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WAR and PEACE

JAFFNA: LESSONS OF HISTORY

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SINHALA OPINION SHIFTS

Mervyn de Silva

The twelve year "war" is frequently introduced as an ethnic conflict, majority Sinhalese versus minority Tamils. Though a gross oversimplification it does recognise and respect the nature of the armed struggle launched by an organisation styled the "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam" and its objectives — liberate the Tamil people from the "Sinhala State" and establish an "independent" Eelam. In short, a secessionist struggle. That "Eelam" includes the North AND the East. This then is the territorial aspect of the war, a civil or internal war.

The Lion Flag flies over Jaffna, the northern capital, and L.T.T.E. bastion. The 'Tigers' expelled from Jaffna move eastwards to re-open the other theatre of this protracted war. The P.A. government also moves to another front, the Sinhala constituency — majority Sinhala opinion, and Sinhala opinion-makers. By hitting the L.T.T.E. hard militarily, the P.A. spots a perfect opportunity to recover the Sinhala support it lost by its 5-6 months of "peace talks" i.e. between the elections (parliamentary and presidential) and mid-April when the L.T.T.E. unilaterally abandoned the peace path". Thus, the visit to Kandy of President Chandrika Kumaratunga and her Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte. Together President Kumaratunga, who is also Defence Minister, and Colonel Ratwatte, paid homage to the Sacred Tooth Relic "to mark the liberation of Jaffna from the grip of LTTE terrorists and the hoisting of the National Flag in Jaffna". The Mahanayake Thera of Malwatte, Ven. Rambukwella Sri Vipassi and the Mahanayake of Asgiriya, Ven. Palipane Sri Chandananda chanted *seth pirith*. They were conducted to the *hewisi mandapaya* by the Diyawadana Nilame, Neranjan Wijeyeratne.

During the peace talks with the

L.T.T.E., the *Maha Sangha* was far from happy over the P.A.'s policies on the National Question.

Choosing her words cleverly, President Kumaratunga described the victory in Jaffna as "the first step in the battle for peace". Peace was the ultimate objective since the intrinsic nature of the problem — the ethnic conflict — demanded "a political solution".

By thrashing the L.T.T.E. militarily, the Sri Lankan state had taught the L.T.T.E. a simple lesson. It could not achieve its ultimate objective through armed struggle. Without alienating the national minorities, Chandrika Kumaratunga was presented to the electorate by the P.A. think-tanks as "the peace candidate". Why? Apart from the fact that the war was bleeding the national economy, the "numbers game" that dominates electoral politics, requires a major party to have substantial backing from the minorities — Tamils, Muslims, Christians. This "law" applies to the main conservative party the U.N.P. as well as to its rival. But post-independence electoral politics show that the U.N.P. starts with a higher irreducible minimum than its rival — which of course explains why the SLFP, its traditional rival, is tempted to form "united fronts" or pre-election coalitions. Thus, "Comrade" Chandrika's smart move to discard her fashionably "pinko" Sorbonne gown and move towards the centre — "negotiated peace" on the separatist conflict, "free market policies" on the field of economics, meaning the acceptance of the IMF "structural adjustment" strategy but with a "human face", a necessary salute to "socialism". By these "adjustments" founded on the electoral arithmetic of domestic politics, and to the basic dictates of the donor community and the aid agencies, Candidate Chandrika won a spectacular victory, well over 62% of the total votes.

She had a price to pay — hardline Sinhala-Buddhist opinion which opposed her devolution/regional autonomy package. The armed forces and OPERATION RIVIRESA (Sunshine) has helped her win back the lost ground. But by that same logic, she has lost the Tamil coalition, starting with the main parliamentary party, the TULF. There the situation stands — until the military operation in the East decides the balance of Tamil-Muslim-Sinhala opinion in that province.

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The Economic Burden

Mark Nicholson

The single-mindedness of the Sri Lankan government in its military drive to evict the separatist Tamil Tigers from their Jaffna stronghold and the risks to this enterprise are evident in the budget.

What Mr G. Peiris, deputy finance minister, called the "compelling need to intensify military operations" will leave a budget deficit this year of 9.3 per cent of gross domestic product, against a targeted 7.5 per cent. High defence spending will keep the budgeted shortfall near 8 per cent next year, with Rs 38 bn (£455m) set aside for military costs (4.9 per cent of estimated 1996 GDP).

Two military campaigns against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam since summer, the latest a three-week-old push towards the Tiger-held Jaffna city, have placed what Mr Lakshman Kadirgamar, Sri Lanka's foreign minister, this week called a "horrendous burden" on the island's small economy.

"But," he said, "there are things you have to do, even if you can't quite afford them."

Sri Lanka can barely afford its latest war. Claiming no scope existed for deep spending cuts and that few other sources of revenue were available, Mr Peiris has banked on earning Rs 21 bn from state asset sales and other forms of "public sector reform" next year.

But, a Colombo-based economist said: "It depends almost entirely on privatisation proceeds. If they don't come through, it could be really explosive. The government would have no choice but printing money and inflation."

Raising such a sum from a privatisation programme which last year garnered just Rs 2.6 bn of a targeted Rs 13 bn will be difficult. The figure is almost twice that which the previous United National Party administration managed through its own

state asset sales over five years between 1989 and 1994. The People's Alliance coalition government must also contend with likely union opposition to the sales, the danger of political opposition from leftist parties within the ruling coalition and a listless stock market currently devoid of buying interest.

There are other risks, military and political, to the government's expensive armed drive in the north. The first arises in actually securing Jaffna from the Tigers, the apparent goal of the offensive.

The broad political aim is to deprive the LTTE of its logistical base and the symbolism of holding territory in the name of a *de facto* Tamil homeland.

At the same time, President Chandrika Kumaratunge wants to persuade the LTTE and the island's Tamils in general that they have no option but to back devolution proposals tabled in August, while satisfying hard-line members of Sri Lanka's majority Sinhala population that she has done what she can to quash the LTTE as a military force.

The Sri Lankan army has been camped for more than a week on the outskirts of Jaffna city, moving forward cautiously, defusing mines laid by the Tigers. Entering Jaffna may be a political necessity, but military analysts believe a danger exists that the final thrust could incur far higher army casualties as troops encounter booby-traps and tough street-by-street fighting in a city the Tigers have held for more than four years.

Holding Jaffna could also be costly, leaving the army vulnerable to guerrilla fighting at which the LTTE has shown it excels over the 12 years of the island's ethnic conflict.

There is also the question of whether, and how, the political benefits of a victory in Jaffna will actually infuse energy into Mrs Kumaratunge's ambitious devolution

proposals, which would create a form of federalism giving Tamils in the north and east, and other regions in the island, elected Regional Councils with considerable governing autonomy.

These proposals need a two-thirds majority in parliament before moving to national referendum. Proponents of the devolution package suggest a notional timetable for the proposals which would see them debated in parliament in the first quarter of next year, voted on by April or May, leading, they hope, to the first regional council elections before the end of next year.

But while the far-reaching devolution proposals have secured support from Tamil and Moslem parties, the main opposition UNP has yet to offer the support Mrs Kumaratunge requires. Its leaders say the party is unlikely to back the proposals without significant amendments.

Neither is it clear that any military success in the north would necessarily spur their support. "At the moment, one can't see the political and military sides of the government's strategy coming together," says an independent political analyst in Colombo. "For the next few months, it seems both wheels will spin separately."

If so, then uncertainty may continue to cloud both Sri Lanka's political and security position for several months, even if the army plants a flag in the centre of Jaffna. Many economists, businessmen and certainly brokers on the Colombo stock exchange believe this will keep domestic and, particularly, foreign investors on the sidelines, where they have stood for much of this year.

That would bode ill for Mr Peiris' highly ambitious privatisation plan. "It's good that privatisation is finally gathering pace," says one Colombo equity analyst. "The trouble is it will keep hitting a brick wall of bad sentiment."

(Financial Times)

Winning the War

Mark Nicholson and Mervyn de Silva report on the war

A Tiger withdrawal or defeat in Jaffna would be a grave strategic, logistical and political blow. They have run the city and much of the northern Jaffna peninsula as a *de facto* mini-state for the past four years. "Jaffna would be a significant loss," said a diplomat in Colombo. "It would make the difference between the Tigers being a territorial, pseudo-government or a guerrilla movement on the run."

For the government of President Chandrika Kumaratunge, by contrast, capture of the strategic prize could be the best — some might say only — piece of good news since she took power in November last year with a 62 per cent vote backing her determination to forge peace with the Tamil separatists.

Having invested so much in engaging the Tigers in peace talks earlier this year, her government lost support and credibility when the Tigers walked out in April. "It looked to many people that she'd been duped," said one diplomat.

Since April, though, Mrs Kumaratunge's administration has hardened its approach. Operation sunrise is the second heavy military assault in the north since summer. And her strategy has now evolved into a two-track process; to hurt and weaken the LTTE in Jaffna militarily, while continuing to push her

government's recent set of proposals to address the Tamils' demands for separate state by turning Sri Lanka into more of a federation.

The detailed devolution proposals are currently inching through parliamentary committees and will eventually require a two-thirds majority — which Mrs Kumaratunge's party and its immediate allies do not command — and a national referendum. There has been predictable opposition to the proposals from extremist groups and Buddhist priests within the majority Sinhala community, but Sri Lankan officials maintain there is "basic consensus" for the proposals.

Having already tried talks, and with a far-reaching constitutional "solution" on the table, Sri Lankan officials believe Mrs Kumaratunge has secured at least international sympathy, if not backing, for the assault on Jaffna. Domestically, however, her government's political momentum would now seem to rest on securing Jaffna and demonstrably weakening the Tigers leaving them no alternative but to return to the negotiating table.

* * * *

This prize is far from won, however, and most analysts believe Mrs Chandrika and,

particularly, her armed forces, will need both nerve and luck in the next days and weeks. The monsoon rains in northern Sri Lanka, which last until after Christmas, have already begun and though military commanders say it will be another two weeks before the heaviest rains set in, analysts believe the army will need to have broken through to Jaffna before then.

