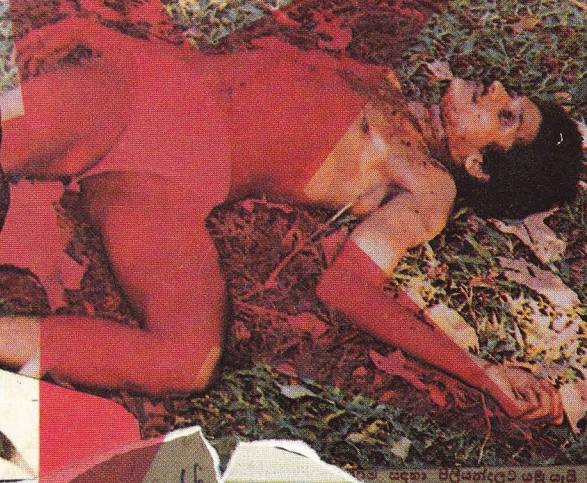


# THE IDEAS GUARDIAN

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## DAYS OF RAGE

### THE KILLING OF DAYA PATHIRANA



## A 10th ANNIVERSARY LOOK AT THE JVP'S FIRST ASSASSINATION

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K. M. de Silva

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# THE COLLAGE OF CRISIS

Mervyn de Silva

A British Minister Dr. Liam Fox told Parliament recently that Britain had offered to "play a facilitating role" in talks between President Chandrika Kumaratunga's "People's Alliance" (P.A.) administration and the secessionist Liberation Tigers (L.T.T.E.). Dr. Fox who visited Sri Lanka in September will probably make another trip to Colombo soon. Meanwhile some retired American generals who have launched a private organisation to sell counter insurgency expertise were approached in connection with the North-and-East war, wrote the Sunday Times columnist, Iqbal Athas. Since the government strategy is to hammer the Tigers hard and force Prabhakaran to negotiate a political settlement, these initiative must be taken as a new P.A. initiative in 'conflict resolution'. President Kumaratunga's visit to France where she met President Chirac, is part of the diplomatic arm of this strategy. Already, LTTE organisations in the West, European capitals in particular, are finding the security agencies in those countries less tolerant than before. Diplomatic pressure on the LTTE abroad, military-political pressure at home.

Since ending the war through a negotiated settlement based on devolution is the P.A's policy, a successful exercise would mean a gradual reduction of the mounting defence vote, what we are watching then is President Kumaratunga's grand strategy. On the operational side, Prof. G.L. Pieris, Constitutional Affairs Minister, is the key figure. His task is to mobilise multi-party support (the UNP most of all) for the devolution package. The history of the ethnic problem, and particularly of all efforts at a negotiated resolution, proves that bipartisan (SLFP-UNP) support for such an exercise is a "must". Right now, the

UNP, both leadership and mass base, are convinced that the PA's policy makers regard the conventional parliamentary "enemy" a greater threat than the separatist insurgent foe, the LTTE.

Meanwhile, the PA has battles on several other fronts.

## L' Affaire Bandaranayaka

The manner in which the all powerful JRJ Presidency treated two important institutions — the judiciary and the national press provoked sustained Opposition protest. And rightly so. The Opposition was supported by Human Rights groups, and many an influential NGO. In that battle the legal profession, and some courageous journalists, played an important role. One such lawyer was Mr. R.K.W. Goonesekera, now a President's Counsel. Last week, Mr. Goonesekera addressed a nine Judge Bench of the Supreme Court on behalf of the petitioners who have challenged the appointment of Professor Shirani Bandaranayake as a Judge of the Supreme Court. The respondents are Prof. Shirani Bandaranayake, Prof. G.L. Pieris, Minister of Justice and Constitutional affairs, the Secretary to the President, Mr. K. Balapattapendi and the Attorney-General. The curtain has gone up on a drama that is likely to be regarded by political analysts and future historians as a landmark legal battle. The Bench consists of Justices Mark Fernando, Dr. A.R.B. Amarasinghe, P. Ramanathan, S.W.B. Wadugodapitiya, Priyantha Perera, A.S. Wijetunga and S. Anandacoomaraswamy.

Mr. R.K.W. Goonesekera was certainly conscious of the significance of the proceedings. "I am conscious that I am supporting an unprecedented application but I am also conscious that

what is at stake is the independence of the judiciary as a practical reality. The several petitioners stated that the power of the Executive to appoint the first respondent under Article 107 (1) of the Constitution was not absolute and was aimed at ensuring the independence of the judiciary. That had not been complied with in this instance. The said appointment was therefore arbitrary and capricious and was a violation of the fundamental rights of the petitioners to practice their profession, righteously and freely, and also the rights to equality" (Daily News).

Senior Counsel R.K.W. Goonesekera cited Justice Kuldip Singh who had stated: *"The Powers and functions of the three wings of government had been precisely defined and demarcated in the Constitution. The independence*

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THE IDEAS MAGAZINE



*of the judiciary is basic feature of the Constitution*" Mr. Goonesekera observed. "The judiciary is separate and the Executive has no concern with the day to day functions of the judiciary".

While no one would deny that the President has the absolute right to make certain appointments, the government's ultimate judge and jury are the people of this country. In the end, the electorate decides. It is on that fact that President Chandrika Kumaratunga's self assurance is ultimately based — the 63% factor, so to say, as against the PA's modest percentage of the national vote at the 1994 Parliamentary election, two months before the Presidential contest.

True, the PA knows that it must stand together or it will sink together. No party is likely to quit unless (a) the issue is of such fundamental importance to its own constituency that staying in the PA will be seen as a gross betrayal by its traditional support-base or (b) it is convinced that membership in the PA has become a liability. Meanwhile we watch divisive tendencies, sudden eruptions of protest over PA policy pronouncements or ministerial decisions. Here is a clear instance - Vasudeva Nanayakkara:

"There are many government MP's who entertained suspicions about the sale of the Steel Corporation. These suspicions are compounded by the government's refusal to allow a debate called by me and some members of the UNP and the TULF"

#### Tamil Reaction

The TULF saw the Attorney General last week. A delegation which included party chief M. Sivasithamparam and MP's Neelan Tiruchelvam, Joseph Pararajasingham and K. Thurarajasingham took up the question of detained Tamil youths. Some have been detained for five years without being charged. While the A.G. said there had been significant progress in clearing the backlog, a special unit of his dept. is speeding up inquiries. There has been unrest in the prisons and several hunger strikes. While the TULF the main Tamil

parliamentary party controls 8 votes, the ENDLF, a former insurgent group, is one of the larger Tamil Parties. The ENDLF has held talks with LTTE

representatives, "at an undisclosed location" reported the ISLAND'S R. Satyapalan.

