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CEMENT AND THE P.A.'S CRACKS

Mervyn de Silva

In an increasingly unfriendly global economic environment where the prospects of foreign aid, particularly "untied" aid, are poor, cash-strapped "Third World" regimes take the easy option of selling the family silver. First to be sold are loss-making State corporations, a legacy of a once fashionable "socialism". The chairpersons and the managers of these state-run enterprises were often party loyalists or the kith-and-kin of minister or deputy minister. They made money and contributed generously to party coffers, keeping a reasonable percentage for themselves.

Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, a former international civil servant, a star of the Oxford Union, and a member of an elite professional family, was far from satisfied that the Puttalam Cement Corporation deal was above board. He decided offence was the best part of defence — in this case, defending "transparency and accountability", part of P.A.'s polls promise and program — and he levelled charges which alas had an explosive effect and a political fall-out he did not (or could not) anticipate.

Mr. Kadirgamar's monumental mistake and misfortunes were promptly spotted

by Opposition Leader Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe as the U.N.P.'s window of opportunity. Groomed in Parliament's conventional and guerrilla warfare by two veterans — Presidents Jayawardene and Premadasa — the U.N.P. leader moved fast. The result was this motion of no-confidence:

"Whereas this government failed to take prompt and effective action on the specific allegation made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in a letter and dated 19th January 1996 addressed to Her Excellency the President that a minister and an official received bribes amounting to Rs. 30 million to set aside a Cabinet decision of 23rd March 1995 pertaining to the Puttalam Cement Corporation Ltd."

The P.A.'s counter-move was the best tribute to the Opposition's choice of tactics. Instead of agreeing to debate the no-confidence motion, the Government was ready to debate Mr. Kadirgamar's statement to the House. But whatever the forum, the PUTTALAM deal, and the media exposure in itself, has done irreparable damage to the P.A.'s "transparency, accountability, good governance" Good Guy image. It

is no surprise that the self-elected "watch-dog" (clean conscience?) of the P.A., the "Mulberry Group" has made its own move. While the C.I.D. is reported to have commenced inquiries of the whole sordid business, the Bribery Commissioner may launch his own inquiry. Mr. Kadirgamar took off to Egypt, an official visit.

MAHA SANGHA

While the Opposition has pounced on the Foreign Minister and his serious allegations of top-level bribery and corruption, the MAHA SANGHA trained its heavy artillery on the P.A.'s "Devolution Package" which the Buddhist clergy identify with Prof. Pieris, the campus think-tanks and NGO's, all part of a network blessed by western donors.

BRIEFLY

"NOT GUILTY" pleads Editor

The Editor of the *SUNDAY TIMES* pleaded "Not Guilty" when the trial before High Court Judge, Upali de Z. Gunawardene commenced on March 8. Mr. Sinha Ratnatunga, the editor, is charged for defaming President Chandrika Kumaratunga. The state led the evidence of the Publisher, Mr. Ranjit Wijewardene. The trial will resume on April 4th.

NOT CRICKET

It was decidedly "not cricket". Recognising Mr. Bill Tweddell when he arrived at the grounds a large crowd — over 10,000 said one sports writer — broke into "boos" before the Sri Lanka-Kenya match began. It was tit-for-tat. The Australians refused to play in Sri Lanka after the "Tiger" terrorist attack on the Central Bank building in mid-February.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, a man is honoured in his own country even if the 'natives' in another place, hoot him. The new conservative government of Prime Minister John Howard has decided to make him Cabinet secretary.

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The Ven. Maduluwawe Sobhitha Maha Thera, recognised as a leading spokesman of the Maha Sangha said in an interview with the *Sunday Times*. "Constitutional Affairs Minister G.L. Pieris says the government does not accept the so-called concept of "traditional homeland" of the EELAMISTS but it would be the inevitable result of the package...."

On the question of discrimination, he said: "If Tamils are discriminated against mainly because they are Tamils and if the Sinhala people have been given certain privileges because they are Sinhalese, then there is definitely a justifiable Tamil problem. But there is no such issue".

What is the direct outcome of this Buddhist agitation led by the Maha Sangha? The P.A. is likely to reconsider the "constitutional reforms package" (the devolution proposals) put together by Prof G.L. Pieris. The P.A.'s vulnerability is not only exposed by the onslaught of the Maha Sangha BUT the disagreements WITHIN the 8-party coalition. How allied is the Peoples Alliance? The question cannot be avoided.... certainly not after the statement of NDUNLF, led by Minister Srimani Athulathmudali widow of the party's founder Mr. Lalith Athulathmudali. "We feel very strongly that further amendments are necessary" she said. Her main objection is to "union of regions", and the attempt to destroy or erode the sovereignty of the State.

It is now clear that the Opposition leader has bided his time to select the ideal battleground, not just any available battlefield. The *Sunday Leader* has called the controversial deal the K-Gate after Foreign Minister Kadirgamar's exposures, in his first opinion on the Puttalam Cement privatisation issue.

Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremasinghe evidently bided his time since this was not just a bazaar scandal. It involved offers from many firms, including foreign, certainly from our big neighbours, Pakistan and India. And the bids ranged from 10 million US dollars to 41, million US dollars.

If anything was "transparent" it was the discord in the "Peoples Alliance". The Opposition Leader let the contradictions and conflicts within the "alliance" multiply and mature. He has used the

Foreign Minister, a highly regarded professional whose integrity has not been challenged, as the Opposition's battering ram. As in conventional warfare, so in politics. The "target", the "timing" and the battleground. Mr.

Wickremasinghe has set about the business with a cool-headed professionalism. And now for the debate...

It will take bags of Puttalam Cement to cover the widening cracks in the Peoples Alliance.

Waiting — 19

Letter from Kundasale

*You wrote,
My letter this time is late
I had three sick cows to think about
So they had priority
Over you, love.*

*One cow, you said, was pregnant
But the awe
Of fertility
The Vet had defused
Saying the womb was silent.*

*Could she have calved in the pasture in the night
And the calf stolen by man or wild creature?
You had surmised it couldn't be
The cows were home early evening*

*Then the Vet had felt right inside
And brought out a wee white calf
Limp and dead.
Relieved but sad
You checked the dairy records and confirmed
This was her third still birth
A hopeless case
The Vet suspected contagious chronic calving
And if the tests confirmed this
He would have to condemn her
To death? Oh No! Oh yes, miss!
Such are the slick decisions
Of market economics.*

*So you see, love,
Why my letter was late
I pleaded for her life, I told the Vet
You must, you must please make her well.*

*I am sad, so in my letter
I cannot make the usual happy chatter
She was a fine animal, sleek and supple
But couldn't return investment on the double
Denizen of a dark, animal world
Birth and death had brought twofold suffering
Our human world, love,
What is our future promising?*

U. Karunatilake

Meaning of the Tamil "Liberation Struggle"

H. L. D. Mahindapala

Mr. Sachi Sri Kantha (*Lanka Guardian* February 1, 1996) deserves a reply not because his comments need refuting (in fact, I ignored his earlier comment where he was tilting at the solid windmills of *The New York Times*) but because he, like most other Tamils in the diaspora, refuse to face their brutal history which records the inhuman oppression of Tamils by Tamils from the time of Sankili (1519).

But before I go further let me hasten to add that my two articles (*Lanka Guardian*, October 15, 1995 and November 1, 1995) which, undoubtedly, have pricked Mr. Sri Kantha's guilty conscience, were definitely meant to be attacks on the Tamils who treated their fellow-Tamils as sub-human slaves. I was focussing on the 75 per cent of the upper-castes in Jaffna who never lifted a finger to liberate the oppressed Tamils for over five centuries. I even pin-pointed that the loud-mouthed champions of Tamils today despised and segregated the low-caste Tamils like the *turumbas* who were never allowed to walk in daylight. One of the points stressed by me was that no other community in Sri Lanka — Muslims, Indian Tamils, Burghers or Sinhalese — ever treated the members of their own community in this degrading manner. Even a writer like H. W. Tambiah, who is generally inclined to argue that the sun that shines over Sri Lanka comes out of the Tamils' ears, (see *Laws and Customs of the Sinhalese*), has stated categorically that the Tamil low-castes were treated as "abject slaves" by the upper-castes. On this evidence I wrote that this must be the darkest chapter in Sri Lankan history.

Unable to answer this point Mr. Sri Kantha says that "the caste group known as *rodiyas* among the Sinhalese shared the same hierarchical order similar to *turumbas* of the Tamils." So what? Wheren't all Asian societies, whether Buddhist or Hindu, hierarchical? For that matter, aren't all societies and institutions hierarchical? The issue is not about the

hierarchical social structure but how the hierarchy at the top treated the sub-castes at the base of the social pyramid. On this score, the upper-caste Tamils of Jaffna have set a unique record of being the most heartless and cruel oppressors of their own people. It is an oppression which will remain as an indelible stigma on their social conscience. As an excuse, Mr. Sri Kantha attempts to equate the *rodiyas* with the *turumbas*. If Mr. Sri Kantha knows anything about Sri Lanka he should know that the *rodiyas*, being nomadic outcastes, were never the slaves of any caste. Nor were they forbidden to walk in daytime. They were the Sri Lankan gypsies who roamed freely all over the country, day and night.

Besides, I went further than the hierarchical structure and quoted Jane Russell who said: "There had been slavery among the Kandyan Sinhalese but it was of the mildest form, slaves personal bondsmen to the owners." (*Communal Politics under the Donoughmore Constitution, 1931-1947*) In other words, I was saying that there not only a hierarchical society but even slaves among the Sinhalese. The difference, however, is in the treatment of these slaves by the two communities. Let me quote Robert Knox who had known the Sinhalese society like the back of his hand after having lived with them for 20 years. Writing about the Sinhalese disposition he says: "They are not very malicious towards one another, and their anger doth not last long; seldom or never blood shed among them in their quarrels. It is not customary to strike; and it is very rare that they give a blow as much as to their Slaves." (Knox, *Historical Relations* p. 102, Tissara Publications).

Compare this to the Tamil slaves of Jaffna who were no better off than the Negro slaves in America. Like the Negro slaves they were murdered, lynched by mobs, and even burnt alive for daring to cross the caste barriers. Besides, the upper-caste Tamils not only aided the

importing of Tamils from South India by the Dutch but abetted their imperial masters in transforming the caste system to legitimise and enforce the status of the imported Indian Tamils as slaves. This was a bonanza to the Jaffna Tamils who had no hesitation in reducing their own low-castes into untouchable slaves. They were denied the basic human rights. They were even denied the right of worshipping in Hindu temples. The Churches too faithfully adopted the vicious caste system. They segregated the low-castes by erecting separate pews. Apartheid became the official doctrine inside the tabernacles of Christ in Jaffna long before it emerged as a fascist instrument of the elitist whites in South Africa. The Church leaders woke up to Christian charity — not to mention liberation theology — only after the Christian domination, enforced through their imperial masters, waned in the post-colonial period. Then the Churches joined hands with the Tamil communalists to denigrate the Sinhala-Buddhists, ironically enough on human rights.

