objectifying their own interpretations".

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This inconsistency points to a wider problem. At the heart of Sahlins's theoretical endeavours lie difficult and interesting anthropological questions about the relation between individual cogitations and collective cultural categories. These questions have important implications for the concept of culture, particularly the matter of whether cultures are as coherent, encompassing and persistent as Sahlins wants to believe, and on which his theoretical position depends. But the book passes over these issues, and does not really enhance our comparative understanding of cultural influences on how "natives" — including ourselves — think, despite what the title might be thought to promise. In these terms, the book is disappointing. But as an account of what Hawaiian thought about Captain Cook, and how these thoughts led to his death, as well as a put-down of self-righteous adversary, *How "Natives" Think* is a tour de force.



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