## Waiting - 32

### VEL-TROTHAL

*Mortals, earthbound, dark on whence and whither  
We cannot recall all from all the years  
Backwards and beyond, across receding Worlds  
Time draws the veil.*

*This message, boy borne, only half remembered  
Over two miles of morning, gold smeared beach  
From St. Ritas to Albert Place  
Said, be ready, Saturday afternoon  
Our Father's taking all the kids to Vel.*

*So Saturday saw us sitting in the train  
All eyes from window seats hard won  
Your bare arms chaste and mine play bronzed  
We swung  
Tripping from the Train stop to the Fair,  
To soar Giant wheel above the rooftops  
And swoop down with a flutter in our stomachs.*

*Shy,  
You tried glass bangles on your wrists,  
I peeped inside a strange Temple  
Seeing an Elephant headed God, Garlanded with jasmines,  
While one glowed blue like sunlit water lilies  
And another rode a peacock.  
A Goddess of great beauty graced a lotus.  
Then bangled, you peeped in.*

*So this was then the childhood sacrament  
Taken together on a cosmic threshold  
The future still unwritten.*

*Dusk saw us all back for the return train  
There was a crimson sun on the sea and lemon lamps  
Lighting the platform, where we walked our new clay horses  
And you laughed,  
When I made yours prance.*

*This joy, my Father brought us  
But a scrap of memory blown over from those years  
Shows me his eyes troubled on that evening's paper  
Headlines I couldn't then quite render  
About the Depression that was getting deeper.*

U. Karunatilake



# FROM '77 TO THE LAST POLITICAL THOUGHTS

K.M. de Silva

## JR in '77

In July 1977 at the moment of his triumph, JR was 71 years old, by far the oldest Prime Minister in the country's history, seven years older than D.S.Senanayake had been in 1947, fifteen and sixteen years older than S.W.R.D.Bandaranaike and Sir John Kotelawala in 1956 and 1952 respectively, twenty eight years older than Mrs Bandaranaike had been in 1960, and a full thirty years older than Dudley Senanayake in 1952. Despite his towering political presence as one of the outstanding politicians of the day, he had been the leader of the party for only four years before and yet he led them to an electoral victory on a scale that had eluded the Senanayakes, father and son, who were presumed to have had much more of the common touch than he. His winning the Prime Ministership had been the culmination of a career just short of four decades in politics. His way to the top had been, to use Bacon's words, a winding stair. *While his political opponents spoke of him as a Sri Lankan R.A.Butler, the enlightened Tory who never succeeded in gaining his party's nomination as Prime Minister of Britain despite being eminently suited for the post by virtue of ability, experience and seniority, JR's diaries had many references to an enlightened Tory of an earlier vintage, Benjamin Disraeli who had become the leader of the Conservative Party of his day and given it a new and more progressive image by moving it to the centre of the political spectrum and reaching out to sections of the working class.*

It is surprising that he did not think of that other - and more appropriate - analogy among British statesmen in the process of modernising the Tory party, Sir Robert Peel. J.R.Jayewardene in

fact, had little in common with the flamboyant Disraeli in his personality or his vitriolic; he had much more in common with Peel. They both ensured the survival of their parties during a decade of their eclipse; and both did more than any other person within the ranks of their respective parties, in their day, to modernise its appeal, to keep up its spirits, and offer those who preferred moderate to radical change, a constructive political creed.

There was also one other point in the comparison with Peel - the encouragement given to young men in the Cabinet. He had also had the local example of D.S.Senanayake in whom the younger and newer members of the first Cabinet after independence had found an understanding leader, and one who gave them greater opportunities for demonstrating their own skills as political leaders and as administrators than they may have had from a less self-confident leader. J.R.Jayewardene, for instance, never forgot the generous encouragement the elder Senanayake gave him in his formative years - of which the choice of JR as the principal delegate from the country to the peace conference at San Francisco in 1951 was an example - in the cabinet, and his memory of the example set by his old chief, combined with his own sympathetic and understanding attitude to youthful Cabinet Ministers, once he himself was in a position of leadership in the later 1970s, to give them opportunities for initiatives which they may never have had under a more insecure leader. Young men like Lalith Athulathmudali and Gamini Dissanayake saw their careers flourish under his benign tutelage, as did the careers of older men like R.Premadasa and Ronnie de Mel, all of whom were given 10 years or more in the same Cabinet post, time enough to implement their plans. Unlike his

immediate successor, JR was not a "hands-on" head of government. He preferred to leave the initiative in the making of decisions with this Cabinet Ministers, once he and the Cabinet had given formal approval for their policies and plans. It could be said of him, as Harold Wilson said of Peel, that his greatness lay in bridging two epochs and carrying the traditions of his youth into the patterns of the future, through these younger colleagues. The present leader of the UNP, Ranil Wickremesinghe, a kinsman of Jayewardene's, was elevated to the Cabinet in 1980.

The general election of 1977 was as much of a landmark in Sri Lanka's recent history as that of 1956. In both instances the outcome of the electoral struggle was a change of regimes as much as a change of government. The 1977 election marked a setback for the populism of the SLFP as well as for Sri Lanka's traditional Marxist movement, which began what was certainly a terminal decline. Because his victory in 1977 was beyond anything seen before, many in his party and in the country expected dramatic changes. *Looking back at the last time his party had been in government, i.e. from 1965 to 1970, he felt that it was doomed by its leader's lack of vision; for himself he decided on a leap of the imagination into a series of new policies that would modernise the country in every way, especially its economy. His first period as head of government (1977-82) was one of the most constructive phases in the recent history of the island, with a succession of radical changes of policy introduced in virtually every sphere of activity. That programme and its priorities had been decided upon in his brief 3 year period as leader of the UNP before he became head of government; the pace at which change was introduced was*



also determined by him. In the first six years as head of government as Prime Minister and executive President, he had a record of accomplishments that none of his predecessors as head of governments could match: these included the five principal dams on the Mahaveli and its tributaries, the new Parliament building at Kotte, the new administrative capital of the island, the re-building and modernisation of the port of Colombo and the international airport at Katunayake, and the transformation of the run-down Echelon barracks in the heart of Colombo into a site for high-rise buildings and five-star hotels. None of these would have been possible without the radical changes in the economy which he introduced in association with his Finance Minister, Ronnie de Mel.