So far the military's progress has, in the view of independent analysts, been more successful than in previous campaigns.

Both the government and army are also making much of what they claim is the Tigers' "desperation" in launching brutal massacres on Sinhalese villages in the north and east. More than 30 civilians were hacked to death in the latest incident recently.

The Tigers have not claimed responsibility for these atrocities, but few doubt them to be their inspiration. The strategy appears to be to try and divert army forces from the fighting in the north to protect villages in the east, while also attempting to spark bloody reprisals across Sri Lanka in the hope of burying in violence Mrs Kumaratunge's attempts to build political consensus around her devolution proposals.

(Financial Times)

Censorship now meaningless — Editors' Guild

The present press censorship imposed by the government on the ongoing war has become meaningless, as the Colombo based foreign press has been excluded from it the Editors' Guild of Sri Lanka has said in a press release.

The Guild points out that it would be more sensible to take the media into the confidence of those concerned and ensure that full coverage of the war and its consequences are made possible without damage to the national interest, rather than resort to a censorship which is both patchy and unreasonable.

The full text of the press release is as follows.

Editors' Guild, committed to press freedom and its defence and mindful of the demands of national security in the context of the ongoing armed conflict, has discussed the prevailing censorship and its implications.

Given the sensitivity of the issues involved the Guild has studied all the aspects of the matter. Above all, we have kept the national interest in mind.

We believe that the current crisis demands a well informed public served by a responsible press. While the

publication of security related news should not damage national security interests, any censorship that may become necessary must be handled with a sense of equity and professionalism which has been sadly lacking in many instances.

The Colombo based foreign press has been excluded from the present censorship. With a section of the population having access to uncensored foreign reports via foreign newspapers and journals, satellite dishes and other means, much of the present censorship has become meaningless. It would be more sensible for those concerned to take the media into their confidence and ensure that the fullest possible reporting of the war and its consequences is made possible without damage to the national interest, rather than resort to a censorship which has proved to be both patchy and unreasonable.

We are confident that the media will fully cooperate with such an arrangement the results of which will best serve the interests of the public and the country. We urge the authorities to consider these representations and find a via media that will ensure the interests of all concerned.

Jaffna : Will History Repeat Itself ?

— Lt. General V. R. Raghavan

The LTTE has failed to stop the second offensive by the Sri Lankan armed forces. At the time of writing (31 October), the Lankan forces were poised to begin the final offensive on Jaffna, the headquarters of the Tamil dominated northern Sri Lankan province. The Sri Lankans need to capture a few more towns on the approach to Jaffna before making the final assault. Given their recent successes and the LTTE's inability to stand up to the frontal assault by government forces, which are using combat aircraft, tanks, armoured personnel carriers and heavy artillery, military analysts feel it is only a matter of time before Jaffna falls. However, the Sri Lankan armed forces have been using inordinate force in their drive towards Jaffna, causing very high collateral damage. Civilian areas have been shelled and bombed to an unprecedented extent. The Indian Army's Sri Lankan operations were mild compared to this. Several thousand Sri Lankan Tamils have been displaced, and the fleeing Tamil civilians are without food, water or medical supplies. Jaffna, according to some reports, has become a ghost town. All this is unlikely to help in the implementation of the political package for Sri Lanka's Tamil population. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that although the Indian Army during its Sri Lanka operations in the late 1980s had managed to take control of the major towns, the LTTE had escaped to the jungles and mingled with the local Tamil population. It had taken the Indian upwards of four Army divisions to keep the peace. What had followed was a phase of protracted regular army versus guerrilla warfare. Question is will history repeat itself?

The two decades old Tamil separatist conflict in Sri Lanka seems poised to enter a new phase. The popularly elected President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, started the major initiative by first announcing a political package. It devolved considerable powers to the states, apart from guaranteeing the continuation of the unique status of the Tamil peoples of Sri Lanka. While most political groups accepted the package with some reservations, the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) rejected it altogether. This was not in the least surprising in view of the LTTE's known reluctance to participate in any elections, other than on terms which would ensure its complete majority. A few rounds of talks were also held between the government and the LTTE, which not unexpectedly, failed to produce any results. In the interim the LTTE shot down military aircraft, hit some naval ships, and launched other well planned attacks against the government forces to make its dominant military position known. Those in India, who have had the experience of LTTE's skill in using negotiations to gain its military ends, had foreseen the outcome even as the new Sri Lankan Government took the first steps to find a solution to the problem. That the LTTE would force the Government to take to military operations was anticipated. The nature of the Sri Lankan military response, however, came as a surprise.

The LTTE controls the towns and the countryside in northern Sri Lanka. Its control is evident in the inability of the government forces to move freely, as also in the tough combat actions necessary even to approach the principle town of Jaffna. The Sri Lanka army is operating with the support of combat aircraft, armoured personnel carriers, artillery and under the cover of censorship of all news connected with military operations. Unfortunately this perfect military approach to a socio political problem, would in all probability lead to greater problems in the future. The Sri Lankan army has greatly enhanced its capabilities in manpower, equipment and morale. It is to the credit of Sri Lanka's political and military leadership that this has been brought about so soon. On the other hand, the LTTE would like nothing better than to have the army strung out in the Jaffna Peninsula, in the vast Vanni forests, and in the eastern provinces extending from the port city of Trincomalee to the Tamil-Muslim areas of Batticaloa. An army that can move and hit, and keep moving, is a menace to militants. Unfortunately, few armies in history have done it for long. The Sri Lankan army with its weaponry may before long, succeed in taking Jaffna and other towns. After that, it will need to defend the same towns by hundreds of military posts, patrols, and other deployment and become a static force. The last few years saw the army

blockading the northern areas from mainland Sri Lanka. After taking these areas, it will have to maintain the population and itself by road and rail transport. It will soon become vulnerable to all the risks a scattered army in a defensive role is faced with. The LTTE will then come into its own and impose heavy attrition on the army, leading to the expected response of more operations and resultant civilian casualties. The Sri Lankan government will then face a long drawn occupation of the northern areas and the added burden of human rights and international opprobrium.

During its peace keeping efforts in the area, India had to use upwards of four army divisions and para military forces. Sri Lanka will perhaps need more, and over many more years. Its costs would be heavier in military terms, and incalculable in political terms. The LTTE would target not only the army in the Northern areas, but also the civilians in mainland Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan military option would also exacerbate the Tamil refugees problem in the southern Indian states. This gloomy scenario may change dramatically, if the LTTE supremo is removed from the scene by a chance combat action, or, through an internal coup. Unfortunately democracies do not normally have such luck.

(SAPRA INDIA Monthly Bulletin)

Sri Lanka's distant refugees

The Clinton administration, the NATO allies and the United Nations have made strenuous efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to the victims of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and to foster a negotiated peace among the warring parties. These efforts were justified not only on ethical grounds, but also because of the demonstration effect that can be expected from successful peacemaking or protracted war in the Balkans.

But even if international exertions for peace in the Balkans succeed, the precedent will be wasted unless the peacemakers demonstrate that their work is not dictated by a double standard.

On the idyllic island of Sri Lanka today,

a reported half-million Tamil refugees are fleeing troops of the central government, homeless and exposed to monsoon rains, falling sick and dying from disease. The Sri Lankan government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga has insisted that it be the entity to distribute international humanitarian aid, complaining that non-governmental organisations have permitted relief supplies to benefit the secessionist Tamil movement known as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Since most of the refugees who fled the government forces closing in on the northern city of Jaffna are now in territory controlled by the Tigers, relief supplies channeled through the government could not help those in need, whatever the intentions of the government.

Because the war zone has been closed to reporters and cameras, the human calamity visited upon the Tamils has become a tree falling unheard in the forest. Yet theirsuffering in as grievous as that of refugees in the former Yugoslavia.

For the sake of a single human standard, the United States and other governments should insist that humanitarian aid to refugees be delivered under international supervision. There is also a need for outside parties willing to help broker a ceasefire and a negotiated peace between the Tamil minority and the Sri Lankan government. As in Bosnia, millions of civilians must be saved from the madness of their leaders.

(Boston Globe)

JAFFNA SETBACK

Serious or Temporary

Michael Drudge (VOA)

The Sri Lankan government is waging a propaganda war to complement its military offensive against Tamil separatist guerrillas. Correspondent Michael Drudge reports from Colombo that truth has become one of the war's victims.

Text: Media observers say Sri Lankan government television has begun resorting to disinformation in its reporting on the war against Tamil Tiger guerrillas.

A government television news broadcast Monday quoted Tamil Tiger commander Velupillai Prabhakaran saying the military takeover of the northern Jaffna peninsula was a serious setback for the rebel movement.

In truth, commander Prabhakaran called the loss of Jaffna only a temporary setback.

The government newscast said commander Prabhakaran's reference to peace negotiations was a sign of Tamil Tiger weakness. In reality, he simply rejected any negotiations as long as the army occupies Jaffna.

The broadcast also said commander Prabhakaran had been interviewed by the Tamil language service of the British Broadcasting Corporation. Actually, he had given a speech on rebel radio and a copy of the text had been sent to the BBC.

Observers say the television newscast was but the latest instance of government media officials hedging the truth.

The military press office on Saturday issued a statement that the Tamil Tigers had used gas on troops, implying it was a chemical weapons attack. Only later did military sources admit the gas in question had been tear gas.

The government continues to ban reporters from the northern war zone. The State Information Department had out video and still photographs produced by the Sri Lankan army. Information is provided by fax.

The government is also forbidding reporters to visit camps where hundreds of thousands of civilians have fled to escape the fighting.

Sri Lankan media are subject to military censorship. The local cable operator even blacks out stories about Sri Lanka that appear on foreign television news channels.

Lucien Rajakarunanayake is a prominent Sri Lankan journalist and member of the free media movement. He thinks the government faces a credibility gap:

"I think there is a major credibility gap as a result of censorship about the problem of refugees or displaced persons as the government officials would like to call them. One does not know how they are being fed, one does not know how they are being sheltered, so as a result of censorship, that essential truth doesn't come to the people and that is very much part of war".