However, no low-caste man among the Sinhalese was debarred from entering any Buddhist temple, or to be a Buddhist monk like the Hindus. Nor were there separate places of worship for them as in the Churches. The upper-caste Sinhalese have never refused to prostrate before a low-caste monk and worship him. Despite the inherent evils of the hierarchical caste system, the Sinhalese used it essentially as a division of labour to make the hydraulic/feudal society functional. With the active assistance of the Tamil Brahmins, Churches and the colonial masters, the Tamil upper-caste transformed the caste system into an inhuman instrument of oppression and suppression of their own people. Through that system they exploited their own people, initially to increase their profits from the tobacco, paddy and other farming enterprises and, later, in the post-Donoughmore period, to protect and consolidate their political power.

There is a discernible pattern in the reactions of the Sinhalese and the Tamils to slavery. When, for instance, the Britishers were pushing the Kandyan peasants into slavery in their tea plantations the Sinhalese never gave in. Faced with their stubborn and silent protest the British imperialists had to import indentured labour from South India. For trying to protect their dignity the Sinhalese had to pay the incalculable price of their traditional homelands being confiscated and ejected from their homes. The Tamil society, on the other hand, was quite comfortable with slavery and happily went along with it. They encouraged their colonial masters to import slaves from South India and, under colonial protection, exploited their low-castes as cheap slaves. They rejected from their society the Indians brought as slaves to the tea plantations with the same kind of contempt they rejected Indian slaves brought by the Dutch to Jaffna. Today the Jaffna Tamil leaders show a patronising interests in the Indian Tamils, after allying themselves with the British imperialists who exploited the slave labour of the estate workers for nearly a century, purely to add numbers to their communal politics.

Consider this with the record of the Sinhalese. Their record reveals that it is they who took the first step to liberate the Tamils, long before the Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran came on the scene. The Prevention of Social Disabilities Act, 1957 of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike — an Act which prohibited segregation in buses, schools, churches and, in general, the oppression of the low-castes — stands as a monumental landmark not only to the liberal spirit of the Sinhalese but also to the enlightened and pioneering efforts of reforming the dismal and the discriminatory legacy left behind by five centuries of colonial rulers. However, the Prevention of Social Disabilities Act ran into serious obstacles laid by the all-powerful upper-caste in Jaffna to block its implementation. Undeniably, the greatest achievement of Mr. Prabhakaran is in the dismantling of the obscene and the oppressive caste system in Jaffna that dehumanised Jaffna society since the coming of the Dutch.

The act of Tamil youths taking up arms was a double-edged weapon — 1) against the Sinhalese and 2) against the upper-caste Tamils of Jaffna who have been their oppressors for generations. Consistent indoctrination by the Chelvanayakam-Ponnambalam leadership made them perceive the Sinhala-Buddhists as their enemies. But Tamil youths also had a clear grasp of the social inherent in their caste-ridden society. They had first hand experience of their leaders as incorrigible oppressors and political failures. In their sober moments they would realise that whenever the Sinhalese erred there were democratic, institutional and structural remedies for each and every one of those mistakes. For example, those political mistakes that the Tamil elite have raised were remedied within the turbulent four decades beginning from 1956. The self-corrective mechanism, thought it worked tardily at times, was inherent in the Sinhala-Buddhist society. But for three centuries, ending as late as the 1980s, there were no remedies for the entrenched institutions of oppressive casteism maintained ruthlessly, and if necessary through extralegal violence, in Jaffna. Even those Tamils who returned from Oxford and Cambridge found casteism more rewarding and comfortable than Western liberalism. The rigidly conservative ambience of Jaffna, withdrawn into a time warp of its own, did not leave the space of a hair's breadth for any kind of passage into the twentieth century. The dominant forces were so steeped in feudal casteism that they lost touch with reality. Consequently, after the failure of the Prevention of Social Disabilities Act, a violent overthrow of the inhuman *ancien regime* of Jaffna was inevitable.

As in the case of the JVP youth in the South, the unrest in Northern society could not have been appeased even if the linguistic, religious and other cultural demands of the Tamil elite were granted by the "Sinhala-Buddhist governments". Like the JVPers, there was in them a determination to overthrow the entire Jaffna establishment which they felt had betrayed them in the past. The Tamil elite ruling Jaffna had, over the years, confirmed the belief of the

"boys" — particularly in the temple entry crisis at Maviddipuram in 1968 when the upper-caste closed ranks against the low-castes — that there was no escape from the oppressive Tamil past into a liberated future through the entrenched caste base. Most of all, it was the loss of human dignity, by being treated as social outcastes, that hurt them most. Equally insufferable was the inborn and internalised caste prejudices that made the low-castes the pariahs (a demeaning and an opprobrious epithet derived from the Tamil word *paraiyar*, according to the OED) of Jaffna society. Deluded by their smug superiority, the upper-caste did not realise that the subterranean forces were running far deeper than the hate campaign whipped up by them against the Sinhala-Buddhists. Explosive tectonic forces were rising from under their feet to blast the crusted surface of three centuries of the caste/slave system. The politically bankrupt Tamil elite had no other non-communal programme or policy to rescue themselves and Jaffna from the ever-widening cracks of feudal casteism.

The Tamil elite planned to escape their impending doom by "putting forward more and more rapacious demands". (S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, Hansard 1939, quoted by Jane Russell on page 240). Increasing demands at each critical stage was a deliberate tactic adopted to appease the unrest growing from the oppressed sub-castes below. The Tamil elite refused to heed the lesson of King Canute that there was no way of rolling back the caste forces rising against them. Their predictable reaction was to hastily prop up their declining feudal power through anti-Sinhala-Buddhist slogans. They resented any interference that would topple this power structure. Their paralysed objectives were (1) to accumulate as much money as they could from the Sinhala-Buddhist South and (2) preserve their privileged personal and political position in the Tamil North. Both — the money from the south and the privileges of the north — worked in tandem to consolidate their dominance over Jaffna society. They never wanted to part with either. The issue of discrimination they orchestrated so successfully was not about their abominable discrimi-

nation against their own people but the perceived threats to their privileged positions both in the South and in the North. Only Tamil chauvinism could give them the slogans to promote their acquisitive instincts in the South, especially through the language issue, and exploit the North by keeping their own people in submission.

By turning the anger of Tamils against the Sinhalese the Tamil elite successfully deflected the rising political tide against themselves from their own rank and file. In raising the communal cry they were able to sweep under the carpet their failure to stand up for the basic rights of their own people by obstructing social reforms. Furthermore, the anti-Sinhala-Buddhist cry was the opium fed to the Tamil masses to legitimise and prevent the dismantling of the oppressive feudal society of Jaffna. The Jaffna upper-caste was determined to preserve Jaffna as their traditional feudal haven, particularly for their retirement. The loss of privileges derived from feudal casteism would have been as great as the loss of pensions derived from serving, in their parlance, "the Sinhala-Buddhist governments". The two-pronged machinations of the Jaffna upper-caste to retain their traditional supremacy were directed simultaneously against (1) the "Sinhala-Buddhist governments" and (2) their own sub-castes. They held on to their precarious positions by pitting (2) against (1). Naturally, they resented any outside interference that would threaten their prestige, position and power in Jaffna. This point is illustrated amply in the obstructionist tactics of the Chelvanayakems and Ponnambalams to the Prevention of Social Disabilities Act. It was also the only time when both parties — All Ceylon Tamil Congress and the Federal Party — buried the political rivalry of the Jaffna upper-caste and ganged up to protect their privileged position against the low-castes. It was a concerted and a contemptible attempt to deny the fundamental rights due to the low-caste Tamil slaves of Jaffna.

But after three centuries the outdated caste system was crumbling. And the inevitable storming of the Jaffna Bastille occurred when Mr. Prabhakaran's

low-caste "boys" raided the upper-caste homes in Jaffna, and cocked their legs up on their caste-ridden tables, and ordered those high-cast ladies hiding behind the cadjan curtains to cook "chicken *poriel*" for them. It was meant to be a kind of "revolutionary justice" dished out by the former slaves who reversed roles with great delight by sitting on top of their cruel masters and making them experience, for the first time, what it was to be an oppressed caste/slave for centuries. The accumulated bitterness of centuries was expressed not by the simple act of forcing them to cook but in making the Tamil elite obey, in the most humiliating manner — no, not the diktats of the new regime which were inescapable but the individual whims and fancies of the low-caste pariahs who had nothing to fear from their powerless masters.

It was also poetic justice for the arrogant elite, who even in their hour of distress, refused to share the toilets with the low-castes in refugee camps. Mr. Prabhakaran's "liberation struggle", at last, dethroned forever the feudalistic fiefdom of Ponnambalam and the Chelvanayakams in the neck of Jaffna. His

"liberation struggle" finally brought to the low-caste Tamils the kind of equality which the Tamils enjoyed among the Sinhalese in the South and the kind of equality the "Sinhala-Buddhist governments" hoped to introduce in the North through the Prevention of Social Disabilities Act. The essential meaning of Prabhakaran's "liberation struggle" is that he freed the low-caste Tamils from their upper-caste oppressors. And the essential meaning of the pre-Prabhakaran protests and demonstrations of the Tamil elite led by the Federal Party and the Tamil Congress lies in their desperate struggle to retain their privileges, both in the South and the North. The Chelvanayakam-Ponnambalam elite merely led a rearguard action to protect and preserve the privileges inherited from a declining, fascist caste system. In fairness to Mr. Prabhakaran it must be stated that his liberation struggle was a movement of the Tamils, by the Tamils and for the Tamils who were, oddly enough, against the upper-caste Tamil exploiters of Jaffna. It is indeed a remarkable coincidence that Mr. Prabhakaran named his organisation the LTTE — Liberation of Tamils from Tamil Exploiters!

LETTER

The good and the bad

In the *LG* of Feb.1, there appeared a letter with a pseudonym 'A Patriotic Muslim' with the title "Canards: Arabs Abused". This writer had criticised the LTTE leader Prabhakaran for ill-treating the Muslims. Before I sat down to comment on this controversial theme, you made a pre-emptive strike by publishing in the Feb. 15 issue, Kalinga Seneviratne's commentary on the sufferings of Sri Lankan women in the Middle East Muslim countries. The figures presented in it were revealing indeed. 11 deaths in March 1995 alone; average of 400 complaints a month on physical and verbal abuse: 300 Sri Lankans in the United Arab Emirates prisons.

I wonder what that 'Patriotic Muslim'

has as an answer to Kalinga Seneviratne's commentary? If the wealthy Muslims in the Middle East are different from Prabhakaran, why folks like the young Sri Lankan maid Sithi Unisa had to face a firing squad?

Also I wish to note that in the Feb. 15 issue, you are overplaying the card of Chandrika Kumaratunga as the 'peace maker'. Here is a lady who could not make peace with her own brother Anura Bandaranaike. So, how can Tamils like me expect her to make peace with Prabhakaran? First let her prove her sincerity by making peace with Anura.

Sachi Sri Kantha

Fukuroi City,
Shizuoka, Japan.

ELUSIVE PEACE: Negotiating in a Secessionist Conflict

Howard Wriggins

A simple two-party negotiation became more complex as sympathetic Tamils in southern India supported the Tamil movement in Sri Lanka with money and arms. The government of India itself became directly involved in two ways: it became a mediator between the government of Sri Lanka and the Tamil insurgents, and a provider of arms, safe houses, training camps, and logistical support to various Tamil factions.