### Change Agent

These reforms aimed at reducing state controls and restrictions in the economy, and providing greater incentives to private enterprise, a set of reforms devised to liberalise the economy, after almost 20 years of a Sri Lankan version of India's control Raj. *Nevertheless the outcome of the economic reforms introduced in the late 1970s and continued thereafter was not a reduction in the scope or scale of the government's role in the economy, but a deliberate and distinct shift in its priorities.* Thus there was a massive investment of money, men and governmental energies on the accelerated development of the irrigation and power resources of the Mahaveli-river basin, the most complex irrigation enterprise in a country with a long history of fostering the development of irrigation as an essential feature of the state's responsibilities to the people. It would be true to say that without his historical vision and energetic commitment the scale of the venture would have been smaller and the process of implementation of the plans much slower. As it was JR set out to complete the construction of the principal dams of Mahaveli project in 6 years instead of 30, and very nearly succeeded in keeping that self-imposed deadline. The foundations for the dams at Kotmale, Victoria and Maduru Oya

were laid in the early years of his first term as head of government, while work on Randenigala and Rantambe began somewhat later. He had the satisfaction of seeing all of them completed before he left office. To JR, the Mahaveli programme was a revival and re-affirmation of Sri Lanka's time-honoured position as one of the great irrigation civilisations of Asia. In this and in many other features of his political policies he regarded himself as the heir of D.S. Senanayake. Indeed the accomplishments of his governments, especially in irrigation and dam-building were much greater than D.S. Senanayake's and bore comparison with the achievements of the greatest Sinhalese rulers of the past in their role of "compulsive dam-builders", to borrow a phrase which the Economist used with reference to JR and his principal minister in this enterprise, Gamini Dissanayake.

*One of his most significant achievements was to have handled the transition from a controlled economy to a more open one with greater political skill than many other leaders, in similar circumstances, in other parts of the world.* By implementing the major reforms simultaneously, in 1978, rather than in stages, he provoked and easily overcome bureaucratic and trade union resistance and gave himself time to soften the impact of these reforms on the poorer sections of the community. Whenever it was necessary to do so, in the interest of social justice or plain good political sense, adjustments and modifications were made, to strengthen the social safety net at the very time when the number of people entitled to its security was reduced by excluding those whose economic situation did not warrant such support. *Just when food subsidies were trimmed and transport subsidies eliminated, his government introduced a most imaginative and effective system of public housing for the poor, in the rural areas particularly, and in the towns as well, under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Premadasa.* Thus JR's governments was one of the very few which introduced a structural readjustment program and reaped political benefits and vindication rather than discomfiture or obloquy.

During the whole period when he was head of government, JR did not have any rivals within his party, no challengers to his authority within his government and, till the late-1980s, no effective challenge from the opposition either. Thus, at most times, and on most matters, and especially in the early phases of his administration, he was able to set the priorities as well as the pace at which change would be administered. On such occasions he acted with a speed and decisiveness which his critics asserted were those of an old man in a hurry to introduce changes he had been thinking of long before he assumed the leadership of his party. On other matters, the management of the country's ethnic conflict, for instance, he moved more cautiously and more deliberately, and there the pace was set for him by powerful political forces whose strength he understood and perhaps feared as well, but even with regard to those he could act on occasions with remarkable decisiveness and courage in introducing changes which neither an influential section of his cabinet nor the people at large would appreciate - such as the District Councils scheme of 1980-1, and the Provincial Councils established in 1987-88. He strove to control events and occasionally, as in the violent aftermath of the Indo-Sri Lanka treaty of July 1987, was nearly overwhelmed by the street demonstrations organised by the SLFP in association with the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna. *His courageous refusal to be intimidated by the violent public demonstrations organised by this combination of forces provides a stark contrast to Bandaranaike's repudiation of his pact with Chelvanayakam when the opposition to it was a mere trifle compared to that organised by the SLFP and its allies on this occasion.*

In 1977 his government made the establishment of a Presidential system one of its highest priorities. While this system better ensured a continuity of government policy which, he argued, was necessary for sustained and consistent economic development policy, it was in fact a hybrid. Presidential authority was grafted - to change the metaphor - on to a prime ministerial trunk. The institutional



A Special Correspondent

# THE KISSING OF DAYA PATHIRANA

## A 10th Anniversary Restropective of the JVP's First Political Assassination

When the JVP decided to terminate Daya Pathirana, the leader of the stridently anti-JVP Independent Students Union - ISU - of the University of Colombo, 10 years ago, there was only one flaw in their otherwise flawless plan of action. The D day chosen for the abduction and murder, the 15th of December 1986 happened to be the Unduvap poya (full moon) day. At first everything went off like clockwork: Pathirana and fellow ISU activist P.V.Somasiri were abducted and taken to a lonely stretch near the Bolgoda Lake; the torturing of the two students began in earnest. Then came the unexpected: the arrival on the scene of some Buddhist devotees on their way to a nearby temple. Prevented from completing their gruesome task of decapitating their two victims and disposing of the bodies, the JVP assassins ran away. Pathirana was dead - but thanks to this almost miraculous intervention, Somasiri, though severely injured, survived to tell the tale.

### The End Zone

And what was that tale? A meeting of the Inter University Students Federation (IUSF - an umbrella organisation of all major student unions; at that time dominated by the JVP) was held at the University of Kelaniya on the 13th of December 1986. Pathirana's second in command, K.L.Dharmasiri (a law student)

represented the ISU at this meeting. Jayaratne and Dharme, two well known JVP student activists representing the University of Sri Jayawardenapura, approached Dharmasiri and requested a discussion with the ISU. As a result, a meeting with Pathirana was scheduled for the next day (Dec 14th) at 4 p.m. at the University of Colombo. The discussion was held as planned and a second round took place the next day (Dec 15th) at the same venue. As the evening approached, the two JVPers invited Pathirana to come with them to their lodging at Piliyandala to continue the discussion further. Pathirana and Somasiri (who also participated in that day's discussion) agreed and all four proceeded to the 120 (Piliyandala) bus stop near the Police Park grounds.