The Indian Mediation Moves

Humayun Kabir

A. P. Venkateswaran, India's new Foreign Secretary, endeavoured in early 1986 to redefine the Delhi Accord in favour of the Tamils. However, soon the mediatory role of India underwent a change as the Indian side started negotiating with the Sri Lankan government virtually on behalf of the Tamil minority of the island. Also, this role was upgraded with the involvement of India's politicians in the peace process. P. Chidambaram, India's Minister of State for Personnel, and Natwar Singh, the Minister of State for External Affairs, were sent to Colombo three times in 1986 in an effort to persuade the Sri Lankan government to meet some of the Tamil demands by moving beyond the Delhi Accord. But the sticking point was the LTTE demand for the creation of a Tamil ethno-region by merging the Eastern province with the Northern. During the second SAARC summit at the Indian city of Bangalore in November 1986 there were efforts to break the deadlock. These efforts were continued by the two Indian Ministers during the last of their three visits to Colombo on 17-19 December 1986. They proposed a formula which envisaged carving a Tamil linguistic entity out of the existing Eastern province, enhancing the Tamils' political strength. This was to be done by excising the Sinhala-dominated Amparai electorate from the Eastern province. According to this proposal, which came to be known as the 19 December proposal, the demographic pattern of the east would change the percentage representation of Tamils 42, Muslims 33 and Sinhalese 25 to Tamils 48, Muslims 37 and Sinhalese 14.¹³⁷ President Jayewardene agreed to this proposal. But in the face of reservations of some of his colleagues in the Cabinet and the ruling UNP as well as stiff opposition from the SLFP and the Buddhist clergy he was forced to renege on it.

What was remarkable in the whole process of mediation was that India always put pressure on the Sri Lankan government to progressively give ground to accommodating Tamil demands while never doing the same on the Tamil side. This had at least two effects on the Sinhala mind. The first was the impression that India was not an impartial mediator as its position appeared to be favouring the Sri Lanka Tamils, and the second was that since India never attempted to know the bottom line of the Tamil, particularly LTTE, position, the latter never budged from its maximalist demand for Eelam.

While playing the role of a mediator, India also resorted to pressure tactics that were brought to bear upon the government of Sri Lanka.¹³⁸ This took the form of covert intervention or 'destabilisation through surrogates', and of exerting pressure on Sri Lanka at the international level. India gave sanctuary, arms, training and financial succour to Tamil rebels who waged their secessionist war against the state of Sri Lanka. Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa accused India in 1984 of interfering in Sri Lanka's internal affairs and preventing his country from finding a solution for its ethnic unrest.¹³⁹ President Jayewardene complained about India providing arms to the Tamil rebels.¹⁴⁰ In a protest note to India, to government of Sri Lanka averred: "... It is equally well-known that such terrorist challenge stems from a movement which has logistical, training and operational base facilities, propagandist mechanisms and a sanctuary in the territory of the state of Tamil Nadu".¹⁴¹ Although the Indian authorities had always denied the existence of such rebel camps and arms training,¹⁴² it had been common knowledge then as well as it is now¹⁴³ that India did keep these as a policy option in order to exercise control over the Tamil rebels.

(To be Continued)

Notes

136. (Contd.) (4) recognition of the right to full citizenship and other fundamental democratic rights of all Tamils, who look upon the Island as their country. For the texts of the statements of 12 and 13 July 1985, see *Mainstream*, New Delhi, Vol. 23, No. 49, 3 August 1985, p. 26.
137. *The Hindu*, Madras, 20 December 1986.
138. One Sri Lankan commentator wrote: "India has, over a considerable period of time, carried on a sustained campaign against Sri Lanka through surrogate forces or agents-provocateurs. Pretending to act as an honest broker she has misused her mediatory role to the disadvantage of the legitimate government of the island and worked towards her own aggressive purposes in the region". *Island*, Colombo, 22 June 1987.
139. "India utters untruths about Sri Lanka, encourages the guerrillas and interferes in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka," he said. *International Herald Tribune*, 17 December 1984. In 1987 he said, "everyone has come to recognise who the cunning parents [of Tamil militants] are, who sheltered and who armed those mischievous murderous miscreants". *Bangladesh Observer*, Dhaka, 14 October 1987.
140. In an interview given to *India Today* he said: "Help is coming from India. Their weapons are coming from India. We have found their weapons with Indian markings." *India Today*, New Delhi, 15 December 1985, p. 38. In a statement made to ABC's South Asia correspondence in April 1986 President Jayewardene said that if India stopped helping the rebels based in South India, there would be no terrorist movement in Sri Lanka. *Daily News*, Colombo, 16 April 1986.
141. For the text of the Note see, *Sunday Observer*, Colombo, 2 March 1986.
142. See for example the denial by A.A. Rahim, India's Minister of State for External Affairs. He stated in Parliament: "... We have conveyed to the Sri Lankan Government that there are no caches of arms or training camps on Indian territory...". *Lok Sabha Debates*, Seventh Series, Vol. XLVI, No. 29, 3 April 1984, Col. 404.
143. A.B. Vajpayee, a prominent Indian opposition leader said in 1991 that "LTTE, which is suspected to be behind the brutal act [Rajiv Gandhi's assassination], was armed and encouraged by the Congress (I) government". *Indian Express*, 03 June 1991.

India and the Ethnic Crisis in Sri Lanka

Bipattaran Ghosh

Ethno-political problems often get aggravated when externalised. Extra-regional linkages of ethnic groups make the problem more complicated by bringing the outside elements in the vortex of what could otherwise be regarded as an internal affair of a state. Though interstate ethnopolitical tensions are not difficult to come by elsewhere, 'South Asia which is a intricate kaleidoscope of ethno-political groups creating one of the most complex webs of inter ethnic interactions in the world',¹ offers a typical example of a region afflicted with such crises. In the case of Sri Lanka the crisis was generated out of the Tamil discontent and the resultant secessionist movement. By the irony of circumstances, India, was cast in the role of a mediator in the conflict between the Tamils and the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka. The object of the present paper is to analyse this role of India taking into consideration different aspects of the issue, i.e., why and how India got entangled with the problem and how she responded to this mediating responsibility and with what measure of success.

Sri Lanka (until 1972 known as Ceylon) has been a multiracial, multi-religious and multi-lingual 'plural society'.² The two major communities — the Sinhalese and the Tamils — in spite of a long history of coexistence failed in developing any cultural fusion. This has seriously impeded the nation building process. During British rule the Tamils enjoyed preponderance, particularly in the service sector, education, professions and the economy. This preponderance was disproportionate to their numerical strength, thanks to the cunning British policy of 'divide and rule'. The frustration of the majority Sinhalese community found expression after independence in the assertion of the claim to their 'rightful place'. By making use of their numerical superiority they aimed at establishing their dominance in economic and political matters. As has been pointed out by A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi, "The democratic instrument of majority rule was thus translating a cultural plurality into the hegemony of one group".³ Attempts were made to portray Sri Lankan nationalism

as coterminous with the majority Sinhalese Buddhist community. Even the secular and progressive elements of the Sinhalese community had ultimately to yield to the fanatics resulting in the marginalisation of the significant minority Tamil community and reinforcing the alienation of its psyche.

The Sinhalese Buddhist drive for hegemony was revealed in the wake of independence in passing the citizenship and disenfranchisement laws of 1948-49 which virtually rendered a large number of the Indian Tamils (also known as the plantation Tamils whose ancestors had been brought by the British in the 19th century from South India as labourers to work on the coffee and the tea plantations) stateless and denied them voting rights. It was followed by declaring Sinhalese as the State language and conferring special status on Buddhism. The Tamil demand for greater regional autonomy and devolution of power failed to evoke favourable response from the Sinhalese ruling elite. On the contrary measures were taken to alter the demographic composition of the northern and eastern parts of the island by making arrangements for the settlement of non-Tamils in these regions which had traditionally been regarded as the natural habitat of the Tamils. The merit-based admission policy in the educational institutions, particularly in professional courses, was replaced by a system of weightage in favour of the Sinhalese students and a quota system much to the detriment of the interests of the Tamils. The Tamils, who used to occupy large chunk of the government employment, were removed from their position of advantage.⁴ The cumulative result of all these and other discriminatory measures was the generation of a strong sense of deprivation in the mind of the Tamils. They began to feel that their just demands were being deliberately ignored and that their concern for their own community was treated as parochial while the same of the Sinhalese was hailed as patriotic. The Tamils demanded the removal of the discriminatory measures and carried on movements through constitutional means. The response of the Sinhalese community to all these was one of outright rejection of what the Tamils considered

their just demands. It progressively hardened the attitude of the Tamils. As the moderate leaders failed to realise the just demands of the Tamil community, the radical Tamil elements ultimately declared that their aspirations could be achieved only in a separate sovereign independent homeland in the island and they waged an armed struggle for its achievement. The too late too little concessions granted by the Government of Sri Lanka failed to bring back the discontented Tamil radical leadership to the main-stream. Thus, the Sri Lankan political system was thrown in a legitimacy crisis and the country was plunged into protracted civil war.

The ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka offers a classic case where the ideology of 'nationhood' contrived by the dominant groups and the ideology of 'independence' held by the lesser groups eventually seek extra-constitutional and extra-territorial remedies.⁵ The Government of Sri Lanka, largely dominated by the Sinhalese, the champions of Sri Lankan nationalism, are used to have recourse to extra-constitutional measures to tackle the crisis generated by Tamil discontent, while the Tamils often looked at India for support in their struggle for a separate homeland. However, India had all along considered the ethnic issue essentially an internal problem of Sri Lanka. Of course, she had got to be involved in the matters of the plantation Tamils of Sri Lanka and she concluded three pacts (Nehru-Kotelawala Pact of 1954, Shastri-Sirimavo Pact of 1964 and Indira-Sirimavo Agreement of 1974). But these pacts did not involve the ethnic Tamils of Sri Lanka nor were they related to a conflict situation. Even though the ethnic riots involving the Sinhalese and the Sri Lanka Tamils had taken place at regular intervals since 1965 India did not go beyond issuing a customary statement expressing its concern.⁶ During the Janata rule Prime Minister Morarji Desai, under the pressure of domestic public opinion, had sent Mr. S.A. Chidambaram to Sri Lanka to study the situation after a riot broke out there in 1977. However, it was reported by the emissary that the riot was merely an internal disturbance of Sri Lanka and did not have an anti-India tenor. It helped relaxing the tension between the two countries. Anyway, it was

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in the wake of the July 1983 riot⁷ when the Sinhalese wrath fell upon both the ethnic and plantation Tamils and the crisis was internationalized that India became directly involved in the controversy. It was partly the failure of Sri Lanka to solve the ethnic problem within national polity that finally brought India into the picture.⁸

The riot that followed the killing of thirteen Sinhalese soldiers by the Tamil extremists in 1983 exposed the helplessness of the defenceless Tamil civilians and the inability (and perhaps lack of sincere efforts as well) of the government to protect the life and property of the Tamils. Behind this anti-Tamil program the hand of the government itself was not very much concealed.⁹ Pressures were mounted on the Government of India not to remain indifferent to the plight of the Tamils in Sri Lanka and the measures recommended ranged from reminding the Government of Sri Lanka of its obligation to protect the life and property of the minority community to a Cyprus-like solution¹⁰ of the problem of Bangladesh-type intervention by India.¹¹

India asserted that she had a stake in the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka, that it was no longer absolutely an internal problem of the island country, and that it was a matter of concern for both India and Sri Lanka. Smt. Indira Gandhi told President Jayawardene in 1983 that 'India could not be regarded as just another country'.¹² In India's perception she has legitimate reasons to be concerned about what happens in Sri Lanka as "history records the closest ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural links"¹³ between the two countries. Besides, an inevitable fall-out of the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka is the influx of a large number of Tamil refugees in India thereby creating socio-political problems and imposing a heavy burden on her already overburdened economy.

Further, the geo-political realities of the South-Asian region envisaged a prominent role for India particularly after the dismemberment of Pakistan in the early seventies. Her acknowledged pivotal role¹⁴ made the regional security, in her perception, an Indian concern and she expected that the neighbouring countries should adjust their security concerns to the larger context of the security of the Indian subcontinent of which India was practically the sole custodian.¹⁵ This view, which came to be known as India's Monroe Doctrine, thus emphasized the con-

cept of strategic unity of South Asia which considered Sri Lanka to be an organic part of India's defence calculations. India's perception was that "as long as Sri Lanka is friendly or neutral India has nothing to worry about but if there be any danger of the island falling under the domination of a power hostile to India, India cannot tolerate such a situation endangering her territorial integrity".¹⁶

Some initiatives taken by the Government of Sri Lanka also sent adverse signals to the policy makers in the South Block about the intention of that country. Thus, in modification of an earlier decision the Sri Lankan Government, which came to power following the election held in 1977, lifted the ban on the foreign naval vessels calling at Trincomalee and signed an agreement to provide rest and recreation facilities to the US military personnel there¹⁷. India was concerned that Trincomalee should not be in the hands of any of her adversaries. Aware of the interests of the big powers in having a foothold in the Indian ocean she considered this action of the Government of Sri Lanka as a serious threat to her vital national interest. Again, in 1981 the Government of Sri Lanka decided to lease out oil storage tanks at Trincomalee to a western consortium. It aroused suspicions of India that American warships would gain access to such facilities and that Sri Lanka was getting increasingly enmeshed in the US strategic initiatives in the Indian Ocean.¹⁸ Moreover, when Sri Lanka expanded the existing broadcasting facilities enjoyed by the Voice of America by an agreement of 1983, India apprehended that these facilities might be used for acquiring and transmitting strategic information and military communications. Other moves of the Government of Sri Lanka which had hurt Indian feelings included the requisition of the services of the Mossad (Israeli Intelligence Agency), hiring out the mercenaries from the British commando organization Keeny Meany Services, taking help from Pakistan to train the special task-force and purchasing military hardware from Pakistan, South Africa, China and South Korea in addition to what could be bought in the international arms market. Expressing its resentment the Government of India declared, "We totally disapprove of it and take a serious view of the matter".¹⁹ She dropped a hint to the effect that Sri Lanka would be risking a conflict with India if her arms shopping spree was purported to deal with the Tamil insurgents. In fact, she did not want that any of her small

neighbours should build up large arsenals or establish military relationships with other powers. Reacting to Sri Lanka's frantic effort to enrich her arsenal India cautioned other states that "granting of military assistance would be regarded by Delhi as an action unfriendly towards India".²⁰

India's policy towards Sri Lanka offers an example of how domestic political compulsions influence the formulation and conduct of foreign policy, the phenomenon which had been identified as 'linkage politics' by James Rosenau.²¹ The Tamils of South India and those of Sri Lanka have close affinity among themselves. The emotional attachment of the Tamils in India with their Sri Lankan brethren remains a reality which can hardly be ignored.²² It has added an internal compulsion for the Government of India to get involved in what is technically an internal problem of Sri Lanka, thus giving it an external dimension. In fact, different regional parties of Tamils Nadu vied with each other for championing the cause of the Sri Lankan Tamils and "for acceptance in their own state as patrons of the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka".²³ Naturally they would put pressure on the Government of India to come to the rescue of the Sri Lankan Tamils whenever the latter would fall victim to the Sinhalese outrage. And, as has been aptly stated by Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, "with emotions running rather high in Tamil Nadu over alleged Sri Lanka's handling of ethnic crisis, it is not easy for any Indian decision maker to ignore the intensity of feelings in Tamil Nadu".²⁴ It became evident particularly after the holocaust of 1983. The Indian National Congress led by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had fared badly in the election of January 1983 in the southern states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

One might perhaps mention another factor. After all relations between countries, in spite of being based on objective perception of what is called national interest, have a subjective dimension where personal equations of elites possibly come to play a role. This element can be more perceived than measured. It was noticed that Indo-Sri Lankan relations suffered a relative setback when Kotelawala and Nehru were in the helm of affairs in their respective countries. The intensity of their differences was attributed by some observers to their personal incompatibility with each other rather than to the clash of interests between the two countries.²⁵

The situation underwent a dramatic change when S.W.R.D. Bandarnaik, who had a very warm and friendly relationship with Nehru, came to power in 1956. Improved relations at the personal level between Mrs. Sirimavo Bandarnaik and Mrs. Indira Gandhi also helped smoothen many rough edges of Indo-Sri Lankan relations. Similarly Mr. Morarji Desai and Mr. J.R. Jayawardene could build up a warm personal rapport the reflection of which was noticed in the improved bilateral relations.

Anyway, India willy nilly had to be entangled in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. She had delicate task ahead of her. First, she had to ensure that the just demands of the Tamils were not ignored and that they could live in the island with dignity, equal rights and privileges with the Sinhalese community and that their cultural identity was not threatened. This was consistent with her traditional policy of supporting the cause of the oppressed minorities, democracy and human rights. Secondly, India had to assure the Sinhalese community that she was not at all interested in the dismemberment of the country. Actually India had reasons not to be interested in the formation of a sovereign independent Tamil State in the island because further division of a small country like Sri Lanka would go against the spirit of times.²⁶ There was also doubt about the viability of the contemplated state for the Tamils. Geopolitically also it was in India's interest to ensure that the unity, integrity and political independence of Sri Lanka was preserved and that she pursued a nonaligned foreign policy. Reiterating India's stand that she did not believe in separatism Mr. Khurshid Alam Khan, the Minister of State for External Affairs, stated in the Lok Sabha on 29th April 1985 that India has an abiding interest in maintaining the sovereignty, integrity and unity of Sri Lanka.²⁷

Thirdly, the Government of India had a compulsion arising out of domestic politics to convince the Tamils of India that it was not indifferent to the sufferings of the Tamils of Sri Lanka and that she was eager to see that they got their rightful place in the island country. Finally, she had to satisfy herself that the strategic interests and her preeminence and pivotal position in the region were not threatened.

It is in the light of these objectives that India's role in solving the ticklish ethnic problem of Sri Lanka has to be judged.

As it has already been pointed out, India did not directly entangle herself in the problem until 1983. So she urged upon the Government of Sri Lanka "for accommodation of legitimate Tamil grievances within the framework of Sri Lanka's integrity and unity".²⁸ She contended that it was a political problem and that only a determined pursuit of the political process of consultations and mutual accommodation could lead to a constructive solution.²⁹ On her part also she attempted a peaceful and negotiated settlement through quiet and sincere mediatory efforts. She preferred to play the role of a broker and a catalyst.³⁰

India's mediatory efforts were not initially well received by Sri Lanka. She considered India's action as an unjust interference in her internal affairs. India was also accused of pursuing a dual role of a mediator and at the same time fomenting the ethnic trouble by providing money, materials, shelter and training facilities to the Tamil insurgents on her soil. Though the Government of India repeatedly denied this allegation, it failed to convince Colombo. Particularly the provincial government of Tamil Nadu led by Mr. M.G. Ramchandran openly sympathized with the Tamil secessionists of Sri Lanka and the Union Government of India turned a Nelson's eye. India's air dropping of essential commodities for the besieged Tamil people of Jaffna peninsula in 1986 in the wake of Sri Lanka's refusal to allow the Indian flotilla with such items to enter into her territorial sea was condemned by Sri Lanka as a flagrant violation of her sovereignty and a naked exhibition of muscle power by the regional superpower.

However, ultimately Sri Lanka had to acknowledge that India had a serious stake and an inescapable role to play and that without active cooperation of India the hope of solving the ethnic problem would be totally unrealistic. Colombo had to realise the impracticability of a military solution of the problem and her belated understanding that Indian mediation was necessary to persuade the radical Tamil groups to come to the table of negotiation induced her to welcome India as a mediator. International public opinion also stressed India's indispensability for solving the ethnic conflict and the Western powers advised Sri Lanka 'to work through India'.³¹ Perhaps the failure of the Government of Sri Lanka to enlist substantial external assistance and her own internal compulsions also hastened the volte face

in her policy towards India. It resulted in the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement to Establish Peace and Normalcy in Sri Lanka between President Jayawardene and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in July 1987.