Four years of intensifying conflict produced a war of secession. In July 1987 President J.R. Jayewardene of Sri Lanka and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India signed the India-Sri Lanka Accord, which provided for the end of hostilities and the entry into Sri Lanka of an Indian peacekeeping force to protect the guerrilla fighters while they laid down their arms. However, because the accord had been arranged without the direct involvement of the leader of the most militant Tamil faction and provided less than independence, the guerrilla movement turned on the Indian peacekeepers and the conflict was resumed. After a year and a half of costly but indecisive warfare, the Indian army was told by Jayewardene's successor, Ransinghe Premadasa, to go home. The conflict has continued between the government of Sri Lanka and the most dogged of the militants.

To understand the development of the spiraling hostilities, mutual distrust, and growing violence in Sri Lanka, it is important to examine the background to the Tamils ethnosecessionist struggle and to trace over time the negotiating exchanges between the principal protagonists as they sought a negotiating formula to delimit the issues and exchanged offers and counteroffers on details; the shifting balance of capability on the ground as the struggle escalated; changes in the negotiating participants; and changes in the government's position and the issues at stake as successive offers were rejected by the most militant Tamil factions.

Background

Sri Lanka is a multiethnic island state off the south coast of India, the size of West Virginia, with a population of some 15 million people. Sinhalese make up 74 percent of the population. Indigenous Tamils represent some 13 percent

An examination of the protracted negotiations that began in 1977.

of the total: they are concentrated largely in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, although a third of them have lived for generations in the cities and market towns of the south. A second Tamil-speaking community are descendants of laborers brought to the island by the British in the nineteenth century to work on the tea estates in the central highlands; these Tamils have not been particularly active politically. A Muslim community, often called Moors, account for another 7 percent.¹

Sri Lanka never went through the nation-building experience of a protracted struggle for independence. At the time of independence spokespersons for the 69 percent Sinhalese majority, the 11 percent indigenous Tamil minority, and the 6 percent Moorish minority together shaped a constitutional bargain that provided for a democratic parliamentary system with substantial safeguards for the rights of the minorities.² Since independence was established in 1948 there have been nine parliamentary and three presidential elections.

Ever since the coming of independence, however, the relative political and cultural standing of the Sinhalese and Tamil communities has been a source of contention. Sinhalese zealots have maintained that Tamils have been over-represented in Parliament, in the bureaucracy, and in university placements. As Sinhalese saw it in the early 1950s, though they were a substantial majority of the population, more than 40 percent of the workers in the clerical service and one third of all university graduates were Sri Lankan Tamils.³ Tamils have argued that democratic government by the majority Sinhalese has systematically undercut their opportunities, that over the years virtual second-class citizenship has been imposed on them, and that their personal security has become increasingly threatened.⁴

From 1956 onward an action-reaction dynamic between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities gained momentum. In such conflicted situations, reciprocal perceptions and mutual and escalating

fears become crucial to an understanding of events.⁵ At stake was the nature of the Sri Lankan state. The Sinhalese majority favored a centralized, unitary state of the kind inherited from the British; the Tamils sought a more decentralized state that would permit them to manage their own affairs, especially in the Jaffna peninsula where they were concentrated. That normal politics could not meet Tamil needs was demonstrated over and over again, most particularly in 1958 and 1969 when carefully negotiated agreements on decentralization between government and Tamil spokespersons were abandoned under pressure from Sinhalese protesters.

Linguistic and cultural nationalism intensified this issue. Politics within the Sinhalese community focused increasingly on Buddhist symbols and on legislation defining Sinhalese as the island's official language, reflecting an exclusivist conception of the Sri Lankan polity. This focus reinforced Tamil suspicions that the original constitutional bargain was being revised to their growing and ineradicable disadvantage.⁶ Tamil defensive anxieties intensified their calls for a federal structure and devolution of centralization, which in turn intensified Sinhalese fears that the indigenous Tamil minority really wanted to join with the 55 million Tamil-speaking people in southern India. It was as if the majority community had a sharp sense of inferiority, its own Sinhalese Buddhist identity being perceived as under growing threat in a region believed to be dominated by the large Tamil community in India, only 25 miles across the Palk Strait.

Underlying sociodynamic factors having little to do with intercommunal relations were also at work. From 1956 on educational policy had set Tamil and Sinhalese youths on separate educational tracks, each to be taught in its indigenous language, so that communication between them became more and more difficult. A rapidly growing population and an expanding school system were producing graduates at a rate far faster than the economy was producing jobs, intensifying a sense of rivalry between these asymmetrical communities. Within the two communities competing political leaders, each seeking to win a political following at the expense

of local rivals, intensified communal consciousness and exaggerated popular fears of the evil intentions of the other community. Moreover, the Tamil community was itself divided structurally between the numerically dominant Vellala (farmer) and the contesting Karaiyar (fishermen) communities, the latter rallying lower castes resentful of "Vellala domination".⁷ Ironically, largescale government investment in the settlement of hitherto uninhabited land, instead of easing population pressures, produced in effect apples of discord between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities, each holding that the other was getting an unfair share of scarce status-and wealth-giving land. Thus there were a number of intractable local forces at work to impede a negotiated resolution of Sinhalese and Tamil differences.

Before the 1977 election that brought J.R. Jayewardene's government to power in a sweeping victory for the United National Party, Tamil youths, based mainly in the Jaffna area of northern Sri Lanka, had become embittered and demanded the creation of an independent state in the northern and eastern parts of the country, to be called Tamil Eelam. The United National Party's election manifesto promised to deal with specific Tamil grievances while reaffirming the government's commitment to a unitary governmental structure.

On coming to power one of Jayewardene's first moves was to rescind the orders regarding university entrance that had been promulgated by the previous government, and which Tamil youths considered particularly discriminatory. And very early in Jayewardene's administration the Tamil language was given a substantially higher constitutional status than before. But these measures proved insufficient to soften the demands of Tamil youths for Tamil Eelam. The analysis in this chapter turns now to negotiations between the Jayewardene government and elected Tamil members of Parliament about what additional grievances should and could be corrected and how that should be done.

Two-Party Negotiations, 1978-82

From 1978 to 1982 principal negotiations focused on defining the structure and powers of proposed district development councils as a way of meeting Tamil demands for greater decentralization. At the outset the negotiating parties were the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), then occupying eighteen seats in Parliament and designated the official opposition, and President J.R. Jayewardene, whose United National Party

(UNP) held a three-fifths majority in Parliament. There was little trust between the two sides.

In the 1977 elections the Tamil United Liberation Front had won over-whelmingly in Tamil-speaking areas on a platform demanding secession of those areas. Although publicly sounding sympathetic to the more intransigent Tamil youths, TULF leaders privately reassured the government that they were moderates ready to negotiate a resolution of Tamil grievances short of independence.

Jayewardene stood head and shoulders above all the other members of his United National Party. He held that Sri Lanka was overly centralized. However, the UNP had influential members whose views differed little from those of the rival Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), long an advocate of Sinhalese Buddhist interests at the expense of Tamil concerns. Because many Sinhalese saw any devolution from centralization as the first step toward partitioning the island, Jayewardene was reluctant to promptly offer the Tamil United Liberation Front the extensive devolution it demanded out of fear that to do so would split his party and strengthen the SLFP, which was ready to exploit any concessions he might make to the Tamils. Nor could Jayewardene entirely discount Tamil spokespersons who publicly held that proposals that fell short of independence were nevertheless significant first steps.

Moreover, there were other priority items on the government's agenda: introducing a new presidential constitution, and accelerating construction of a huge irrigation and hydroelectric system while foreign donors were in a generous mood. In addition, economic policy had to be liberalized to open up what had been a stagnant, semisocialist, and administratively controlled economy. Thus the Jayewardene government, caught in the middle between militant Tamil and Sinhalese zealots, proceeded slowly in responding to reiterated Tamils demands. These demands were now and again emphasized by acts of violence in the northern and eastern provinces.

The government possessed official authority and an army of some 13,000 men, although the army was without combat experience and at least at the outset was ill-disciplined. The army was almost exclusively Sinhalese, recruitment of Tamils having been sharply reduced by the preceding Bandaranaike government. There were some 14,000 police.

The Tamil youths at first seemed to be no match for government forces. However, they quickly learned the arts of guerrilla warfare, in part from the Palestine Liberation Organization in Lebanon, but also in training camps organized in India. They early demonstrated unusual resolve when arrested, committing suicide by biting into cyanide capsules rather than reveal the movement's secrets.

In 1978 the government and the Tamil insurgents had differing perceptions of the value of time in resolving the conflict. The government at first was in no hurry. The number of committed activists, limited to the north, was thought to be in the low hundreds. Internal rivalries had always plagued Tamil politics, and some leaders of the United National Party hoped these divisions might solve the insurgent problem with only a modestly increased presence of the national army and police in the Jaffna area. However, the elected leaders of the Tamil United Liberation Front, who were mainly legally oriented, feared that unless there was more rapid progress in resolving Tamil grievances through negotiation they would be thrust aside by the more violent Tamil factions.

(To be Continued)

Notes

1. See K.M. de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies — Sri Lanka 1880-1985* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1986).
2. For background, see H. Wriggins, *Ceylon, Dilemmas of a New Nation* (Princeton University Press, 1960), pp. 79-104; Michael Roberts, *Collective Identities, Nationalisms and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Marga Institute, 1979).
3. C.R. de Silva, *Sri Lanka: A History* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1987), p. 239.
4. For details of a communal outbreak following the general election of 1977, see Government of Sri Lanka, *Report of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Incidents which Took Place between 13th August and 15th September, 1977*. (Sessional Paper No. 7) (known as the Sansoni Commission Report) (Colombo, 1980).
5. Benedict R.O.G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Robert N. Keamey, *Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon* (Duke University Press, 1967).
6. See Wriggins, *Ceylon*, pp. 169-211. See also Satchi Ponnambalam, *Sri Lanka: The National Question and the Tamil Liberation Struggle* (London: Tamil Information Center and Zed Books, 1983).
7. Dagmar Hellman-Rajanyagam, "The Jaffna Social System: Continuity and Change Under Conditions of War", paper read at the Association of Asian Studies meeting, Boston, March 1994. For detail on developments within the Jaffna peninsula, see Rajan Hoole, Daya Somasundaram, K. Sriharan, and Rajani Thiraganama, *The Broken Palmyra: The Tamil Crisis in Sri Lanka — An Inside Account* (Claremont, Calif.: Sri Lanka Studies Institute, 1990).

TODAY'S KARACHI

Dear Sir,

Kindly recall my visit to your office in December. I drew your attention to an article titled "A Solution to Karachi" published in your respected journal on Nov. 15. I pointed out to you, sir, that the article was written by a former Indian diplomat, Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyar. As I mentioned Mr. Aiyar had not only attacked the basic ideology of Pakistan but also presented scurrilous views about the existence of Pakistan, views unbecoming of a diplomat but perhaps acceptable from a politician trying to gain cheap popularity from uneducated voters.