As they were passing Hotel Shanthi Vihar, a white Hi Ace van stopped near them and several persons got down brandishing pistols and saying "*we are from the CID; get in all of you*". By this time twilight was falling and being a poya day the roads were deserted. Not sensing anything more dangerous than an uncomfortable and probably a sleepless night in some police cell, - an experience to which they were no strangers - Pathirana and Somasiri did not make an attempt to escape. They were bundled into the van forcibly. The JVP students were let out of the vehicle at two different places along the way. The abductors started assaulting Pathirana and Somasiri,

questioning them about the ISU and asking why they didn't join the JVP. By now it was clear that the abductors were not CID officers but a gang of JVP 'heavies'.

The journey ended in a lonely wooded stretch near the Bolgoda lake. Three of the abductors dragged Pathirana away while the remaining ones (including the driver of the van) started working on Somasiri. Held prone on the ground, a knife slicing his throat bit by bit, the agonised screams of his leader and friend ringing in his ears, Somasiri was asked various questions, particularly the whereabouts of the leading activists of both the ISU and the 'Vikalpa Kandayama'1. Somasiri was also told what the abductors intended to do with them once the sessions of torture cum interrogation were over - he and Pathirana were to be killed and their bodies dumped in the crocodile infested Bolgoda lake. That was when fate intervened. There was the sound of oars, the sounds of many voices and then the light of a torch; the screams of pain of the two victims had attracted the attention of a party of pilgrims. Interrupted in their gruesome endeavours, the abductors slashed a knife several times across Somasiri's throat and believing him to be dead, ran away. Somasiri escaped death - but Pathirana didn't. He was discovered a few yards away, stripped to his underpants, his throat cut and the back of his head bashed in.



## **Backdrop to the Killing: The University Student Movement in the '80s.**

Why did the JVP decide to kill Daya Pathirana? What did they hope to achieve through this brutal murder? What did they actually achieve i.e. what were the results of this act? What was its relevance to the macropolitical picture, and the way the country's extreme political crisis was played out?

In order to answer these questions it is necessary to consider the history of the ISU. The ISU was formed in the early eighties in the Colombo Campus as an alternative to the JVP's Student Union, the Samajawadhi Sishya Sangamaya. Apart from being anti JVP, the ISU was also firmly anti UNP and anti SLFP. The ISU was a hotch potch of various strands of radicalism; its leading members varied from independent socialists to Trotskyites and confirmed Stalinists, from dogmatic Marxists to Fidelists/Guevarists.

At one level, the ISU was an attempt at forming a student organisation unaffiliated to any established political party and devoted exclusively to student issues and interests. At another level it was an attempt to form a non-racist revolutionary student nucleus which would one day be a part of an 'internationalist revolutionary movement'. Therefore, from the inception *two distinctly contradictory impulses and characteristics* were in operation within the ISU: on the one hand, the desire to be free of all political parties and organisations and on the others the persistent search by some of the more 'advanced' elements for a 'revolutionary alternative' to existing left parties and organisations. With the assumption of the leadership by Daya Pathirana, this second tendency became increasingly dominant. This process was accelerated by the belief of the leading cadres of the ISU that a pre-revolutionary situation existed within the country following the closure of the parliamentary option for regime change with the fraudulent Referendum of '82. In their view therefore, the building of an armed revolutionary organisation was the most urgent task on the agenda.

Throughout 1982 and '83, discussions were held with all existent various left parties and groups in search for an organisation with 'the correct political line'. The two determinant factors in this regard were an internationalist stand on the ethnic question and the rejection of the parliamentary path as the main strategy of the revolution. The ISU's unofficial affiliation with the 'Vikalpa Kandayama' (V.K.) was the result of this persistent search.

**The inability of the non/anti JVP left to seize the unique opportunity presented by Somasiri's exposure of the real identity of Pathirana's assassins, enabled the JVP to regain the lost initiative (both nationally and within the student movements) after an interval of a mere few months.**

*As the politicisation and radicalisation of the ISU intensified, so did its contradictions with the JVP.* After the July 83 riots, the JVP took an increasingly racist stand, opposing any and all attempts at devolution and branding all anti-racist parties and groups (including the leftist ones) "Eelamists". The ISU with its vocal opposition to the war and support for the Tamil struggle therefore headed the JVP's list of enemies, within the student movement.

### **The JVP Onslaught On The Left**

By mid '85 this had led to physical violence between the two groups, on Colombo campus. In mid 1986, after the Left's attendance at the Political Parties Conference (PPC) - a roundtable on the ethnic issue and devolution convened by the Jayewardene administration at the written suggestion of Vijaya Kumaratunga, the JVP started its sustained campaign of violence directed against the anti racist

left. (A precursor of this campaign was the violent disruption by JVP activists of an important convention of the Joint Trade Union Action Committee, held in early 1986 at the Sugathadasa Stadium.) A number of SLMP meetings as well as the residences of some of the left leaders (such as Vijaya Kumaratunga) were bombed. In the Universities, pitched physical battles were raging between the JVP and the anti racist left student groups. Nowhere was this more in evidence than in the University of Colombo where the struggle for supremacy between the ISU and the JVP was at its peak. The JVP even abducted a militant ISU activist, held him captive for several hours in their stronghold the University of Sri Jayawardanapura and used torture to elicit information from him about the ISU and its leaders. The Pathirana assassination took place in this context.

In mid '86 Pathirana started to drift away from the VK, mainly because of his disagreement with the latter's support, (following the LTTE massacre of TELO in May '86 and converging with the conclusions of the PPC), for an intermediate political solution for the ethnic problem short of both secession and federalism. By this time, of the 7 member unofficial leadership of the ISU, two had become inactive; three stayed with the VK; Dharmasiri took an intermediate position while Pathirana recommenced his search for a revolutionary group which supported the Tamil national struggle unconditionally. (He had become quite sympathetic to the ultra Trotskyite Kamkaru Mawatha group and, in Northern politics, to the EROS rather than the EPRLF). However all five active members of the ISU leadership were united in their implacable opposition to the racist JVP and SLFP and in their struggle against the repression by the UNP and the NIB/CID, which at that time was directed primarily at the three non JVP Southern revolutionary groups: the Vikalpa Kandayama, the Samajawadhi Janatha Viyaparaya<sup>2</sup> and the Nava Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna<sup>3</sup>. It should be emphasised that from 1984, the JVP was providing the State with information about these rival groups in the same way it was sneaking to



the University authorities on the ISU.