The Accord brought about a fundamental change in the role of India in the ethnic problem of Sri Lanka from a mediator or catalyst to an active participant or a third party to the conflict. This kind of mediatory role was being played by India since 1983. The sending of Foreign Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and the Chairman of the Policy planning Committee of the Ministry of External Affairs, Mr. G. Parthasarathi, by Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1983 to Sri Lanka, arranging a dialogue between the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) leader A. Amrithalingam and Hector Jayawardene, the emissary and the brother of President J.R. Jayawardene, in 1983, playing a crucial role in organizing a meeting between the emissary of the Government of Sri Lanka and different Tamil radical groups in Thimpu in 1985, the sending of the Minister of State for External affairs Mr. K. Natwar Singh, Minister of State for Home Mr. P. Chidambaram and the Foreign Secretary Mr. Romesh Bhandari by Mr. Rajiv Gandhi to Colombo for talks with the Government of Sri Lanka in 1986 are just a few of many such attempts by India to promote a negotiated settlement of this vexed problem.

The new role in which India was cast in terms of the Accord of 1987 was a novel one in modern history in the sense that the government of a sovereign independent country invited an outside power to deal with the insurgency of a section of her own population. However, her intervention-on-invitation, instead of solving the problem, made it more complicated. It failed to win the approval of both the Sinhalese and the Tamils.³²

There was nothing to be surprised that change of government in Sri Lanka after the election in late 1988 made the presence of the IPKF more difficult. The new President Premadasa declared that 'the domestic conflict with the Tamil citizens could be resolved ...without any outside interference'.³³ And if one relates the killing of Rajiv Gandhi with India's involvement in the Sri Lankan imbroglio it would appear that the price she had to pay has been enormous.

India ultimately had to withdraw her

forces from Sri Lanka even before the implementation of all the provisions of the Accord (the withdrawal was completed on March 24, 1990), though a face saving announcement was made that the objectives of sending the IPKF had been largely fulfilled. After her withdrawal things are back to a square one. It is now a free-for-all situation, the LTTE continuing its protracted armed struggle for a separate homeland and the Government of Sri Lanka equally determined to thwart such attempt and maintain the unity and integrity of the country.³⁴

Perhaps it would not be of place to mention here that the tragic assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 allegedly by the LTTE activists has caused considerable erosion of the support base of the Sri Lankan Tamil secessionist in South India. It has somewhat reduced the compulsion of New Delhi to be involved in the affairs of her southern neighbour. Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao also assured the new government of Sri Lanka led by Ms. Chandrika Kumartunga that India considers the ethnic problem of Sri Lanka as her domestic problem and that Indian good offices were available, if required.³⁵

Anyway, a close look at the balance-sheet of India's involvement in the ethnic crisis of Sri Lanka would reveal that India's participatory role was less successful than her mediatory role.

Notes and References

1. Bhabani Sengupta, *South Asia Perspectives: Seven Nations in Conflict and Cooperation*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1988, p.2.
2. The term 'plural society' to describe Sri Lanka was first used perhaps by J.S. Furnival in his 'Colonial Policy and Practice' in 1948. See Robert Kearney, 'Ethnic Conflict and the Tamil Separatist Movement in Sri Lanka', *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXV, No. 9, September, 1985.

According to the Census of Population (1981), the total population of Sri Lanka was estimated to be 14.85 million. The percentage of each ethnic community was as follows:

Sinhalese	74.0%
Sri Lanka Tamils	12.6%
Sri Lanka Moors	7.1%
Indian Tamils	5.6%
Malayans	0.3%
Burghers	0.3%
Others	0.2%
Source- <i>Ibid.</i>	

Religion-wise distribution of the population is as follows:

More than 80% of the Sinhalese are Buddhists. More than 80% of the Tamils are Hindus. Almost 100% of the Moors and Malayans are Muslims. The Burghers and the residue of the Sinhalese and Tamils have been predominantly Christians. Christianity

appears to be the only religion which cuts across racial boundaries.

So far as the linguistic profile is concerned English is spoken by a segment of all the communities. The Moors speak Sinhalese or Tamil depending on the area of their habitation. The average Tamil speaks Tamil and average Sinhalese, Sinhalese.

See Urmila Phadnis, *Ethnicity and Nation Building in South Asia*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1989, p. 43.

3. Lodhi asserts that it is misleading to argue that the conflict between the Sinhalese and Tamils of Sri Lanka is a clash of fundamentally different nationalisms rooted in the long standing antagonisms of opposed political communities. He is of opinion that nationalism was promoted to further the class interests of the competing class forces and class divisions became 'socially concretised' as communal divisions.
- For details see A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi, 'Class and Chauvinism in Sri Lanka', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1987, pp. 160-68.
4. An account of the discrimination against the Tamils may be found in Urmila Phadnis, 'Ethnic Groups in the Politics of Sri Lanka' in David Taylor and Malcolm Yapp (eds.), *Political Identity in South Asia*, Curzon Press, London, 1979, pp. 201-05.
 5. C.R. Perumal and R. Thandavan, 'Ethnic Violence in Sri Lanka: Causes and Consequences', *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 50, No. 1, January-March 1989, p. 3.
 6. V.P. Vaidik, 'Ethnic Crisis in Sri Lanka: India's Response' in Satish Kumar (ed.), *Year Book of India's Foreign Policy, 1983-84*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1986, p. 81.
 7. For an account of the riots see Mohan Ram, *Sri Lanka: The Fractured Island*, Penguin, 1989, pp. 31-32; S.L. Tambiah, *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd., London, 1986, pp. 21-33.
 8. Amal Jayawardane, 'Finland vs. Sri Lanka: Use and Misuse of an Analogy' in S.U. Kodikara (ed.), *South Asian Strategic Issue: Sri Lankan Perspectives*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p. 123.
 9. See V.R. Krishna Iyer, 'Tamil Tragedy in Sri Lanka and Contradictory Strategy by India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXIII, Nos. 28 and 29, July 9 and 16, 1988, pp. 1417-18.
 10. See V.P. Vaidik, *n. 6*, p. 82.
 11. See Sri Ram Sharma, *Indian Foreign Policy - Annual Survey: 1973*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1977, p. 60; B. Sengupta (ed.), *Regional Cooperation and Development in South Asia*, Vol. 2, South Asia Publishers, New Delhi, 1986, p. 193; A. Sivarajah, 'Indo-Sri Lanka Relations and Sri Lanka's Ethnic Crisis: The Tamil Nadu Factor' in S.U. Kodikara (ed.), *n. 8*, p. 141.
 12. Quoted in A. Sivarajah, *n. 11*, p. 143.
 13. Gurbachan Singh, 'The Ethnic Problem in Sri Lanka and Indian Attempts at Mediation' in Satish Kumar (ed.), *Year Book on India's Foreign Policy, 1984-85*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1987, p. 122.
 14. India's special role in South Asia as the 'pivotal power' was recognized by the USA. See Bhabani Sengupta, *n. 1*, p. 47.
 15. Shelton U Kodikara, 'The Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of July 1987: Retrospect' in S.U. Kodikara (ed.), *n. 8*, pp. 160-61. Also see Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema,

'Security in South Asia: An Approach' in S.U. Kodikara (ed.), *External Compulsions of South Asian Politics*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 48-49.

16. Ravi Kaul, A former Commander of the Indian Navy, Quoted in Gamini B Keerawella, 'Peace and Security Perceptions of a small State: Sri Lankan Responses to Superpower Naval Rivalry in the Indian Ocean' in S.U. Kodikara (ed.), *n. 8*, p. 180.
 17. However, the veracity of this statement was denied by the USA as 'figment of imagination', *Ibid.*, p. 15.
 18. Urmila Phadnis, *n. 2*, p. 223.
 19. Statement of the Minister of State for External Affairs. Quoted in V.P. Vaidik, *n. 6*, p. 87.
 20. Bhabani Sengupta, *n. 1*, p. 47.
 21. James N Rosenau, *The Scientific Study of Foreign Policy*, The Free Press, New York, 1971, pp. 306-38.
 22. Thus because of the presence of over 50 million Tamils in South India with whom the Lanka Tamils have a strong sense of ethnic affiliation the Sinhalese, though they constitute the majority on the island, 'are psychologically disposed to seeing them in the minority'. See Shaikat Hassan, 'problem of Internal Stability in South Asia' in S.U. Kodikara, *External Compulsions of South Asian Politics*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 268-69. Also see S.L. Tambia, *n. 7*, pp. 92-102.
 23. B. Sengupta (ed.), *Regional Cooperation and Development in South Asia*, Vol. 1, South Asia Publishers, New Delhi, 1986, p. 46; also see S.L. Tambia, *n. 7*, p. 111.
 24. B. Sengupta (ed.), *n. 24*, p. 111.
 25. S.D. Muni, *Pangs of Proximity: India and Sri Lanka's Ethnic Crisis*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 35-36, 73-74.
 26. Sri Ram Sharmak, *n. 11*, p. 60.
 27. For a full version of the statement of the Minister see Gurbachan Sinha, *n. 13*, p. 128.
 28. B. Sengupta (ed.), *n. 24*, p. 196.
 29. Minister of State for External Affairs Mr. Ram Niwas Mirdha's Statement in the Lok Sabha on August 16, 1984, Cited in Satish Kumar (ed.), *n. 13*, p. 246.
- The urgency of arriving at a political solution of the ethnic problem was advocated by some Sinhalese scholars as well. See, for example, Newton Gunasinghe, 'Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: Perceptions and Solutions' in Alavi and Harriss (ed.), *Sociology of Developing Countries: South Asia*, Macmillan, London 1989, pp. 254-55.
30. See Bertram E S J Bastiampillai, 'Ethnic Conflicts in South Asia and Inter-state Relations Especially in relation to Sri Lanka' in S.U. Kodikara, *n. 8*, p. 94.
 31. Kumar Rupesinghe, 'The Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement 1987, and Conflict Resolution in Sri Lanka', *South Asia Journal*, 2.3 (1989), p. 286.
 32. See Bhabani Sengupta, *n. 1*, pp. 251-52.
 33. Pnnalal Dhar, *India, Her Neighbours and Foreign Policy*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1991, p. 100.
 34. However, a truce between the Sri Lankan President Ms. Chandrika Kumartunga and the LTTE Supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran has resulted in a ceasefire between the two contending parties on January 8, 1995. *The Telegraph*, January 9, 1995.
 35. *The Statesman*, September 9, 1994.