Mr. Editor, Sir, you were prepared to place an article in your esteemed journal written by "a renowned journalist and recognised scholar".

I now forward an article on the subject by a renowned journalist and a scholar of reputed viz. Ahmed Hasan Sheikh.

*With regards,
Yours sincerely,*

Rai Riaz Hussain (Press Attache)

The havoc 'intellectuals' play

Ahmad Hasan Sheikh

It's only now after two and a half decades that loud and clear voices from that Indira Gandhi in her exultant moment of victory had pronounced as the graveyard of the two-nation theory have started reaching our ears-affirming faith in it.

The affirmation does not come so much from the 'collaborators' of separate Muslim nationhood as from the 'revolutionaries' who had participated in its 'burial' as armed insurrectionists of Mukti Bahini.

The realisation has dawned less on account of self-analysis and more on account of the Hindu's continuing thrust against the 'polluting' presence of Muslim identity in the subcontinent, all of which he regards as his Bharat Mata (mother India).

Political and economic strangulation apart, what the 'liberator' has been doing in Bangladesh since the heady days of 1971 is to subvert and smother the cultural identity of the Muslims of Bangladesh. It was courtesy the 'intellectuals' — the votaries of Bengalee-ism—that Hindu India was able to make first inroads into the faith of the vanguard of the Muslim freedom movement we used to call East Pakistan.

Overtime the magic had worked so well that what was Islamic came to denigrated as 'communal', linked as it was with the West Pakistani 'exploiters' and what was Hindu came to be revered

as 'secular', and hence liberal, linked as it was with the Indian 'liberators'.

As an October 1973 report of Dosh Bangla, Dhaka, has it, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's government not only closed all offices and courts for two days on the occasion of the principal Hindu festival of 'Durgapuja' but also provided money from the public exchequer for each altar made for idol worship. Perhaps no other way of expression of gratitude would have gone well with the 'liberators'.

But only a few weeks later, a Times of India report published on 12 November 1973 quoted him as telling a students moot in Dhaka that the "Pakistanis had tried to wield the weapon of communalism to perpetuate their rule but they had failed", and asserting that "communalism had been banished from the soil of Bangladesh".

How well 'secularism' has dug its feet in the soil of Bangladesh since then has been highlighted by Zainal Abedin, a Dhaka journalist, who had taken up arms against Pakistan in 1971, in his latest book, "Raw and Bangladesh" which probably would have been more appropriately titled as "The 'Liberator' of Bangladesh".

It is a well-documented account of Hindu India's merciless ravishing of the political and economic Landscape of Bangladesh.

But what merits particular attention is the enslavement of the Muslim mind that is taking place with the collaboration of 'intellectuals' in the name of culture and modern outlook.

"Above all", says Zainal Abedin, "cultural and religious identity of 90% people of Bangladesh is being eroded out by systematic attacks on Islamic values", the objective being "to undermine Islam in the lives of Bangladeshi Muslims so that their blending with Hindus is facilitated". Under the pretext of Bengalee culture, "the aim is to promote Hindu culture".

He points out that "RAW backed intellectuals take infinite pains to prove to the new generation that the liberation war of 1971 disproved the validity of the Two Nation Theory and generated the spirit of secularism. However, this is totally wrong. The war of liberation was directed against the then West Pakistan domination and exploitation and not against Islam and our Muslim identity".

It is true he says that "their demand for emancipation found expression in Bengalee nationalism", but "this was purely in the context of Pakistan and at no stage the people intended to part with the Two Nation Theory". In fact, "the emergence of Bangladesh is in consonance with Lahore Resolution of 1940", and "once renunciation of Two Nation Theory is accepted, reunification

of India becomes obvious". In his eyes, "propagation and promotion of Bengaleeism is a conspiracy against the very foundations of Bangladesh".

He poses the question "Why Hindus of West Bengal do not support Bengalee nationalism against Indian (Hindu) nationalism. Why the idea is being drummed to people of Bangladesh only?..... Bengali speaking Hindus and the Muslims could never become one national in the past. Now that the ideological, cultural and political differences between the two have grown futher, how can there be any rationale for a common Bengalee nationalism".

But the "intellectuals" who are ensconced according to Zainal Abedin in various academies of art and culture and the media are busy in promoting "Brahministic and atheistic diseases" in the body-politic of Bangladesh. Bangla Academy, for instance, financed with public money", due to dominance of pro-Indian elements is in effect working for the revival of Indian culture. It has been promoting books written by Hindu and secular minded 'Muslim' writers. Bangla Academy is allergic to anything Islamic.

Its doors are shut for all Muslim nationalist writers while works of even third grade pro-Indian writers who claim to be secular are published".

* * * *

Commenting on the opposition leader, Sheikh Hasina's ringing of a metal bell to inaugurate a function at the Bangla Academy in connection with the Bengali New Year of 1398, Zainal Abedin says.

"Sounding a metal bell (an integral part of Puja or Hindu form of worship) was unprecedented not only in any function of Bangla Academy but also in the history of independent Bangladesh. Now link it with the kindling of the Mongal Pradeep — first of its kind in the Shilpakala Academy premises by Sufia Kamal and you will easily discover where the reins of these two organisations actually lay. The sponsors of these practices claim that these practices are only ceremonial. But let me ask them will a Hindu start his work with recitation of 'Bismillah'?"

Shilpakala Academy, an organisation set up to promote art and culture of Bangladesh, favours "Indian artists more than those of Bangladesh with higher

standing..... (It) invites Indian cultural activists and seeks to popularize their songs, dance and drama." In January 1993, the Academy organised a national Jatra festival (open air opera popular in rural Bangladesh), which was inaugurated by Prime Minister Khalida Zia. Its sponsors, actors, and audience were all Bangladeshis but out of eleven writers of this Jatra, ten were Indians. Naturally the dress, decoration and dialogues of these Jatras reflected Indian culture and social values.

Bangladesh has almost been inundated with immoral Indian video films to corrupt the morals of the youth and Zainal Abedin notes with surprise that "the nation which had fought and struggled against Urdu now proudly watches Hindi films and listens to Hindi music".

The official electronic media, particularly the Bangladesh Television, purvey programmes, which are mostly repugnant to the main principles of Islam. In most of the dramas, on the plea of necessity of the story, the traditional Muslim culture, norms and social values of Bangladesh are ignored. When any anti-social character is depicted, he is generally shown with a beard and a cap on his head. At time, evil characters are shown as Haji, Maulvi, Pir etc (i.e. personalities respected in Islam). The religion is ridiculed and projected in poor light".

BTV is also "promoting a pseudo to liberal culture. In most of the plays it is shown that young boys and girls rise in revolt against their parents. Wives revolt against their husbands. The main purpose of depicting such acts is to destroy our traditional social values and family ties. In many plays explicit love scenes are shown disregarding our social values".

Rabindranath Tagore is over projected in most of BTV's dramas. "There is hardly any play where Tagore is not shown, or his songs are not sung or his poems are not read..... On the occasion of Rabindranath's birth anniversary, BTV's heroines, heros and dancers display on their foreheads the Hindu symbol of 'Tilak', "Even between presentation of Eid programmes, BTV punches in Tagore items.

Since BTV commonly uses Hindu names in its different programmes, the "adoption of Hindus nick names by Muslim boys and girls has become quite

common in Bangladesh. Hindu names like Sawan, Sagar, Somundra, Nadi, Abantika, Saurav, Sujan, Shentu, Rajiv, Torun, Gagan, Anita, Bipasha, Shnata, Shanti, Amit, Ajit etc, have infiltrated into Muslim families. Muslim families could not think to keep such nick names even in pre-partition era when Bangladesh was part of India and the Muslims were a minority".

Rarely, "there is any mention of atrocities committed by Indian forces and Hindu fundamentalists on Muslims in India including Kashmir". But "plays about Razakars and Albadars of 1971 are repeatedly telecast" by BTV.

A number of Indian-sponsored and financed papers constantly carry on "vilification campaigns against pronationalist elements. They unabashedly criticise partition of India and directly and indirectly propagate for merger of Bangladesh with India. They spread disinformation, discontent and promote disharmony amongst different classes, particularly with reference to events of 1971 liberation war. The aim is to impede national integration and progress. They also vehemently oppose Bangladesh's friendship with Muslim countries".

Indian text books are being prescribed in many prestigious private schools from K.G. level to higher classes. These books have all Hindu characters and preach and promote Indian causes, Hindu culture and history. As a result of a vigorous drive to attract students from Bangladesh to educational institutions in India, as many as one hundred thousand Bangladeshi students are presently studying in India. Incredibly, even children of Class I to V are sent to India for education. A craze has developed among bureaucrats, businessmen and politicians to send their wards abroad, particularly to India for studying.

Recently, according to Zainal Abedin, the Indians, have adopted "a novel way to contact and recruit important religious and political leaders of Bangladesh. They send some of their Indian Muslim stooges to Bangladesh to approach high religious and political personalities of Bangladesh. Moulana Asad Madni of Deoband, Alhaj Kashani Baba of Dargah Nizam-uddin Aulia and ulema from Ajmer Sharif have been visiting Bangladesh for the purpose" and trying to sell the line that partition of India has done no good to Muslims and therefore the Muslims should work for re-unification of India.



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The Specificity of Sri Lanka

Towards a Comparative History of Sri Lanka and India

Eric Meyer

A comparative history of India and Sri Lanka reveals that there is more to be gained by recognising the specificity of historical developments in Sri Lanka rather than by regarding it as a microcosm of India.

Sri Lanka concentrates some of the major elements of the Indian world and can in fact be regarded as a sort of microcosm of India. But seen in a different perspective its characteristics are strongly specific. The aim of this paper is to delineate comparative aspects of the history of Sri Lanka and India during the period between the 15th century and independence.

The natural and climatic features of Sri Lanka parallel those of south India: the wet south-western regions can be compared with Kerala, the Kandyan up-country with the Nilgiris, the low lands of the dry zone with the plains of Tamil Nadu. The society and culture of Sri Lanka result from the juxtaposition, and in a large measure the combination of north Indian and south Indian elements. During the historical period, various groups coming from the continent settled in the island. Some of them spoke languages and belonged to cultures originating in the Indo-Gangetic plains. Under the combined influence of the kings established in the centre-north of the island, and of the large Buddhist monasteries which they protected, these elements slowly fused into the Sinhala community (*not race*). Other groups, probably more numerous, came from the nearer southern part of the peninsula. Most of these must have melted into the evolving Sinhala community over a long period. By the end of the first millennium AD, when Buddhism disappeared from the continent where new religious forms developed (especially devotional Saivism), and when expansionist states were established in south India, a Tamil identity solidified in the north and east of the island. Under the combined influence of climatic change, expanding maritime trade and unsettled conditions created by was with the Chola empire and other Indian powers, the highly elaborated hydraulic system, upon which the ancient civilisation was built, eventually collapsed. After the 12th century, the core of the Sinhala popula-

tion drifted towards the south west and the central hills, while the Jaffna peninsula became the centre of the Sri Lankan Tamil community. Although geographic separation increased the cultural distance between the two communities, the links of the island with the continent were by no means severed. The development of a rich Sinhala literature was deeply influenced by the flourishing Indian cultures of the middle ages; and different groups continued to settle in the island, integrating with one or the other community or, as in the case of the Muslims, keeping an identity of their own.