The universities were not only the JVP's main support base; they were also its most fertile recruiting ground. Achieving total domination - actually, a totalitarian monopoly - over the Universities was therefore an important objective of the JVP. The ISU and Pathirana were perhaps the most serious obstacles to achieving this goal. The removal of Pathirana and the destruction of the ISU were increasingly considered by the JVP as necessary preconditions for its further growth. The JVP's plan was simple and deadly: Kill Pathirana *and get rid of his body*. Suspicion would naturally fall on the UNP regime. While the other leading cadres of the ISU (and the VK) were fully occupied with blaming the state and trying to protect themselves from the state repression, the JVP could take them out systematically, one by one. With each new killing the attention would be focused more and more on the state, leaving the ISU and the VK wide open for the JVP's insidious campaign of cold blooded murder. By the time the ISU and VK realised that this was nothing but a red herring and the real culprits were the JVP, it would be too late. That was the game-plan.

#### **The Days After : The Road Not Taken**

*Somasiri's survival made all these carefully laid plans go awry.* By the evening of November 16th (1986), the ISU was aware of the real identity of the killers. A meeting was held at the University of Colombo the same evening and a decision was taken to launch a massive propaganda battle against the JVP. It was also decided to alert the other left parties and groups to this new danger and bring them all together in an anti-JVP united front. The first leaflet was issued on the 17th of December 1986 and 50,000 copies were distributed in Matara (where Pathirana's funeral was held with K.L.Dharmasiri as the chief speaker) and in Colombo. A second leaflet giving the complete details of the crime was issued on the 2nd of January 1987.

A series of meetings of all anti racist left political parties, trade unions, and

sectoral organisations were held to discuss the JVP threat and to formulate some kind of united action. *Though most of the participants privately agreed that the JVP was responsible for this crime, there was a curious reluctance to say this publicly.* Many reasons were given. Some felt that attacking the JVP directly would 'help the UNP' by 'diluting the anti UNP struggle'. The traditional left parties (the CPSL and the LSSP) regarded the whole issue as an internecine struggle among various ultraleft student groups; the JVP, they felt, could never become

### **It is of extreme political importance to stress that Chandrika Bandaranaike, Vijaya's wife and the SLMP President, was not present on this momentous occasion**

a threat to them. The LSSP leader Dr.Colvin R. de Silva informed this correspondent - at the time the ISU representative - who met him two days after Pathirana's death that though the JVP may kill radical students but it will never touch the traditional left. The implication was: this is your problem not ours; a problem of the Junior League, not the Big Boys. The NSSP was reluctant to criticise the JVP because it had high hopes of dislodging the JVP leadership and winning over the rank and file, in the not too distant future! Because of all these reasons the ISU's appeal for a concerted and united campaign against the JVP to stop it in its tracks, fell on deaf ears. Only a few who knew the JVP and Wijeweera intimately, like the former JVP leader Nandana Marasinghe of Anuradhapura (who, less than one year later, became the second victim of the JVP) understood what the Pathirana

killing meant: that the JVP had become a Polpotist entity which presented a mortal danger to all left and democratic forces. But this correct assessment did not reach any receptive ears; this writer recalls that Marasinghe himself was reduced to watching the whole charade from the back of the meeting hall, standing near a window.

Somasiri's survival and the resultant exposure of the real identity of Pathirana's killers presented the anti racist and democratic left with an opportunity to strategically weaken the JVP through the launching of a massive politico - propaganda campaign. *If this opportunity was seized, many of the subsequent tragedies, including the murder of Vijaya Kumaratunga could have been prevented.* But this opportunity was lost; the only concrete result of the series of joint meetings was a statement (which the four leading left parties didn't sign, deputising that task to their student organisations) which didn't criticise the JVP by name, but referred to it in Aesopian language as 'racist fascist forces'.

This strategic error on the part of the left parties was further compounded by the subjectivism and lack of unity *among the anti JVP student elements.* After its involvement in the Pathirana assassination became known, *the leading JVP cadres went into hiding. As a result the IUSF which was hitherto dominated by the JVP, became leaderless. This presented another unique opportunity: a chance for the anti-JVP, anti racist student organisations to capture power in the IUSF and thereby effectively marginalise the JVP within the student movement.* Several initial discussions were held in December 1986 and January 1987 at the office of the CPSL Students Union - the Lanka Jathika Shishya Sangamaya - attended by the student organisations of the four major left parties, the ISU, the Independent Student Group of the University of Moratuwa and several anti JVP student activists from other Universities. A statement was drafted signed by all participant organisations, condemning the JVP for assassinating Pathirana and assuming the leadership of the IUSF. However due to lack of



consensus, this statement was never issued to the newspapers. No further steps were taken to dislodge the JVP and take over the leadership of the IUSF. The second battle against the JVP too was thus lost.

The period following the assassination of Pathirana was a "diabolically confused era" (to borrow a phrase from Pablo Neruda). *The inability of the non/anti JVP left to seize the unique opportunity presented by Somasiri's exposure of the real identity of Pathirana's assassins, enabled the JVP to regain the lost initiative (both nationally and within the student movements) after an interval of a mere few months.* During the next year, while the non/anti JVP left was debating whether criticising the JVP by name would help the UNP or whether the rank and file of the JVP could be 'won over eventually', the JVP busied itself with the serious business of planning and organising the next stage of its bloody campaign of eliminating its rivals. This commenced with the attack on the LSSP headquarters in October 1987 and the killing of Nandana Marasinghe at the Sunday fair in Anuradhapura town in November 1987 - and continued till the military defeat of the JVP at the end of '89. The assassination of Vijaya by the JVP in February 1988 effectively decapitated the United Socialist Alliance. This was compounded by the killing of several thousand left activists, also by the JVP. This bloodletting weakened the left to such a degree that an independent existence as a third formation became practically impossible. The break-up of the USA and the reversion to coalition politics on the part of its component fragments (with both the SLFP and the UNP) were the final outcomes of those strategic errors made in the aftermath of the Pathirana assassination.