Human Rights According to the West

The Western agenda for the 21st century is going to be human rights — but that only means political and civic rights, as these have evolved within Western society. Excluded are economic rights (which would infringe the fundamental tenets of *laissez-faire* political economy), social rights, cultural rights and collective rights.

Jeremy Seabrook

'Democracy', even in the West, has become the management of organised impotence, the art of reconciling people to an unchosen destiny. Underlying a commitment to plurality, diversity and tolerance there is to be no other economic system than that which already exists — a distant reflection of the Old Testament injunction that thou shalt have no other God but me.

The capacity for manipulation even of the most sophisticated electorates in the world was seen in Italy in 1994, when Berlusconi's *Forza Italia*, conjured forth, a phantom of the media, could come from nowhere to form a government of renewal. In the United States less than half the people vote because a majority perceives democracy and politics as mere disputes between members of the possessing classes. When this model, the acme of human self-governance, is exported to the rest of the world, some even stranger mutations are bound to occur.

When democracy becomes devoted to the maintenance of the existing structures of power, the first casualty is, naturally, freedom: for without freedom to imagine, to dare to conceive alternatives — including also alternative ways of answering human need — then what exactly is the nature of the freedom of which democracy is supposed to be defender and guarantor?

It is clear that something called 'freedom of choice' has been offered to the people of the West as a consolation prize for their lost liberties: they can choose anything they like as long as it exists within the global supermarket to which their privilege grants them access. To have traded a version of affluence against freedom is a bargain on which the people of the West have themselves yet to declare their verdict.

The global market has become the cosmos: and outside of its stifling embra-

ce, nothing exists, or may be allowed to exist. This is the essence of the violence of development. Even the global drug barons, with their secretive private armies, who paradoxically exemplify the workings of the market most transparently, are less of a threat to this model of development than indigenous peoples, tribal and forest-dwellers, fishing communities and women who know that not everything can be bought and sold, and who know how to live in peace within the constraints of the resource-base they have.

To set 'freedom to choose' at the heart of our culture, and to deny the possibility of choosing any other way of being in the world is a denial of the 'pluralism' and 'diversity' to which the West asserts its devotion: these are evidently mere ornaments, decorations on the surface of an increasingly showy, image-conscious, appearance-manipulating culture.

It is the same with all the new words that have been assimilated effortlessly into the rhetoric. 'Empowerment', for instance, means the conceding of autonomy without the resources to make it effective; 'decentralisation' likewise is the setting up of lower tiers of administrative control whose capacity for action is cancelled by the vast centralising tendencies of multinational companies, and growing concentrations of wealth and power in the world.

Indeed, the words often mean precisely the opposite of what they say: 'Resource' comes to indicate, not the exhaustible treasures of the earth, but money; 'independence' describes the growing dependence of human beings on money and the market; 'efficiency' means an accelerating melt-down of nature into commodities; 'maintaining our way of life' stands for the conservation of privilege; 'sustainability' was swiftly absorbed, and in the process, came to mean, not the secure husbanding of the fruits of the earth in perpetuity, but keeping intact the present inequitable system. 'Community' is a neighbourhood of strangers; 'participation' is the art of gaining popular acquiescence to the inevitable.

Before we can even begin to discuss the realities of the West within the global system of domination, we have to arm ourselves with a dictionary of Bullshit that will help us unpick the hidden meanings, to interpret a language whose meaning has all the clarity of the Kabbala.

It is clear that the Western agenda for the 21st century is going to be Human Rights. Here is another partial and one-sided story. For it means political and civic rights, as these have evolved within Western society, and which gives the West a moral right to castigate all departures from their own high standards, which are, of course, universal.

This version of human rights cannot concede economic rights because this would infringe the fundamental tenets of *laissez-faire* political (i.e the objections are ideological) Social rights cannot be acknowledged, nor the right to be a fully participating member of society, not even the right to life; so that the children of those millions of women each year who give birth bestride a grave, perish before their political and civic rights can ever be called into question.

Cultural rights do not exist for indigenous people to whose land the market economy now lays prior claim; collective rights are of little worth in a system that prizes 'the individual' so highly, an individual who must act out her or his lonely destiny for ever in the guise of customer, consumer, client or punter in the jungle of commodities in which we must now make our home.

The first task, then, is to strip away the hypocrisy and confusion that makes political argument so opaque and impenetrable, and drives the will to change into a tangle of contradiction and impotence.

Once this has been done, it is possible to see more clearly how the institutions of dominance, set up and controlled by the G-7, the most powerful industrial nations, actually function.

— Third World Network

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G77 and NAM joint proposal for debt settlement meets stiff north resistance

A proposal by the South for a once-and-for-all arrangement to settle the debt problem of the developing countries has met with opposition from the North.

Martin Khor

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Group of 77 and China have produced a joint resolution in the United Nations calling for a once-and-for-all arrangement to settle the long-standing debt problem faced by developing countries.

The NAM-G77 resolution, which was tabled in November at the General Assembly's Second Committee, is facing resistance by many Northern governments.

The joint resolution, submitted by Algeria (on behalf of G77 member states and China) and Indonesia (on behalf of NAM member states), contains the most comprehensive proposals collectively put forward by countries of the South to resolve their on-going external debt crisis.

It calls for a once-and-for-all approach to resolving the debt problem, including (for the first time) a reduction in multilateral debt, and the cancellation of all bilateral debts of African and least developed countries.

The resolution, entitled 'Enhanced international cooperation towards a durable solution to the external debt problem of developing countries' (document A/C.2/49/L.12 dated 7 November), has a 20-point set of proposals and comments.

The boldest and most important of these appears to be point 15, proposing that the General Assembly 'calls upon the international community, including the international financial institutions to explore ways of implementing additional and innovative measures to apply once-and-for-all arrangement, including sub-

stantial, debt-reduction policies to all categories of debt of the developing countries, including multilateral debt, to enable them to achieve sustained economic growth and development without falling into a new debt crisis'.

This resolution backs up an earlier point in the preamble, that 'stressed the importance of alleviating the onerous debt and debt-service burdens connected with all types of debt, including multilateral debt, taking into account the urgent need for a once-and-for-all arrangement within the framework of an equitable and durable approach'.

The resolution (in point 7) also welcomes the write-off by certain donors of a significant part of the bilateral official debt of the least developed countries. It then 'urges those countries that have not yet done so to follow suit and, whenever possible, to cancel all bilateral debts of the African countries and the least developed countries'.

Other resolutions include that the General Assembly:

- Recognises the need to tackle the problem of multilateral debt of developing countries while enabling enhanced concessional flows through multilateral financial institutions;
- Calls upon private creditors, especially commercial banks, to expand initiatives to tackle the commercial debt problem of least developed, low- and middle-income developing countries;
- Calls on donor countries and multilateral financial institutions to consider new measures for substantial debt relief of low-income countries;

- Calls upon donor countries, multilateral financial institutions and commercial banks to consider appropriate measures for substantial debt relief of middle-income countries.

The resolution also calls on the UN Secretary General to designate a high-level body or personalities to follow up on the move towards a 'comprehensive approach' to the debt problem and to give a progress report to the General Assembly in the first quarter of 1995.

The resolution follows up on the Ministerial Meeting of Non-Aligned Countries on Debt and Development, held in Jakarta in August, which had approved of a NAM expert group report recommending a once-and-for-all approach to debt settlement. The report had also emphasised the need for action on all types of debt, that is, commercial, official, bilateral, and multilateral.

In particular, it noted that whilst there had been debt relief action on commercial and bilateral debt, there had so far been none on multilateral debt. It had therefore urged that multilateral financial institutions be asked to take debt relief measures on debts owing to them.

The draft G77-NAM resolution, which was formally introduced at the Second Committee on 6 November, is now being considered in informal consultations under the chairmanship of the Netherlands, which is the Committee's vice-chair.

At the first reading of the draft resolution, the representative of Germany, on behalf of the European Union and supported by

The author is director of the Third World Network.

the United States and Japan, presented a series of amendments. These amendments focused especially on the once-and-for-all arrangement for settling the debt of developing countries, the reduction of all types of debt (including multilateral debt) and the cancellation of debt of the poorest countries and other least developed countries, particularly in Africa.

The Northern countries made it clear they were not able to accept such proposals and asked that they be deleted from the draft resolution. Their representatives said that it was not clear what was meant by a 'once-and-for-all arrangement'.

Moreover, the reduction of multilateral debt would only jeopardise the creditworthiness of the multilateral financial institutions vis-a-vis the market, and the reduction of all types of debt was not feasible, not was debt cancellation acceptable.

Representatives of NAM and the G77 were not able to accept these arguments. A NAM delegate told Third World Network: 'As we see it, the creditworthiness of the multilateral financial institutions will not necessarily be jeopardised by the proposed reduction of multilateral debt stock, as a number of measures can in fact be arranged to avoid such a possibility'.

The report of NAM's Advisory Group on Debt has in fact mentioned a number of measures that could be taken by the multilateral financial institutions, should they agree to consider reducing the debt stock of developing countries, particularly the poorest and the LDCs'.

The debate is continuing at the Second Committee. The key issue to be resolved is the need for reduction of all types of debt, especially multilateral debt. NAM sources say they will try to find alternative and more acceptable wording to convey the same concept of the proposal for a 'once-and-for-all arrangement'.