The internal organisation of the insular society reflected these Indian influences: as in the irrigated areas of south Tamil Nadu, the rice-cultivating caste was numerically and hierarchically dominant among both the Sinhala (*goyigama*) and the northern Tamils (*vellalar*); the fishing castes were more or less the same on both sides of the Palk Straits; kinship systems and vocabulary were similar; religious practices — both Buddhist and Hindu — derived from India.

The first distinguishing factor lay in the resilience of Buddhism in the island. Its survival was linked to that of a relatively stable monarchical system which extended its protection to the community of monks, while the growing brahminical influence in south India put an end to its patronage by the local kings, and the decline of the Sangha reached a point of no return with the establishment of Muslim states in north India.

The second distinguishing factor resulted from the length and the depth of the colonial impact: four-and-a-half centuries of foreign domination in the coastal areas, a century and a half in the interior. Integration of the island into the world market was stronger than in India. Following the trading economy focused on cinnamon set up by the Portuguese and the Dutch, the British

imposed in the interior a plantation system for coffee, then tea and rubber production, which became the dominant feature of the economy and made it vulnerable to the fluctuations of the world market. While the British revenue system in India was mainly dependent on peasant agriculture and climatic fluctuations, taxation in Ceylon was based on the plantation sector.

Moreover, after a short experiment with ruling Ceylon from Madras, which ended in failure, the British administration of the island remained separate from that of India and contributed to its continuing particularism. While encouraging the migration of a new group of south Indian manual workers for employment in plantation and urban jobs, the British discouraged their intergration in the local society, contrary to the age-old pattern of acculturation. At the level of representations, while they reinforced in India a taxonomy based on caste and religious categories, they upheld in Ceylon a taxonomy based on so-called 'racial' and linguistic categories.

Finally, the growth of a nationalist movement in Ceylon, although parallel to the Indian freedom movement, enhanced the distinctiveness of the island from India, and inside, the separateness of the different communities, as it was in a large measure based on a growing consciousness, among the Sinhala people, of Sri Lanka as a holy land of Buddhism, and to a lesser degree among the Sri Lankan Tamils, of Jaffna as a repository of the Saivite Tamil tradition.

The beginnings of the modern period in Sri Lanka are signalled by the rise of the maritime trade from the 14th century onwards under the impulse of Muslim merchants. The next phase involved the expansion of the European demand for spices (a market eventually captured by the Portuguese in the 16th century). The development of coconut and arecanut cultivation, cinnamon pee-

ling, gem digging and pearl diving provided important export resources for new states which came into existence along the western coast in interaction with south-west India, such as the kingdom of Kotte. The west-east routes of trade linking Sri Lanka with the west Asia and Europe on one side, south-east Asia and the Far East on the other, became more important than the north-south axis linking the island with the peninsula. But south Indian groups such as weavers, fishers and agricultural labourers continued to trickle in and were integrated into the caste system of the Sinhalese.

After the annexation of Kotte and of Jaffna by the Portuguese, the channels of exchange with India were kept open by the new Sinhala kingdoms established in the interior at Sitawaka and Kandy. Even under the Dutch who expelled the Portuguese in the middle of the 17th century and attempted to cut Kandy from access to the coasts, the Indian connection was maintained by the intermediary of the (mainly Tamil) regions of the north and east. The Kandyan kings married princesses from Madurai and in the 18th century a Nayakkar dynasty of south Indian (Telugu) origin came to power in the highlands. As protectors of the Sangha, these rulers played an important role in the revival of Buddhism. By the end of the 18th century, however, they were finally cut from the mainland by the British conquest, and their authoritarianism intensified by the British intrigues made them unpopular.

The establishment by the successive European powers of a system of direct rule in the coastal regions left a deep imprint on the economy, society and institutions, which distinguished Sri Lanka from India and brought it closer to the Javanese experience. The island was integrated into a network which linked it with the world market of agricultural products, whereas India under the Mughals was the major world centre of textile manufacture and exports. As a result, Ceylon was much more dependent on a limited range of products over which it had no control. The Salagama, a south Indian weaver caste turned into cinnamon peelers, produced under a system of compulsory labour the main article of export, which was exceedingly profitable for the Dutch Company. But these profits were imperilled by frequent revolts encouraged by the Kandyan authorities.

In areas controlled by the Dutch, the Roman civil law was imposed much earlier than under the British in India. Individual land rights became the rule, instead of the traditional undivided rights in a family share ('panguwa') of the village land. Personal and familial law tended to erode status hierarchies, although the Dutch recognised the hegemony of high caste goyigama and bestowed honorific titles upon their headmen, the so-called mudaliyar of the Low country, who formed a kind of landed gentry. The courts of law became the focal point of public life, and a class of lawyers, generally recruited among the Burghers of Dutch or mixed descent, became very influential. Together with the mudaliyar, they formed the backbone of a new elite in the 18th century. The development of western education ensured the continuing power of these groups imbued with a 'colonial culture'. Urban development in Colombo, Galle, Matara and Jaffna was encouraged by the Dutch who left their mark on architecture and furniture.

At the turn of the 19th century, when the British took over from the Dutch, western influence was by no means a new thing in Sri Lanka. What the British did was to extend it to the interior and generally make it more pervasive. Unlike in India, they had not to deal with the legacy of a vast imperial system, nor with the dynamism of an autonomous trade economy, nor with the intricacies of a highly caste-conscious peasant society. They attempted to rule the island like any other colony, with administrators who had made their careers in Africa, south-east Asia or the Caribbean rather than in India; but they could not ignore that Ceylon, with its ancient civilisation deeply influenced by India, was not just another 'sugar island' which they could fill with slaves or coolies and govern at will.

While the British returned Indonesia to the Dutch after the Napoleonic wars, they reinforced their control on Ceylon between 1796 and 1815, because of the strategic value of its ports (Trincomalee, Galle) for ruling the south Indian coasts. But as soon as they found themselves unpopular as a result of a succession of political mistakes, they delinked the Ceylon administration from that of Madras and made it a separate Crown Colony. Instead of transforming Kandy into a tributary 'princely' state, they attempted to conquer it in 1803:

the war ended in failure. They then added fuel to court intrigues so as to destabilise a young king, until then rather popular, and eventually succeeded in annexing the kingdom in 1815.

The cession was recognised by the aristocracy and the Sangha in a written convention by which the British undertook to protect the Kandyan traditions and privileges. But the Kandyans were soon disillusioned and in 1817-18 they joined *en masse* a rebellion stirred up by the appearance of a pretender. This rebellion can be compared to the great upheaval of 1857-58 in India, in that it involved people who had lost faith in the fairness of the Raj. But there are also obvious differences: it flared immediately and not long after the annexation; and its repression weakened the Kandyan aristocracy to such an extent that it could never recover. While the British chose after the Mutiny to come to terms with traditional forces and pamper the princes, in early 19th century Ceylon, where they felt the legitimacy of their rule to be more secure, they did not hesitate to foster the missionaries and openly denounce the contents of the Kandyan convention by severing the links between the state and the Sangha. The missionaries gave a major impulse to the development of English medium education in Colombo, Jaffna and to a lesser extent in Kandy and Galle, and they insured the formation of an anglicised elite conforming to the programme proclaimed in India by Bentinck and Macaulay.

The economic strategies developed by the British in the early 19th century were parallel in both countries. They aimed at dismantling the impediments to free enterprise. Until 1832, the East India Company retained the cinnamon monopoly and manipulated prices to suit its interests on the continent. A commission of enquiry pointed out this anomaly and on the basis of its report the monopoly was abolished together with the corvee system which supposedly hindered the development of free enterprise, while private appropriation of uncultivated land was encouraged shortly afterwards. These measures enabled European adventurers and speculators to lay hands on a substantial part of the Kandyan highlands and open coffee estates; but the reluctance of the local villagers to accept working conditions akin to slave labour led the planters to attract coolies from Tamil Nadu, first on a temporary

basis, and later when tea replaced coffee as the major crop, as permanent labourers.

At that stage, the evolution of Ceylon radically deviated from that of India, in spite of similarities with some regions of the continent such as Assam, Coorg and Travancore. The strength of the plantation economy model was such that when the coffee estates were abandoned in the 1880s as a result of a leaf disease and of south American competition, the island was so dependent on that system that tea was promptly adopted as a substitute, soon followed by rubber. Contrary to a common view, the plantation and the subsistence sectors did not operate in watertight compartments but were linked, so that any crisis on one sector affected the other. Enterprise was by no means limited to Europeans: in the latter part of the 19th century, Ceylonese invested in estates (especially coconut) the wealth amassed in their indirect involvement in the plantation economy: between 1868 and 1906, 72 per cent of the land areas sold by the Crown were acquired by non-Europeans. The estates eventually provided a large amount of various resources to the local population: regular employment in coconut and rubber estates, casual employment on tea plantations; arrack, coir and latex manufacture; carpentry and wood products; transport, building, trade in agricultural produce, and derived activities in towns and roadside markets. The rising standard of living on the island at the beginning of the 20th century stood in clear contrast with the continuing subsistence crises on the continent and contributed to attract Indian immigrants whose numbers exceeded that of the indigenous Tamils of the north and east.

The colonial state backed the planters' interests because its budget depended on custom duties paid by that sector. For want of a survey and settlement on Indian lines, the administration was unable to lay the basis for a general land tax. The only taxation based on agricultural production was the very unpopular paddy tithe, levied by tax farmers or commuted to a fixed payment, which was finally abolished in 1892. This is in obvious contrast with India where the taxation of agricultural produce was the mainstay of the budget and a decisive factor in the development of rural discontent and of the nationalist movement.

The 'plantocracy' was very influential

in government circles (at the beginning civil servants were quite often involved in the planting industry, and later, the Planters' Association became the most powerful lobby in the country). They successfully agitated for cheap land, public roads for their private use and an abundant supply of coolie labour. The government devoted a substantial part of its budget and of the labour provided by poll tax commuters to the building of roads and railways in the plantation areas. It promulgated in 1840 an ordinance proclaiming as Crown land any uncultivated or irregularly cultivated land (such as by slash-and-burn cultivators) for which nobody could furnish a written grant, and sold it for a song to the prospective planters. When these Crown lands became scarce, European and Ceylonese middlemen entered the game and prompted the villagers to part with the remaining land. A new legislation establishing a system of land settlement failed to arrest land alienation, which restricted the living space available for village subsistence cultivation. Moreover indiscriminate deforestation by plantations led to soil erosion and silting of paddy fields, drying of springs, scarcity of fuelwood, and scarcity of grazing grounds for cattle. Thus landhunger and environmental problems in Ceylon were much more the result of plantation expansion than in India.

The supply of stable and obedient south India coolie labourers, generally from untouchable castes, was ensured through the activity of 'kanganies', usually older labourers who were given advances by the planters to recruit new workers whom they controlled through indebtedness (and not under an indenture system like longer distance migration to Mauritius and the Caribbean). The travel and working conditions were appalling until the end of the 19th century, when the conversion to tea and the intervention of the colonial authorities improved the situation. From 1901 onwards, population growth was more rapid than elsewhere in south Asia; the continuing immigration of Indians until the 1930s was an important contributing factor.