#### **The Way We Were (And What Might Have Been)**

In the new conjuncture which came into being after the assassination of Pathirana, the non-JVP democratic left had two urgent tasks to fulfil: the formation of a broad united front which was not only anti UNP and anti SLFP but also anti JVP; and the launching of a politico-propaganda battle to

defeat the Polpotist JVP threat. (After all the JVP in all its speeches and publications made amply clear that the physical destruction of the non-JVP left was one of its primary goal and most immediate tasks.) *The fulfilment of these twin tasks depended on the ability of the left to discard many of the old truisms and adopt a new political thinking. This was what Vijaya was doing in the last months of his life.*

Two watershed events should be mentioned in this regard. First was Vijaya's unexpected presence and his extremely explicit anti JVP speech at the funeral of Nandana Marasinghe in Anuradhapura in November 1987. With this, Vijaya clearly and definitively assumed the leadership of the anti JVP struggle. This solidified the fraternal relationship between Vijaya and the ISU, the seeds of which were sown in the immediate aftermath of the Pathirana assassination. As the key witness to the identity of Pathirana's assassins, protecting the life of Somasiri from the JVP became a major concern of the ISU. When the ISU approached Vijaya with this problem, he offered to keep Somasiri in his own house for as long as it was necessary. Used to nothing but cowardice and opportunism, lame excuses and empty phrasemongering from left leaders, this warm and fraternal response from Vijaya was like an unexpected breath of fresh air - and gave some hope to the beleaguered ISU that all was not lost. During the next one year a close relationship based on mutual respect and admiration grew between Vijaya and the ISU. When the ISU invited Vijaya to address the 2nd Pathirana commemoration meeting (held at the New Town Hall in January 1988) *Vijaya postponed a previously scheduled trip to the Middle-East (to film 'Saharawe Sihinaya')* in order to be there. On this occasion too, he made a devastating indictment of the JVP.

The second event was the gathering of 71 political parties, trade unions and sectoral organisations held at the New Town Hall on 26th December 1987, and the founding of a new bloc, the December 26th Movement, which was Vijaya's brainchild. This was something unprecedented in the history of the

Lankan left and would have been impossible if not for the correct and dynamic leadership of Vijaya Kumaratunga. The two important aspects of this gathering should be emphasised: *it deliberately excluded and attacked the SLFP, banishing it from the progressive fold and strategy* and it brought together in a single bloc, many left *non-party* organisations which the traditional left regarded either as upstarts or nonentities. Thus Vijaya's initiative succeeded in bridging the gap between the established and new Left(s). For Vijaya it was the necessary first step in the path he was determined to take towards the creation of an anti-fascist, anti-racist, anti-feudal, anti capitalist Third Force i.e. an anti JVP, anti SLFP, anti UNP Democratic Left which could one day make a successful bid for governmental power. *It is of extreme political importance to stress that Chandrika Bandaranaike, Vijaya's wife and the SLMP President, was not present on this momentous occasion* - at which Vijaya was declared and endorsed (by Dr. Colvin R. de Silva) as the Presidential candidate of the united Left at the upcoming election:

The formation of the USA was to be the second step in this project. It is necessary to mention here that Vijaya clearly indicated that he wanted to broaden the USA in the near future to include other left formations including the Tamil Left, and not keep it as an exclusive club as the traditional left was wont to. (He had also informed the SLMP's Central Committee of his certitude that leading elements of the VK, ISU and the SJV would join his party shortly, thereby strengthening him politically.) This scenario was what the JVP detested, politically and ideologically, more than anything else. Small wonder that Vijaya was killed by the JVP less than two months later.

If the forming of a broad front of all democratic left forces and the launching of the anti JVP politico-propaganda struggle took place in the immediate aftermath of the Pathirana assassination, many of the eventual tragedies would have been prevented. As it was, *these twin developments came too late either to save Vijaya's life or to save the independent left*

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## Response to Prof. A.J.Gunawardana:

# IS MANAME ONE OF THE FINEST THINGS ON ANY STAGE ?

Douglas Amarasekara and Hemantha Warnakulasuriya.

We have read with interest the article '40 years after Maname' by Prof. A.J.Gunawardana published in the Lanka Guardian of October 31 and November 15. Prof.Gunawardana begins his article with some sarcastic remarks about our booklet '25 years after Maname'; but he has not replied to a single one of our criticisms. Above all, he has not been able to quote a single line from Maname that has anything of value to say; anything comparable, for example, with the following :-

1. Call no man happy till he is dead.  
(From the Oedipus of Sophocles).
2. It was my tongue, and not my mind that swore. (from the Hyppolytus of Euripides)
3. To thine own self be true.  
And it must follow as the night the day  
Thou canst not then be false to any man. (From Shakespeare's Hamlet)
4. What's in a name? That which we call a rose,  
By any other name would smell as sweet. (From Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet).
5. The last temptation was the greatest treason,  
To do the right thing for the wrong reason (From T.S.Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral)

The reader can easily find literally hundreds of similar lines in any dictionary of quotations. Instead of these, we find in Maname typical lines like the following :-

1. O.Sun-God and Moon - God, Lords of the Sky.  
Give us all your blessing.

2. Princess : The night is near  
I'm full of fear,  
My dearest dear.  
Bears are growling,  
Lions are prowling,  
They're drawing near.  
They'll soon be here.

3. At the crucial point of the play, when the Prince has just been killed:-

Princess : Why did you kill my dear husband? It was your fault.  
It was your fault.

Veddah King: He tried to kill me, so I killed him. It was not my fault. It was not my fault.

Compare this with the following, from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar:-

Brutus: If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of Caesar's, to him I say that Brutus's love for Caesar was no less than his. If then that friend demand why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer: It was not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more. Had you rather Caesar was living and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to life all free men? As Caesar loved me, I weep for him. As he was fortunate, I rejoice at it. As he was valiant, I honour him. But as he was ambitious, I slew him. Who is here so

base, that he would be a slave? If any, speak, for him have I offended. Who is here so rude, that would not be a Roman? If any, speak, for him have I offended. Who is here so vile, that will not love his country? If any, speak, for him have I offended. I pause for a reply.

Citizens: None, Brutus, none.

Brutus: Then none have I offended.

Surely the vast difference should be obvious to any intelligent person.

Prof. Gunawardana goes on: "The first issues relates to the substance and quality of the play itself. This has been comprehensively dealt with over the years. However Regi Siriwardena's original review in the Daily News has, like the play itself, stood the test of time. Mr.Siriwardena wrote in 1956: 'Maname is not only unquestionably the finest thing on the Sinhalese stage, it is also one of the finest things I have seen on any stage'.

It is absolutely untrue to say that Maname and Mr.Siriwardena's original review have stood the test of time, as is clearly shown by the following facts.

1. Mr.Siriwardena himself, in an article published in the Daily News about 25 years after Maname wrote:-

'We may have to revise our opinion about Maname. AFTER ALL, WHAT DOES IT HAVE TO SAY?'

(This is exactly what we have been asking from the very beginning!).



2. About 14 years after Maname, another well known critic, in an article published in the Daily News, wrote:-

'The opposition to Maname seems to be growing. We may have to revise our opinion about it some years from now'.