— Third World Network

CORRESPONDENCE

Prabhakaran's Retreat

I do not want to spoil the party line you have presented that LTTE received a drubbing in the recent military offensive in Jaffna (*LG*, Nov. 15). Since one of the mission statements of the *LG* is to present the 'other view', allow me to be the devil's advocate. Why is it that when the Army hits Jaffna with missiles and bombs, the suffering of commoners is cast aside as 'collateral damage' in the international press release, but when the LTTE retaliates in the East or in Colombo, the attack is called a "terror campaign" and Prabhakaran is projected as a "blood-thirsty" Dracula? (vide, your co-authored report with Tony Clifton in *Newsweek*, Nov. 13). Is it because the definition of terror is different for those who hold nominal power and those who challenge the status quo?

The party line that the "LTTE and its senior commanders fled [Jaffna] city" may definitely give a morale boost to the battered and accident-prone image of the Army. It will also probably "strengthen President Kumaratunga's case" in the political stage. But as the old adage says, 'Don't count your chicken before the eggs are hatched'.

Like how "the Army has been able to pursue its own strategy on its own terms", as you have stated, Prabhakaran also is using the war on his own terms. He was not foolish to sacrifice resources in a frontal combat, though the spin of the defence pundits that LTTE fled Jaffna city has the Madison Avenue trademark. Prabhakaran gave his cadre a few weeks of "field experience" and then tactically retreated, by borrowing a page from Mao's book on the *Long March*, to choose his next strategy. The Generals who celebrated their success over Mao's retreating forces later lived to lick their wounds.

Since you have mentioned Muhammad Ali in your commentary, I would add that Prabhakaran also has proved on numerous occasions his adherence to Ali's *manthra* in the boxing ring: 'Float like a butterfly and sting like a bee'. This explains the commando-style attack on Kolonnawa oil depots, which exposed the soft underbelly of the national security forces.

Now a comment about the much-touted "army's resources". Can you be more specific about these resources in terms of cash? I hardly find any real figures

mentioned about the defense expenditure related to military offensives in the pages of *LG*. Does the Army generate its own resources? Someone (not the 67% of the survey sample who favor a military solution, but the international donors) is paying for the army's resources and everyone knows that Sri Lanka is not blessed with gold mines and oil fields. If you put a moderate guess, such as one million dollars per day as operational expenses in Jaffna, then one can easily guess that the Army's resources are not unlimited. There lies Prabhakaran's strategy.

You may be correct in stating, "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". Now flip this point to arrive at an answer to the question you have posed in the cover, "When Jaffna falls what next? Just as they have taken the LTTE frontally, can the Army and the President feel comfortable that they can establish a government in Jaffna? This will be akin to the mental peace of a guy who pretends to sleep in the tiger's den.

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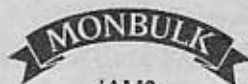
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On an international yardstick, it is difficult to uphold the charge of racism against the US

Edward Mortimer

The predictable effect of last week's riots in Los Angeles has been an outbreak of smug comments on the US in the rest of the world. Early off the mark was President Francois Mitterrand of France. "It's very nice," he said in a radio interview on Friday, "to promote capital, profits and investment in business, but these riots show that the social needs of any country must not be neglected... George Bush is a generous man, who embodies an extremely conservative political ideology, and American society is conservative and economically capitalist. Here are some of the results of that".

Well, I suppose that was just too tempting an opportunity for a Socialist president with his back to the wall to pass up. But Americans are not likely to be much impressed by homilies from that quarter. "We haven't just had a 14 per cent vote for a neo-fascist party," was one comment I heard from an American conservative analyst. "You should see the riots they'd have in Paris if 35 per cent of the population belonged to minorities," was another, from a Francophile middle-of-the-road lawyer.

Nor will Americans be unduly worried by the Egyptian newspaper, Al-Ahram, which asked whether the Libyan Lockerbie suspects could expect a fair trial in the US, in the light of the Rodney King verdict.

But Mr Roger Wilkins, the distinguished black historian who helped shape the Johnson administration's response

America sadly leads the world in the level of violence, and the disparity between rich and poor

to the Watts riots in Los Angeles in 1965, is happy to endorse the remark of a Japanese official quoted in the Washington Post: "There are black people who really have no future, who are completely left over..... The trend of US society was almost to forget about them". And a thoughtful political analyst like Mr Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute foresees that the image of itself that America has just projected will be seized on by Third World dictators who are the targets of American criticism. "There are going to be lot of potshots at the US," he said, "and Americans will not take kindly to that".

Two main charges can be levelled at the US on the basis of last week's events. The first is a very specific one of racism, reflected in the unwillingness of a white jury to convict four white policemen whom the entire nation had seen savagely beating and kicking a prostrate black man, in an amateur video repeatedly shown on television.

The second is a more general one, of being a callous socially divisive and violent society, in which such an incident

can set a whole city on fire, causing 55 deaths and billions of dollars worth of damage.

Both charges are true, but if an international yardstick is used, the charge of racism is the harder of the two to sustain. Most black Americans clearly believe, no doubt with reason, that they are consistently targeted for harassment and maltreatment by the police. But so do most members of racial minorities in western Europe, and no doubt in Japan as well. What is striking to a British visitor is how many of the police, including police chiefs in many of the big cities, are themselves black — as indeed are many of the mayors.

Of course the fact that Mayor Tom Bradley is black did not prevent what happened in Los Angeles, but much of the blame has been laid at the door of its white police chief, Mr Daryl Gates, both for the general atmosphere prevailing in the Los Angeles police department, and for the specific failures which occurred last week.

Mr Gates had in fact been fired from his job before the acquittals were announced (he is to be replaced by a black from Philadelphia with a liberal reputation), and appears to have been virtually on strike. Perhaps he was as surprised as everyone else by the trial verdict, but surely contingency plans should have been made.

Some of the anger might have been blunted if all the accused had been

dismissed from the force as soon as the verdict was announced — even if their conduct was not criminal, it has been repeatedly and officially declared a gross violation of proper professional procedures; and prompt deployment of police in the right places might have deterred many of the rioters. Instead, Mr Gates went off to a fund-raising event for a movement to oppose police reform.

Anyway, it was striking that the riots did not spread to many other cities, and particularly not to New York and Washington where it might have been expected. Both cities have black mayors who issued firm and clear statements deploring the verdicts but warning against any violence.

None of this implies, of course, that racism is not widespread or even endemic in American society. My point is that, unfortunately, this is true of almost all industrialised societies with large ethnic minorities, and that the US since the 1960s has done more than most to combat it. Urban poverty and squalor are not unique to America either. The problems of homelessness, drug addiction and chronic unemployment are all too familiar in Europe's large cities.

Where America sadly does lead the industrialised world is in the level of violence, and in the enormous disparity between rich and poor. No doubt the absence of gun control and President Reagan's tax policies respectively go far to explain those two points.

"Most Americans," writes Prof Mohamed Rabie in a recently published book*, "claim and honestly believe that they are living today in the most civilised

society ever when, in fact, living in the United States probably means living in one of the most violent and least secure societies in modern times".

Part of the explanation is that much of the crime and violence is confined to the inner cities, or to certain districts of them, from which the middle class (including middleclass blacks) has completely removed itself. Mr Rabie recounts the telling case of the director of the budget office of a big city, who not only lived outside the city jurisdiction but in 30 years' service had never even made a telephone call to the district where drugs and crime were most prevalent.

What can be done? Liberals urge social programmes to provide jobs, better health care, better schools and pre-school Head Start programmes for disadvantaged children. Conservatives, led by Mr Jack Kemp, the housing and urban development secretary, urge a package of tax breaks and other measures to encourage investment in inner cities and give incentives to the urban poor to take jobs, save money and acquire their own homes.

President Bush instinctively distrusts the former approach (held to have been tried and failed in the 1960s and 1970s), and gives only lukewarm support to the latter, which is bogged down in the general wrangle with Congress over the budget. Both remedies are victims of the US's political and fiscal impasse, and last week's shock may not be enough to give either of them high enough priority to make much difference.

What can be safely predicted, though, is the reinforcement of the already strong feeling that America needs to look after its own, and that the rest of the world can now look after itself.

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Leonard Woolf in Sri Lanka

Growing, An Autobiography of the Years 1904-1911, *Diaries in Ceylon* 1908-1911 published with *Stories from the East Village in the Jungle*, novel

Jeanne Thwaites

Leonard Woolf was in the C.C.S. for seven years. In 1911 he left the island for a year's holiday in England, and then resigned to marry Virginia Stephens. He felt his true calling was to be a writer and in 1912, after his marriage he tirelessly pursued this career: writing, editing and publishing serious literature. He was a tense intelligent man but an emotional casualty of the system into which he was born. The three books he wrote in or about Ceylon, and also his letters written in or about the Island, show a trembling soul who was deeply insecure.

Woolf's colonial venture started out well. On the voyage to Ceylon, he became intensely concerned about the sobs of a little English girl in the next cabin who was beaten each morning for wetting her bed. He confronted her father Captain Larguing "my experience with dogs and other animals had taught me that corporal punishment is never a good instrument of education" (*Growing* 13). Fortunately, for the child, her father was won over and promised not to beat her again. On the ship, Woolf was also repelled by the habitual cruelty, under the guise of humor, which he experienced from other English. He quotes Freud to explain their behavior:

By making our enemy small, inferior, despicable or comic, we achieve in a round-about way the enjoyment of overcoming him — to which the third person, who has made no efforts, bears witness by his laughter (19)

But, almost immediately after arrival in Ceylon, Woolf changed and began to use the very tactics he had so recently deplored. He, who described himself as

a "very innocent, unconscious imperialist" (25), began to "make small" almost every person he encountered. He dismissed the local people: "the Tamils are dark, dour, stupid, unable to learn, lazy," but the English do not escape. An Englishman: "short, choleric, dictatorial, foul-mouthed, old;" a married couple: "he seemed to have shrunk and she to have swollen. They reminded me of a pair of insects — spiders or worms" (72). He thus makes the college school friend he writes to each week (Lytton Strachey) into Freud's "third person" who bears witness by his laughter. These letters provide a way to compare what Woolf wrote at the time he was in Ceylon — to what he wrote when looking back from England. The exchange of letters have a lack of inhibition that shows a deep friendship. Strachey had not yet written *Eminent Victorians*, which book was to make him world famous, but he was a member of the British middle class literati and had introduced Woolf to his set. Their politics were left-wing liberal, and they came to be known as the Bloomsbury Intellectuals.