In the British imperial system centred on India, Ceylon occupied a marginal place, but the economic links with the continent were significant through the activities of the same banks, managing agencies and export-import firms. Indian businessmen were present in the rural

credit market (the nattukottai chettiers from south India), the rice and the cotton trade (the Borahs and the Sindhis from western India) and the retail of imported goods (Muslim merchants from Kerala). Their competition was resented by the Sinhala traders, especially the karava from the west coast, and led to tensions including severe anti-Muslim riots in 1915. Communal violence was until then almost unknown in Sri Lanka, and in any case less common than in India. The 1915 events, caused by conflicting economic interests rather than religious differences, were a portent of things to come.

The exclusive emphasis on plantation agriculture led to the neglect of peasant subsistence agriculture. Paddy cultivation suffered from the lack of concern for irrigation and the abolition of corvee labour by which the reservoirs and channels used to be cleared and repaired. Any attempt at restoring the hydraulic works of the dry zone was foiled by the persistence of malaria until the 1940s, and the competition in the town and plantation rice market of cheap paddy produced in India and Burma. Even the abolition of the paddy tax did not improve the condition of the peasantry, nor increase rice productivity. As a similar stagnation occurred in the paddy-producing areas of eastern India (in contrast with the development of Punjabi agriculture), the plantation system was probably not the only factor responsible.

There is a tendency to overstress the rationality of the British raj in south Asia. Recent research has shown that there was a large amount of improvisation, expediency and contradictions in the colonial practice both in India and Ceylon. But in the latter country the authorities had at their disposal a much denser network of civil servants, better communications and information systems, and therefore more efficient tools to impose their policy. The nationalist answer to British raj has been constructed as the major trend in 20th century India's history, until some Cambridge-based historians started to question that exclusive emphasis on the basis of local level studies in political mobilisation. In comparison, Sri Lanka's path to freedom has usually been described as relatively smooth, uneventful, and rather parochial: but if the emphasis is put on India's regional and not national history, the difference is less obvious.

In both countries there was an attempt by the British in the second half of the 19th century to restore the authority of the traditional elites. The services due to temples and to Kandyan chiefs were registered and caste hierarchies were legitimised, especially in Jaffna (although they were never officially recognised in censuses as in India). A conservative brand of Buddhism was encouraged and an attempt at 'moralising' social practices was made by condemning polyandry, and exposing corruption in the administration of temple properties. The decay of the Kandyan aristocracy was attributed to alcoholism (which the British had themselves fostered by encouraging the opening of taverns up-country for fiscal reasons).

At the same time the dynamism of the westernised low-country elite was censured exactly like that of its Bengali counterpart. Its economic success was condemned as speculative and exploitative of the peasantry, and its pretensions to represent the nation were denounced as unauthentic. Its members were barred from access to the higher administrative posts while at the same time English missionary schools and the professions were liberally opened to these so-called 'brown sahibs'. Members of this new bourgeoisie were ethnically diverse and divided into rival coteries, but had much in common: English was their second or often first language, coconut or rubber property their favourite investment, law or possibly medicine the career to which they destined their children.

As in India, religious revivalist movements were started by members of the elite in an attempt to counter missionary influence in education. As early as the middle of the 19th century, Arumugam Navalar tried to recreate a Hindu Saivite tradition in Jaffna; by the end of the century, the Anagarika Dharmapala played a major role in the development of a Buddhist revival first supported by the theosophists (who were also active in India during the time of Annie Besant and B G Tilak) and later emancipated from their influence. Dharmapala kept close links with India where he spent a large part of his life restoring the sacred places of Buddhism.

Again as in India, the period of the first world war witnessed an upsurge of nationalist militancy and a stiffening on the part of the colonial authorities, a face to face which could erupt into open conflict. The first centenary of the

cession of Kandy in 1915 provided such an opportunity, but it is rather the panic of the colonial authorities than any intentional plot which was at the basis of the troubles. The execution of rioters and the imprisonment of the main Sinhala leaders of the nationalist movement aroused the sympathy of large segments of the population, including Tamil moderates; but it did not lead to a vast non-cooperation movement comparable to that which challenged British rule in India after the 1919 Amritsar massacre. In the early 1920s, the colonial authorities in Ceylon were able to manipulate the potential rivalries between the communities to break the movement.

These events are not very different from those which encouraged the growth of the Indian mass movement. Among the deeper causes for the different trajectories of the national movements in India and in Ceylon, the length and depth of the colonial impact may be a contributing factor as also the lack of leaders as determined and cohesive as the westernised Indian brahmins. The gap between the anglicised elite and the local dominants was possibly wider in Sri Lanka, and the kind of mass mobilisation which made the non-cooperation movements so impressive in India might have been more difficult to organise in Ceylon. Finally, Colombo was certainly not a place where political debates as lively as in Calcutta or Bombay would normally take place, and the Ceylon National Congress founded in the aftermath of the 1915 repression remained a weak organisation, riven with factional rivalries. Coterie was also a characteristic of local Indian politics, as shown by the recent studies of the 'Cambridge school' of historians of India, but the national leadership of the Indian Congress proved able to rise above parochial interests.

Three specific factors in the Sri Lankan situation require special mention. The first is that the British chose to make Ceylon a showcase of gradual home rule. The second is that even if Ceylon welcomed Gandhi and Nehru, its elites generally regarded developments in India with some diffidence lest they should impinge on Ceylon's independent ways; in the 1930s and 1940s, the group led by D S Senanayake who was to become the prime minister at independence, was quite clear on this point. Moreover, anti-Indian sentiments were fuelled by the national-populist propaganda of party and union leaders such

as A E Goonesinha, who accused immigrant workers of being responsible for the largescale unemployment in urban and plantation areas during the depression, and Indian traders (especially the chettiar) of depriving Ceylonese owners of paddy, coconut and rubber properties of their lands. These developments are exactly parallel to those which led to the separation of Burma (another Buddhist country) from India, but they never took in Ceylon a violent turn as in Burma, probably because the Ceylonese elite had then chosen the parliamentary way which gave them better prospects for political advancement than crisis and confrontation.

The third factor is the lack of social tensions in the rural world comparable to those which underlay Gandhi's mass mobilisation. After the abolition of the paddy tax, in spite of the repression of slash-and-burn cultivation and of the landhunger resulting from plantation expansion, there was until the depression no widespread peasant discontent, because most peasants could draw some advantages from the opportunities created by agricultural expansion. When the depression set in, the villagers whose numbers had been inflated by an early population growth found themselves deprived of these opportunities or even thrown out of employment. The dramatic malaria epidemic of 1934-35 owed its deadly character to the fact that many peasants were undernourished. To counter the prospect of an impending crisis, both the colonial government and Ceylonese leaders such as D S Senanayake were quick to revise the land policy hitherto biased towards the estate sector, along the lines suggested in 1929 by the Ceylon Land Commission. Land redistribution to peasants in the wet zone, and later the large-scale restoration and creation of hydraulic works for paddy cultivation in the dry zone, succeeded in defusing peasant unrest. At the same time, the bases of a welfare state were being set up, in the form of free dispensaries and schools.

The transfer of power by the British to the Sri Lankan elite was a long drawn out exercise. A legislative council established during the 19th century had been opened to unofficial representatives elected on a narrow and communal basis. The enlargement of the electorate in the 1920s under governor Manning had left the communal system intact, the colonial motto being then 'divide and rule' in Ceylon as well as in India. But in the

late 1920s, the Donoughmore Commission, sent to the island about at the same time as the Simon Commission to the subcontinent, suggested a different course: the abandonment of separate electorates, universal franchise, and a system of limited home rule with dyarchy. While the governor retained responsibility for law and order, justice, finance and foreign relations, a board of ministers (without a prime minister) elected by a state council was to manage home affairs, education, health agriculture, industries and communications. The reforms were adopted in 1931 — well before the provincial devolution of 1937 in India. Sri Lanka thus served as a test case of gradual decolonisation, possibly to show the Indian nationalists the benefits they could gain from collaboration with the raj.

The political class reluctantly accepted the new system. Universal suffrage compelled them to play the electoral game, without giving them full responsibility, and even its supporters such as the trade unionist Goonesinha lost their influence when confronted with the emergence of a Marxist movement led by the Lanka Sama Samaja Party. The communal system of representation died hard and led many politicians to revive caste, religious or ethnolinguistic loyalties to ensure vote banks for themselves. The rise of communal politics in the 1930s was in a way the outcome of the majority rule implicit in a representative system in which the institutions did not provide for a measure of federalism. Some leaders of the Tamil minority in Jaffna induced their people to boycott the elections for two years, and they later advocated an equal representation for the minorities (about 30 per cent of the population) and the majority. On the other side of the deepening divide, S W R D Bandaranaike started a communal movement, the Sinhala Mahasabha, reminiscent of the Hindu Mahasabha in India.

But at that stage there existed in Ceylon no separatist movement comparable to that advocated by Mohammed Ali Jinnah. During the second world war, whereas the collaboration of the Muslim League with the British, in contrast with the Quit India movement of the Congress, paved the way for Pakistan, the good relations of D S Senanayake with the British and his ability to integrate the Jaffna Tamils into the political system, ensured the independence of Ceylon as a unitary state. On the other

hand, the Ceylonese leadership (mainly Low country Sinhalese), partly in order to gain the support of the Kandyans, excluded the Indian immigrants (especially the plantation Tamils) from land distribution measures and from some government jobs. India retaliated with a ban on migratory movements, and a serious crisis developed in the plantation sector in 1940. At independence, most of the immigrants were disenfranchised and became stateless; their fate remained for decades a major bone of contention between India and Sri Lanka.

Furthermore, the movement towards complete independence of Sri Lanka followed a path very different from that of India and Pakistan: the new opportunities created by the war had practically opposite effects. After 1942, the island became the headquarters for the anti-Japanese war in south-east Asia. The economy benefited immensely from various contracts, from the demand for rubber and graphite. In addition, a planning apparatus was set up which laid the basis for a welfare state which was to become a hallmark of the Sri Lankan polity after independence: agricultural prices were guaranteed for the producer and controlled for the benefit of the consumers: public services were better organised, the health and education systems were given a sounder footing, malaria was partly eradicated by systematic spraying of DDT.

On the political side, the extensive powers given to the military, far from arresting the march to independence, encouraged it; the unflinching support given by D S Senanayake to the war effort made him appear as the perfect partner in view of the transfer of power, at the very moment when the Quit India movement threatened the British raj on the continent. In a way, Ceylonese independence from India was guaranteed by the same circumstances which provided for the creation of Pakistan, and was prepared by the same man who presided over the August 1947 transfer of power. As early as June 1944, Lord Mountbatten, then commander-in-chief, persuaded the war cabinet to examine a draft Constitution submitted by D S Senanayake. The report of the Soulbury Commission sent to Ceylon by the end of 1944 served as a basis for a negotiation which lasted for three years — not because there were actual obstacles, but because the Attlee government chose to give priority to the burning Indian issue. The independence of Ceylon was therefore

proclaimed only in February 1948, although it had matured during a longer period than on the continent.