3. 23 years after Maname, Prof. Sarachchandra himself, reviewing another play, wrote in the Daily News:

'Although most of the plays now done follow the conventions of the naturalistic theatre, the acting still bears the pernicious influence of stylisation. Lucien Bulathsinghala still declaims as he does in the stylised theatre, and Leonie Kotelawala walks about the stage in a pose that could indicate that she has a permanent back ache. **IF ANY ONE TELL ME NOW THAT I HAVE DONE MORE HARM TO THE SINHALA THEATRE THAN GOOD, I WILL NOT DENY IT**' (Ceylon Daily News, Nov 20, 1979 Page 10).

4. The Encyclopaedia Britannica contains articles of considerable length not only on English, French, other European and American Literatures, but also on Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, and other literatures. It also contains articles on individual writers - not only Sophocles, Shakespeare, Milton, Voltaire, Shaw, Eliot and others, but also on Indian, Chinese, and Japanese writers like Kalidasa, Tu Fu, Li Po, Matsui Basho and others.

However, the 1962 edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, published 6 years after Maname, does not contain one single word either about Sinhalese Literature, including Maname, or about the author of Maname.

*Later editions contain a short reference to Sinhalese Literature and a few Sinhalese writers, included in a long article on South East Asian Literature. But they do not contain separate articles of considerable length, either on Sinhalese literature including*

### *Maname, or on the author of Maname.*

Evidently, the editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica do not regard Maname as 'one of the finest things on any stage'!

5. The New Standard Encyclopaedia, a modern American publication, though smaller than the Britannica, contains excellent concise accounts of various fields of knowledge.

It gives accounts of the literature of several languages, not only European and American, but also Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Persian, and even Icelandic.

The 1981 edition, published 25 years after Maname, does not contain one single word about Sinhalese literature including Maname, or about the author of Maname.

Evidently, the editors of the New Standard Encyclopaedia also do not regard Maname as 'one of the finest things on any stage'.

6. Time International, one of the most prestigious weekly journals, widely read all over the world, recently published a Golden Jubilee Issue entitled 'Asia', - A Comprehensive Review (over 100 pages) of the last 50 years of development in Asia, including Politics, Economics, and Culture.

The section on Culture includes references to the works of a number of Asian writers - Indian, Chinese, Japanese etc. (including Yasunari Kawabata, the first Japanese to be awarded a Nobel Prize for literature).

However it does not contain one single word about Maname or its author.

Evidently, the editors of Time International also do not regard Maname as 'one of the finest things on any stage'.

In the second instalment of his article, Prof. Gunawardana refers to the music, singing and dancing in Prof. Sarachchandra's plays. To us it

seems that the music, singing and dancing are as primitive as the words. For example, in Maname, all the characters go round and round in the same circle for 2 hours on end. Is this really comparable with the Bolshoi Ballet? We found it extremely boring, and almost intolerable to watch after the first ten or fifteen minutes.

To us it seems that Maname is not comparable with (1) Hamlet (words), (2) La Traviata (music and song), or (3) Swan Lake (music and dancing), and a host of similar productions.

It would seem that our opinion is shared by the editors of (1) The Encyclopaedia Britannica, (2) The New Standard Encyclopaedia of America, (3) Time International; so that from the world point of view, we do not seem to be in a "microscopic and negligible minority" as Prof. Gunawardana imagines. Indeed it would seem that from the world point of view, it is the admirers of Maname who are in a 'microscopic and negligible minority'!

Maname rendered a useful service to Sinhalese Drama by reviving interest in it at a time when it was at a very low ebb. For this we are grateful. But now we should try to rise above that level and develop more modern forms. There is dramatic talent in our country, some of it of very good quality. Young dramatists like Sugathapala de Silva, Dharmasiri Wickramaratna, Henry Jayasena and others were just beginning to produce plays of some value. For example, in Sugathapala de Silva's "Thattu Geval", a woman has come to hate her husband. She stands on a balcony and watches him walking along a busy road, far below. She turns to a friend and says "There he goes! Do you know, I often stand on this balcony and watch him walking along that road, and I keep on hoping that he will be run over by a car. Do you think I am a very bad woman? The friend replies "I don't think of human beings as good or bad. I think of them as just human beings". There is depth of thought and feeling in those lines. They offer food for thought. In Dharmasiri Wickramaratna's 'Ran Thodu', the principal character is a woman who has had an unfortunate sexual experience when young. But the

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# RURAL WOMEN AND FOOD SECURITY

## CURRENT STATUS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR ASIA

Gail Omvedt

(A respected sociologist, the writer has lived, taught and worked in India, mainly with oppressed caste and peasant movements, for many years. She is a member of the editorial board of the Bulletin for Concerned Asian Scholars.)

*This is a revised version of Paper prepared for World Food Summit For FAO/Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific*

### Introduction : Food Security and Women

The "four horsemen" of the Apocalypse still ride in the world, and while famine and hunger seem gentle compared to the modern incarnations of war, death and plague, still their cruel pangs and slow destruction affect far too many people in the world. In spite of considerable agricultural progress, in spite of foodgrain production per capita continuing to rise, and in spite of overflowing surpluses in some regions, too many people in the world go hungry and some continue to starve to death. Increasingly we feel that this must not continue, that the lives of millions of women and men should not be cut short and sapped of vitality, that children should not go on suffering malnutrition. And so the concern for "food security".

There is also an increasing awareness that women are not only major victims of hunger and famine, but their connection with food is of vital importance. Women are the investors of agriculture and are still disproportionately involved in agricultural production (see Table 1) - and with increasing market integration and migration for work, often becoming more so, to the point where many social scientists now speak of the "feminization of agriculture" in many regions and countries. Women are more likely than men to be concerned with providing food and nutrition to their families. Women,

particularly the rural women of developing countries, are vitally linked to food security.

But what is "food security"? How in poor countries do we really insure that people will have enough to eat every day, and not only sufficient food but abundant, diverse and nutritious food? The idea that everyone has the right to eat abundantly is after all almost a revolutionary concept in human history, which has seen all too short life spans and all too many famines, and still it is not quite accepted: still we find that too many people identify food security for the poor of the third world only in terms of providing foodgrains. Clearly food security should mean more than simply the bare minimum - so some would talk of "food sufficiency" (Goplan, 1996) or even "food abundance" and only "food security". But the question still remains; but how much more and how is it to be achieved? (see table 1)

Food security can be defined in terms of production of enough food in ways and areas that people have access to through control of income, property or power. It does *not* mean producing food grains rather than "cash" crops; the distinction is anyway a false one since people eat more than grain and since grain itself is normally grown for the market. It does *not* mean simply the ability to produce oneself (either at an individual or national level) rather than acquiring from external sources - though the latter may be considered r

levant. This definition does not prejudge the question of "how much is enough" - because human beings redefine their "needs" in the process of development, as we see in particular in the developing countries of Asia which are eating at increasingly rich levels.