To read Woolf, and what is written about him, is to realize that he contrived to make his flights, from what he perceived as danger, appear to be acts of intelligence and/or fate. While his writing is imaginative it does not bring you close to the man or make you like him, as *Letter* does Daniel, for Woolf's efforts to persuade his readers that he was a superior person merely makes him appear pretentious. Even when he is harsh on himself, an engaging literary ploy, he cannot leave it there; he has a need to complete the passage with a lecture on how wonderful he really was.

Perhaps the greatest disservice done Woolf has been by his earlier biographers who seem eager to either treat him a mere adjunct to his wife or describe him like a bad fictional character, as if he started out as an unloved Charles Dickens' child, became a brilliant colonial administrator, then Virginia Woolf's nanny, and finally a grand old man of letters. Their descriptions of him in Ceylon vacillate from Robinson Crusoe to Gandhi: he lived in the jungle, had to kill deer to keep food on the table, and was thwarted on all sides by devilish fauna, flora and stupid natives whom he tenaciously tried to protect from an oppressive English imperialism. Apparently Woolf encouraged these beliefs, for the biographers I speak of — Quentin Bell, Frederic Spotts, John Lehman, et al, were his personal friends. Virginia Woolf's recent biographers, however, have taken a more critical view of him. The facts are that he was in the highest paid profession on an Island dependent on its agriculture with a literary and sophisticated cultural tradition that is much older than England's. The Sigiriya frescoes and poems are over 2,000 years old, and older texts exist in Ceylon than any part of India.

Woolf cut himself off from this culture by making himself a model British segregationist and was rapidly promoted.

When he got home, he lied to his friends. The fact is he did not need to shoot wild animals to eat: no one, with some money, need be hungry in Ceylon; food has always been cheap and plentiful. Daniel talks of visiting one village where "it was my first experience of not having any hospitality offered us by villagers. Later, I got to know the reason for

this — they were Rodiyas, in those days an untouchable caste" (57). In Woolf's *Diaries in Ceylon*, he himself wrote, "no people in Ceylon starve except a few Tamil coolies who are driven off or leave estates in Sinhalese Districts" (V.W. Diaries 117). The Civil Servants were not required to live "in the jungle" except when on circuits: trips to remote areas. Daniel found them fun and during World War II he began to take British military officers with him because they enjoyed the experience so much (162). Both men were given a generous housing allowance and often government bungalows (which were always among the most splendid in the area). The village people, it is true, were uneducated but not stupid. He once endangered his own life when he took a jungle short-cut against a villager's advice. Woolf says, "We heard a tremendous trumpeting and squealing of elephants ahead and the man said it was not safe to go, so I told him he had better come with me and shoo them off" (Diaries 186). The elephants charged; Woolf's pony bolted across the river and he had to climb a tree until the herd had passed. The man also escaped but no thanks to Woolf.

The reason for the white-washing of Woolf could be because the literary world owes much to him: there is no doubt that his devotion to his wife for thirty years kept her sane and writing; without him, she would probably have destroyed herself much earlier and we would have lost much of what she had to say. It is also possible that because most of his biographers were affluent Englishmen, they actually saw his insufferable colonial behavior as commendable. The net result, however, added to the simplistic view of Sri Lanka that is often held even today.

Woolf's writings on Ceylon are divided into what he wrote at the time he was there (diaries and letters) and what came later as he looked back at himself through a somewhat rose-colored glass.

Growing is the second of his five

autobiographical volumes, and covers his time spent in the Island. The book starts: "In October 1904, I sailed from Tillbury Docks in the P & O Syria for Ceylon," and ends "I sailed for England."

Diaries in Ceylon are copies of the government diaries required of him as an Assistant Government Agent (A.G.A.) in Hambantota where he was posted in his last two years. Although many of Woolf's entries contain tedious information such as the price of salt, and how many head of cattle had a disease called rinderpest, they are also full of intriguing examples of how the young Englishman set about getting the "natives" in order and how they frustrated him by resisting his efforts. He responds with explosive invectives against their nativeness although as Memmi points out, "one can hardly see how the colonized can be simultaneously inferior and wicked, lazy and backward" (83). Daniel also kept such official diaries and in 1941; when he was Government Agent of the Western Province the government finally did away with them (125). Woolf's diaries were given to him in 1960 by Sir Oliver Goonetilleke when he needed a spokesman to support the country in England. From the time he left Ceylon in 1911, Woolf began to write against British imperialism to both Parliament and the English newspapers which started an exchange of letters between him and members of the Ceylon government. One collection of them is held in the University of Cambridge South Asian Archive. When the movement towards self-rule for India was initiated, he recommended a similar treatment of Ceylon. Away from the Island, he had turned out to be one of its best and most influential friends. A trip was arranged for him to visit the Island in 1968, and this is described by Spotts as a glorious affair: "the government treated him almost as a visiting chief of state and further commemorated the event by publishing the official diaries he kept as district governor" (Spotts 59). The dia-

ries were, in fact, not published by the Sri Lankan government but in London by Hogarth Press — that is by Woolf himself. Spott's statement is a good example of how little Woolf and Spotts understood the Ceylonese as a once-colonized people and also is an example of the latter's inaccuracies. Such a greeting as Woolf received was not unique. The Sinhalese always treat dignitaries with extraordinary respect and kindness. Woolf had, by his own admission, received similar greetings when he was twenty-nine and an Office Assistant in Kandy: "Half a mile from the village the headmen and villagers met me in procession and brought me in with tom-toms and dancers." He commented with considerable insight on the mind of a colonizer so feted:

...I certainly, all through my time in Ceylon, enjoyed my position and the flattery of being a great man and the father of the people ...as time went on, I became more and more ambivalent, politically schizophrenic, an anti-imperialist who enjoyed the fleshpots of imperialism, loved the subject peoples and their way of life, and knew from the inside how evil the system was beneath the surface for ordinary men and women (Growing 157).

All the biographers I mention ignore such insights when quoting from his work, so determined do they seem to perpetrate the myth that the problems in the colonies came from the inability of the natives to straighten up and become like the English. When Woolf returned to Ceylon later the local people were also aware that the English had come to enjoy shows of servility and played to that. At this time too, Woolf was an old man and in a culture where age is catered to; if Himmler had shown up with graying hair he would have been as attentively received and he would have been wrong to take such behavior as a sign of approval. Another Spotts' mistake in this particular passage is saying that the diaries were published to commemorate the occasion; they

were not published until 1962 — that is, two years later (Diaries title page). The third error is that Woolf was never a “district governor” of Hambantota; he was an Assistant Government Agent.

Woolf's *Stories from the East* collects three short stories published in the same volume as Hambantota Diaries and his only novel *Village in the Jungle* was first published in 1913. This book has at last become accepted by the Ceylonese as one of the better pieces of fiction set in rural Ceylon. He captures a physical sense of the Island in a way that few other writers have been able to. He writes with a sense of the movement of nature, and makes the reader aware of its smells, its moods, the strangeness of jungles and the wild creatures that abound in them.

Daniel and Woolf did not meet, for the latter left the C.C.S. just before World War I, and the younger man joined just after it. Occasionally they speak of the same people. One is a man called Englebrecht and the difference between how they see the man is worth noting. Daniel:

The renowned Englebrecht, a prisoner taken by the British during the Boer War, and who elected not to be repatriated to South Africa after it was over, was appointed Game Sanctuary Warden at Yala. I went out with him after a ‘rogue’ elephant that I had a license to shoot, but I had no luck. Having gone so far into the jungle, I was reluctant to return without seeing an elephant at close quarters. So we went up to a small herd, one of which was a ‘she’ elephant with a newly born offspring. She scented us, raised her trunk, trumpeted and charged straight at us. Englebrecht shouted “Run!” and we ran. While he ran he fired into the trees above and after a while, we found that she was no longer chasing after us. It was quite dark by then and by the time we got back to the town, I was thoroughly exhausted and weary and also a wiser man (11).

Woolf is very much more descriptive, and this is only a brief excerpt of the many pages which he devotes mostly to his dislike of the South African:

Englebrecht was a Boer of the Boers ...who was living in the greatest poverty and squalor and one of my predecessors recommended that he should be appointed Game Sanctuary Ranger on a small salary. The Government agreed. He was a cold-blooded man, the only man whom I have known who seemed to me to be completely without fear and without nerves — I saw him, as I shall tell. Perform in cold blood an act of incredible bravery and foolhardiness. He was tall, straight, and very thin, his hair and beard reddish, his eyes small, very light blue with a glint in them every now and then of icy malignancy. He behaved to the Sinhalese as the Boers behave to the negroes in Africa and not unnaturally, he was hated in Hambantota (46).

It takes Woolf a full three pages to tell the story of the Boer. His graphic physical description of Englebrecht,

unfortunately, does not tally with a group picture on Page-193, for the Boer is quite short; he is standing in a row of Sinhalese — not a tall race — and six are as tall or taller he is. However, obviously Woolf accepts the Boer as a white man, admires him and overlooks his poverty; whereas he does not speak of any the local colonial Dutch as equals. Daniel makes only the one reference to the Englebrecht, and I do not believe he was ever in our home, although I heard his name mentioned occasionally.

Daniel very much enjoyed Woolf's books, particularly the non-fiction, which he felt accurately portrayed the Island at that time.¹ The sort of comments Woolf makes, which I feel are offensive, Daniel was used to in colonial writing although he did not use them himself. It is still hard for me to hear of poor villagers arbitrarily dismissed as “cunning and stupid” (Growing 54) but my father always shrugged off objections to such comments explaining they came from “outsiders”.

(To be Continued)

Note

1. Personal Recollection

Waiting — 14

Prārtana

*Love. Did I say
Your eyes were saucy?
Sorry. I'm going crazy
I really meant
Your eyes were saucer
Flying saucer.
They shoot me to the stars
But stay, Space Girl
Your radiance and your touch
Is contact I still crave,
Though Death springs the whirl
In Space, in Time.*

*So pledge me love,
You will yet be mine.*

U. Karunatilake

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

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

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



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