Compared with the violent conditions that prevailed in India, Pakistan and Burma, the transfer of power in Sri Lanka appeared as a transition as smooth as had been the takeover of the Low country in 1796 and that of Kandy in 1815. Defence and co-operation agreements ensured that Britain kept an influence on foreign relations and economic affairs. The more radical nationalists such as Bandaranaike, and the Marxist leaders who were becoming popular, could therefore describe the operation as a case of non-genuine decolonisation.

In a way, 1948 does not represent a major watershed in the history of the island. The peaceful character of the transition could not hide for long a series of weaknesses, which were to appear a decade later, with a succession of crises culminating in the 1980s with the Tamil separatist movement and the JVP uprising in the south. It is perhaps the small size, the high degree of education, communication and politicisation which made the Sri Lankan problems appear so untractable, as in the cases of Lebanon or Cyprus.

But in spite of these major differences, the study of Sri Lankan history can shed some light on certain aspects of Indian history and contribute to its critical examination. If one considers India as a state throughout the modern period, the history of Sri Lanka appears as basically specific: the limited relations between India and Sri Lanka have always been of a nature different from those between the centre of India's power (be it Delhi or Calcutta) and any of its peripheral parts. If on the contrary the focus is on the regional aspects of the Indian world, there are more similarities for example between Kerala and Sri Lanka than between Kerala and Rajasthan. That a comparative study of Sri Lanka and Kerala opens a rich field of research in political economy as well as history has been amply demonstrated (see Rex Casinader, *EPW*, December 2, 1995).

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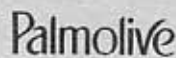
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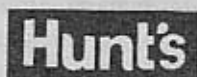
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Rethinking Marxism's Impasse

Dayan Jayatilleka

The 'Crisis of Marxism', the 'End of Marxism', had been proclaimed not merely by its enemies but even its friends. Can the collapse of Soviet and Soviet style socialism and the failure of Marxists to identify and agree upon any universal agency for social change lead us to conclude that Marxism is dead? What were the factors which caused the demise of really existing socialism? Which is dead, and which remains alive within Marxism? Which Marxism, whose Marxism, which aspect of Marxism is in crisis? What is Marxism's Original Sin? How can Marxism's structural lacuane be overcome so as to enable it to escape from its current cul-de-sac? In short, can — and how can — Marxism be revived? In what way can the tremendous ideological and cultural resources of imperialism be countervailed? As Marxists, it is incumbent upon us to seek answers to these questions while we wait for the Party of Lenin to make it's come back in Russia.

PART I

Marxism and the Intangible

There are two major interpretations within Marxism, concerning the motor force of history; two different identifications of the basic contradiction which propels large scale qualitative change. One is the contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production. This view holds that at some point, the growing forces of production come up against the constriction of the existent relations of production. A nuance or modification of this thesis — as introduced by Stalin in his *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* — envisages a situation in which the relations of production become a fetter on the future/potential growth of the forces of production.

The second major thesis identifying the motive force of socio-historical change is the contradiction between classes; the class struggle. Of course, the two interpretations are far from mutually exclusive and the latter can be

seen as caused by and the expression of, the former.

In a striking leap of theoretical originality or perhaps intuition — qualities that are denied him by his legion of critics and denouncers — Stalin, in the essay cited above, envisaged the possibility of a contradiction between the forces and relations of production, under socialism (resulting from erroneous policies). While Kautsky and Trotsky clearly visualised such a contradiction, predicting the direst consequences from it, they did so within an analytic framework that refused to identify post 1917 Soviet society as socialist. Indeed Kautsky deemed it counter-revolutionary while Trotsky, more charitably, identified a collective form of property but stopped well short of defining it socialist. In the case of both these thinkers, their refusal to describe post revolutionary USSR as socialist or even as 'building socialism', stemmed not only from theoretical exactitude, but also from an aprioristic notion of socialism as a successor to developed capitalism and therefore incapable of containing a seriously consequential contradiction between the forces and the relations of production. (Somewhat flipantly, we may discern echoes in their notion of socialism, of a 'heaven on earth'). Hence, what was being built in the USSR was not and could not be socialism-indeed, for Kautsky, it was its exact opposite; something more reactionary than capitalism. One notes that the capitalism he had in mind included that of Germany, which, as he was writing as it were, threw up Nazi fascism!

Defenders of Kautsky and Trotsky would argue that if they could be faulted for anything, it is of excessive fidelity to Marx (and Engels) who clearly spoke of socialism as arising on the basis of advanced capitalism with its abundance of consumer goods. This defence overlooks a question that stems from Marx's now well known reply to Vera Zasulich, admitting the possibility of a revolutionary Russia making a direct transition from the communal 'mir' to socialism, provided the Russian revolution acted as a signal for the European revolution. Certainly, Marx added this last mentioned proviso, but however great the importance one

attributes to it, however great the emphasis one gives it, the problem remains that any Russian socialism/communism arising on the basis of the mir, and not issuing from the womb of a developed Russian capitalism, in fact bypassing such a stage, had of necessity to be very different from a socialism arising in Britain or Western Europe, whatever the degree of assistance from a victorious European proletariat. This is so, unless one can argue that Marx and Engels envisaged a 'substitutionism' by the external — in a context other than that of colonial conquest — which could compensate for bypassing the internal evolution of a developed capitalism. This needs to be explored.

Stalin's particular merit was that he not merely admitted, but cautioned of and indeed drew attention to the possibility of such a contradiction (between forces and relations of production) and its seriousness in a system which he unambiguously saw as socialist and which he was the architect and artisan of.

Mao certainly conceptualized contradictions, including antagonistic ones, under socialism and (non antagonistic ones?) under communism. However, though he spoke of those between mental and manual labour and town and country, Mao clearly emphasized class struggle as the fundamental contradiction in post-revolutionary society¹. It was Liu Shao Chi, Deng Hsiao Peng and less explicitly Chou en Lai, who followed the Stalin thesis of the contradiction between forces and relations of production under socialism. It was not entirely a fiction when the Maoists critiqued this school of thought as 'Bukharinite' and in the interests of accuracy it would be correct to term it a Stalin-Bukharin thesis (though its evolution was a two step one and does not date from the period of the Bukharin-Stalin bloc).

Professional Sovietologists and the more literate of journalistic commentators on the fall of the socialist system in the USSR and Eastern Europe have been unable to suppress their glee at the irony of history in which Marx's discovery, that the conflict between the forces and relations of production, led

to the unravelling of 'Marx's estate', so to speak. They were correct, of course.

The question then is why is it that the Marxists of these countries, failed to see this. A facile reply would be that they were not really Marxists. Is it really correct that they were unable to discern the growing problem. The answer is 'yes' and 'no'. There were many social scientists and theoreticians who grasped the problem of economic stagnation and technological backwardness. Apart from the period of ideological grotesquerie, where the USSR was characterised as a 'developed socialist' society — and this was precisely the period in which the economy was stagnating! — these loyally dissenting ideologues became increasingly influential. The Andropov and early Gorbachev years were, in a sense, their moment. Where then, did they fail? In the first place, they did not wish to admit that the problem was one of a contradiction between the forces and the relations of production, because to do so would have been to rehabilitate a Stalinist thesis or worse still, to make concessions (they wrongly thought) to Maoist notions of fundamental contradictions under socialism. Therefore, the problem as seen merely as one of economic growth/stagnation/technological backwardness. The famous 'Scientific and Technological Revolution' (STR) was seen a quick fix. Their outlook on the problems of Socialism closely mirrored that of Walt Rostow (and World Bank orthodoxy) about the Third World!

Secondly, and more pertinent to us here, was that they did not understand the content of one of the most important aspects of the Scientific & Technological Revolution under late capitalism, which they were hoping to emulate. They failed to comprehend the crucial importance of information technology, of information and the dawning of the information age, which bourgeois thinkers such as Marshall McLuhan had focused on as early as 1962 and Zbigniew Brzezinski had described as the 'technetronic revolution'. The STR, economic growth and even the forces of production were understood by Soviet and Sovietized Marxists in exclusively tangible, physical, material, quantifiable terms. These Marxists forgot or did not know Lenin's remark to the effect that 'intelligent Materialism has more in common with intelligent idealism than with mechanistic materialism'. That is why McLuhan's notion of the 'global village' — and its implications for socialism — escaped them almost completely. Thus it is that a grave philosophical flaw, that of mechanistic, vulgar materialism, blinded

dominant Marxism to the fact that an **Intangible** i.e. 'information' had now been incorporated as a vital **productive force**.

This had several implications. The STR of the West, with its heavy emphasis on information storage and retrieval technology could not be replicated. The Soviet advances in space and military technology could not break through a certain ceiling. There were hardly any spin-off benefits of existing levels of Soviet military and space technology for the civilian sector. Above all, the existing relations of production acted as a fetter on the further development of the forces of production and even caused a retardation of this development, since the forces of production that needed to be developed were the forces of **informational production**.

The contradiction between the forces of informational production and the relations of informational production manifested itself in two ways, or operated twice over. Firstly, as we have discussed, at an internal or intrasystemic level, where the necessary further development of the forces of production were fettered. Secondly, at an external level i.e. the level of inter systemic contradiction. Marx had written of the battering ram of cheap commodities, breaking down the Chinese Wall and subjugating the stagnant, self-sufficient systems of China in particular, and Asia in general. In similar fashion, the hugely developed forces of informational production of the West, battered the Berlin Wall which symbolized the existent protectionist relations of informational production under socialism.

The Marxists also failed to understand that certainly in modern times, information shaped culture and was a component of it. The relationship between information and culture was not understood. This is unsurprising, because Marxism's major lacuna was not — as even so undogmatic a thinker as Régis Debray has alleged — the National Question. Indeed on that subject, Marxism (during and after Marx) contains a corpus of concepts that are the equal of any rival school of thought. A suppressed but easily verifiable fact, is that the Second International's and Lenin's advocacy of the Right of Nations to Self Determination antedated by several years, its use by Woodrow Wilson. Marxism's major lacuna, indeed its major weakness **within** its theorization of the National Question, was and is precisely the **Cultural Question** (with Gramsci as the most notable exception). This is

turn is linked to Marxism's inability to grasp the link between past and present, between continuity and discontinuity, **not** in the social realm, not in the realm of socio-economic relations, but in the realm of thought, attitude, behaviour, habit, etc.

It is this structural weakness in Marxism that made it impossible for Marxists to grasp, let alone foresee, the contradiction that led so greatly to the collapse of socialism as a system: that between the **forces of informational/cultural production and the relations of informational/cultural production**.

For his part, Marx knew that while material force can be opposed only by material force, ideas become a material force when they are grasped by the masses. Marx's Marxism or perhaps the sub-text, the secondary, hidden discourse of Marx's Marxism (perhaps we should call it Marx's other Marxism, that of the Other Marx) was not one in which materialism was exclusively physical, tangible. Ideas → masses → material force. And as with ideas, so too with rhythms, with rock music! This was painfully discovered by the power bloc in the USSR and Eastern Europe. Marx's (or the Other Marx's) notion of **materiality** and of the production of the material, was not reducible to the economic and was very different from the materialism of Sovietized Marxism. Ideas could be a material force, the intangible could become the material. For 'this Marx', there was no Chinese Wall between material and mental production — and the transformation from one to the other was a **contingent process** ("when grasped by the masses") — contingent upon mediation by the collective, the mass. In this Other Marxism then, what is crucially determinant, is not the physical, the tangible, but the collective, the social. Or, more simply put, the people.

A Premature Obituary

The "Crisis of Marxism", the "End of Marxism" had been proclaimed not merely by its enemies, but even its friends. Wallerstein spoke of this crisis in the early 1980's while Ronald Aronson, in a searching and sensitive work, has declared that Marxism is over. Hence the title of his book: **After Marxism**. The collapse of Soviet and Soviet-style Socialism and the failure of Marxists to identify and agree upon any universal agency for social change are the two main pieces of evidence he produces of this demise. But is this evidence sufficient? Is Marxism, once deprived of those two attributes, a dead Marxism? It is incumbent upon us to seek out

that Marxism which is dead and that which is alive, or rather, that within Marxism which is dead and that which remains alive. The same is true of the famous crisis of Marxism. Which Marxism, whose Marxism which aspects of Marxism is in crisis?

The main reason for declaring a crisis of Marxism was held to be the increasing gap between its predictions of polarization and of the vanguard role of the proletariat on the one hand, and the actual evolution of capitalist society on the other. If this were cause enough to declare the crisis or demise of Marxism, then it is almost two-thirds of a century old, since Eduard Bernstein made precisely these criticisms in the early part of the century. The point is not whether Bernstein was correct. The point is that even if he were, there was enough vitality and explanatory power in Marxism to act as inspiration for revolutionary upheavals at least till 1979!

If the point is that of the collapse of the Socialist system, then why is it that the survival of Cuba and its success at ensuring social welfare despite the disappearance of its patron, is being ignored by the theorists of Marxism's end? Could a system that was not superior to capitalism, have survived the decades long, even tightening blockade plus the economic, psychological and spiritual fallout of Soviet Socialism's disappearance? Could a system that was not superior to capitalism have survived all this **without** slashing the social welfare system and while continuing with the advanced medical scientific research that Cuba is undertaking? And all this in a small island, 90 miles from the sole super power? This achievement cannot be explained away as merely one of Cuban nationalism, because it begs the question of why Third World nationalisms — even those under praetorian systems — have collapsed while Cuba has not. It also begs the question as to why nationalism, or patriotism has found its strongest expression in **Socialism** in Cuba. Perhaps the 'nationalist' explanation points to a strength rather than a weakness of socialism. i.e. socialism, when it is not imposed from without, is the firmest and truest guarantee of independence, sovereignty and indeed, of the **national interest**.

None of this is intended to avoid the problem of the collapse of Socialism in the USSR and Eastern Europe — and its implications for Marxism. But why identify a philosophy, an ideology, so completely with a system's destiny,

particularly when the philosophers themselves had no blueprint for a system and whatever notions they did have are long acknowledged to have had little relation to the post revolutionary context? Engels' definitional differentiation between 'method' and (conceptual) 'system' with reference to Hegel is surely even more valid with regard to a historically determined political and socio-economic system?

Furthermore, while this or that scientific thesis or even paradigm can be deemed to have been erroneous or superseded, by repeated failures of experiments based upon it, can any science itself (say, Physics) be deemed to be dead, when experiments fail? While many thesis within Marxism have to be abandoned and revised and while many new ones remain to be elaborated, Marxism as Science cannot be said to have been demolished with the collapse of socialism.

The other major argument that Marxism is over because there is no agreed upon or identifiable agency of change, is another arrow that does not hit the target dead centre. Surely the shift in identification of the main agent of emancipation occurred at least as far back as Mao, and possibly with Lenin's last writings when he spoke of the world revolution's destiny being determined by the weight of China, India and Persia? The shift away from the original identification of the Western proletariat as the fundamental vehicle of emancipation, has been tentative, qualified and inconsistent, but one with a long history: ranging from Trotsky's prediction of a Russian revolution and his later remark that the road to Paris lies through Calcutta, to Lenin's "Advanced Asia, Backward Europe" and Stalin's "Do not Forget the East". The shift becomes bolder with Maoism's differentiation between the leading force (the proletariat) and the main force (the peasantry)

When Fanon, Marcuse, Debray and Lin Biao virtually abandoned the Western and even the World's urban proletariat, no one lamented the crisis, still less the **demise of Marxism** for that reason! That is because Marxism's fortunes were not dependent on fidelity to the original agency — or, at least had not been dependent upon it for many decades. It is conservative Marxism, that of the Second International after October 1917, that used this as a yardstick. Soviet Marxism, reacting to the Castro-Guevarist, Maoist and New Left challenges, adopted a version of this attitude, insisting that the contradiction between the

Socialist and capitalist systems was the driving force of history, while the 'victorious' 'ruling' Soviet proletariat was the main vehicle of change. But this had no effect on the optimism of revolutionary Marxism, and the radical left.

Marxism's main emphasis, strength and contribution was not the model of a future society. Here it resolutely turned its back on the Utopian Socialist tradition. Its main strength and emphasis was its **critique** of capitalism. This still remains relevant and therefore Marxism cannot be said to be dead. It has been argued cogently by Wallerstein that Marxism's validity is a matter for the future rather than the past, since Marx posited a model of pure capitalism and of a capitalist world, which will be approximated only when the non-capitalist hinterlands of the globe are fully subjugated and transformed. Here, Wallerstein follows Rosa Luxemburg who predicted capitalism's final crisis as resulting from the disappearance of the pre-capitalist hinterlands which she said were essential for capitalism's growth — just as their penetration was.

The Chinese identification in the 1960's of the main contradictions of the globe, remain valid, except for that between the world socialist system and the world capitalist system. (This exists only in residual form, in the case of Cuba). The other contradictions between the national liberation movement of the Third World and imperialism; between capital and labour in the capitalist countries and finally, inter-imperialist contradictions, remain intact, though their **form** may have changed. Chiapas 1994 shows that Mao's final assertion in 1973 that 'countries want independence, nations want liberation, peoples want revolution' has not been invalidated. Mao formulation also reveals a development of a complex notion of history, first introduced by Lenin when he modified the International's old slogan of 'Workers of the World Unite', to that of 'Workers and Oppressed Peoples of the World Unite'. In doing so, Lenin revealed his understanding of history not as a unitary process of class struggle but as a confluence of class and popular struggles, generated by contradictions of exploitation ("workers") and oppression (oppressed peoples). He also introduces a new agency, a new category, 'oppressed peoples of the world'. Not 'nations' not 'the peasantry', though there is quite obviously an overlap.

(To be Continued)

Notes

1. "Taking class struggle as the key link"

Homelands of the heart

An interview with Romesh Gunasekera

by Tina Faulk

The post-colonial novel is a paradoxical beast.

It expresses the joys and traumas of what have been come to be called, politely, 'emerging nations', yet — writers in English being post-colonial elites — it often expresses perspectives of the colonisers rather than the colonised, written in their language, rather than that of indigenous people.

Ironic too, that some of the best-known post-colonial writers (Naipaul, Rushdie, Ondaatje, Mistry,) are also exiles, forced to abandon their homelands for those of the erstwhile-coloniser or another previous colony. Thus Ondaatje and Mistry in Canada, Naipaul, Rushdie, and Romesh Gunasekera in the UK.

Romesh who?

If his name is not exactly well known in Australia, it is hardly the author's fault, for his first collection of short stories on his native Sri Lanka, *Monkfish Moon*, was well received and his novel *Reef* was a contender for the Booker Prize of 1993.

January the Sydney Writer's Festival heard Sri Lankan-born Romesh speaking about his work in the State (Mitchell) Library of New South Wales.

Gunasekera, born in 1954, the son of a roving expatriate executive who left Sri Lanka in the 1960s, was schooled in the Philippines and the UK. He has lived in London since the 1970s, where he studied Philosophy and English and married an English woman. He has worked as a development aid officer in several countries and now works for the British Council in London. *Reef* and *Monkfish Moon* have been translated into French, German, Italian, Spanish, Norwegian, Hebrew and Dutch.

Yet *Reef* is tenderly evocative for his homeland, passages of nostalgic longing for that volatile, heartcatchingly beautiful island.

"I remembered the coconut trees of my childhood, the sound of the breeze through the fronds. Simple, pure deathless air. Most of all I missed the closeness of the tank — the reservoir. The lapping of the dark water, flapping lotus leaves, the warm air rippling over it and the cormorants rising, the silent glide of a hornbill... No demons, no troubles, no carrion. An elephant swaying to a music of its own. A perfect peace that seemed eternal even though the jungle might unleash its fury at any moment..."

Reef is Gunasekera's powerful post-colonial morality tale, a Genesis story of sins committed in paradise by new-elites too tangled up in their own lives to notice the encroaching storm until it tears down their world, just as the coral reef, fragile and beautiful, the novel's metaphor, is threatened with destruction from within.

Romesh Gunasekera, speaking at the Sydney Writer's Festival stressed the importance of memory for a writer pushing into the recesses of the past to recover fragments, like pearls from the deep. *Reef* is all about remembered memories, for its author emigrated as a child, with his family, part of the worried middleclass diaspora of English-speaking intellectuals, from Sri Lanka in the Sixties, a country then uneasily coming to terms with what self-government means.

Reef is endlessly funny, warm and enchanting, with its sudden sharp incisive insights, its dreamy prose passages redolent of the long slow heat of a tropical afternoon.

Reef, a novel of migration and memories is also a novel of expatriation. Its protagonists, Triton, the child brought to work in an affluent suburban household, who grows into a talented cook, is the silent observer, the servant who watches, loyal yet judgemental. Triton's master, "my Mr Salgado" is a man of the new elite, the colonial bourgeoisie who step in to run the country once the colonisers have gone. A mild, bookish man, "the sad expression of a hurt heron would struggle in his face" set in his genteel ways, who fails to understand the political forces unleashed by the end of colonialism. Salgado's mistress, lovely Nili, is a modern woman, impatient with tradition, passionate, impulsive and headstrong. Devotedly, like Ishiguro's butler, in *The Remains of the Day*, Triton serves them both, the perfect cook, the diplomatic man servant.

Around them all, the reef, a metaphor for the island, which protects the superstructure as a skin does the internal organs of a human body, the blood, veins and nerve endings, until the reef comes under siege, dissolves and disintegrates.

Gunasekera invites his readers to dive into the exhilarating, occasionally murky world of Third World living; a love cake, made for Miss Nili's delectation, with ten fresh eggs; leftover milk, poured into a clay pot of water, which swirls, "a slow cloud of liquid smoke, uncoiling and running along...unfurling gently in a silent underwater burst of white", and the serene image of the great reservoir of water, the ancient tank, a sea of whose shallows swarm with wild birds.

Romesh Gunasekera wanted, he said in Sydney, to write a short book. *Reef* is short, but it is memorable.



**I joined this corporation
for job security and a
chance to move up the
ladder. What will
privatization
do to my ambitions?**

- Corporation Employee

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