A simple indicator to measure this concept of "food security" would be the number of calories people eat on a regular basis - on the grounds that if women, men and children are getting food in sufficient quantity in "normal" times and if they have some power in modern democratic society, the temporary crises that may hit them may lead to cutbacks but not to hunger and starvation.

### FOOD FIRST OR GROWTH FIRST

How is food security to be achieved? For a long time there have been two contending trends in thinking about this, which we might call the "food first" model and the "growth first" model. The food first model emphasises providing cheap food, basically foodgrains, grown locally by landholding farmers (hence it is sometimes identified with subsistence production); historically it has been linked to statist development policies that emphasised building up a heavy industrial base financed in part by cheap labour and cheap food; low prices for agricultural products were justified by the necessity of providing cheap food for the poor through public



**Table 1: Women and the Labour Force in Agriculture in Asia**

Country	Women's Share of Adult Labour Force (1990)	% of Labour Force in Agriculture		Agriculture as % of GDP 1993
		1960	1990	
Bangladesh	41	86	65	30
Bhutan	39	95	94	42
Cambodia	54	83	74	-
China	45	83	72	19
DPR Korea	45	64	38	-
India	31	74	64	31
Indonesia	39	75	55	19
Iran	21	54	39	24
Laos	46	82	78	51
Malaysia	36	63	27	-
Maldives	42	70	32	-
Mongolia	46	61	32	21
Myanmar	44	81	73	63
Nepal	39	95	94	43
Pakistan	23	61	53	25
Philippines	37	64	46	22
Republic of Korea	39	61	18	7
Sri Lanka	34	57	48	25
Thailand	47	84	64	10
Vietnam	50	82	71	29

Source : Human Development Report, 1996, table 16 and 24, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

**Table 2 : Growth rates:**

	GDP	Agriculture	Population	GDP per capita
			World	
1970-80	3.6	1.9	1.9	1.7
1980-90	3.1	2.8	1.7	1.4
1990-94	1.8	N/A.	1.5	0.3
<b>Low and Middle Income Countries</b>				
1970-80	5.2	2.7	2.2	3.0
1980-90	3.1	3.1	2.0	1.1
1990-94	1.9	1.9	1.7	0.2
<b>East Asia and Pacific</b>				
1970-80	6.9	3.1	1.9	5.0
1980-90	7.9	4.4	1.6	6.3
1990-94	9.4	3.6	1.4	8.0
<b>South Asia</b>				
1970-80	3.5	1.8	2.4	1.1
1980-90	5.7	3.2	2.2	3.5
1990-94	3.9	2.7	1.9	2.0

Source : World Development Report, 1993, Table 2 and World development Report 1996, Table 11.

distribution systems. Today, many of those using the discourse of "food first" argue that state intervention is the primary means for providing food to the poor and that a focus on market production and cash crops (especially for agriculture) endangers food security (for a current example with regard to India, see Swaminathan, 1996; for the growth first model, see Rao, 1996).

In contrast, the **Growth first** model emphasises the necessity for economic growth to provide people with the income to procure food and has been linked with developmental policies stressing technological advances in agriculture and giving higher prices to farmers growing the food. These themes gained dominance in the 1980s with the liberalisation process (often with significant state guidance), and have emphasised market based growth and export-oriented industrialisation. Agricultural growth and exports, most often of fruits, vegetables and plantation crops, but sometimes also of foodgrains (for example the successful case of rice in Thailand and most recently Vietnam) have been stressed in these policies as a source of foreign exchange earnings especially but not only in the early stages of development. Here "food security/abundance" is not so much something the state does as something that people provide for themselves out of growth-generated income.

In the last decade two more themes have been added. First, are the "e" words of today: **entitlement** and **empowerment**, both linked to the concern for **social justice**. Entitlement, a term deriving largely from the famine studies of Amartya Sen, stresses the ability of a person to command food due to her/his position in the overall social relations that govern possession and use in a society (Sen, 1991:154-5) - it suggests that income to buy food, or political rights to demand provision from the state in times of drought, may be as important as actual food availability in the society. Empowerment stresses the ability of the poor and deprived to have entitlements and participate in decision-making, a capacity gained through access to and control over



Table 3: Agricultural Growth and Food Production in Asia

	Growth rate of Agriculture			Per capita food production (1979-81=100)		Daily calories supply per capita % of North				
	1970-80	1980-90	1990-94	1987-89	1993	1988-90	1992	1965	1988-90	1992
<b>East Asia</b>				<b>126</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>2,652</b>	<b>2,751</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>88</b>
China	2.6	5.9	4.1	128	145	2,640	2,729	69	83	88
Mongolia		2.9	-4.0	91	63	2,360	1,899	85	87	61
Rep. of Korea	2.7	2.8	1.8	96	94	2,830	3,298	77	90	100+
<b>Southeast Asia</b>				<b>114</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>2,485</b>	<b>2,541</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>81</b>
Indonesia	4.1	3.4	3.0	124	145	2,610	2,755	65	90	88
Malaysia	N/A.	3.8	2.8	142	203	2,670	2,884	83	89	87
Philippines	4.0	1.0	1.6	86	88	2,340	2,258	66	74	73
Thailand	4.9	4.0	3.1	104	102	2,280	2,443	77	77	78
Vietnam		4.5		111	133	2,220	2,250	78	76	72
<b>South Asia</b>				<b>108</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>2,145</b>	<b>2,356</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>76</b>
Bangladesh	0.6	2.9	1.9	93	97	2,040	2,019	73	62	65
India	1.8	3.1	2.9	113	123	2,230	2,395	72	70	77
Myanmar		0.5	5.1	120	107	2,450	2,598	72	88	83
Nepal	0.5	4.0	1.3	107	114	2,220	1,957	70	70	63
Pakistan	2.3	4.3	2.3	103	118	2,280	2,816	61	69	74
Sri Lanka	2.8	2.2	2.0	87	81	2,250	2,275	81	79	73

Source: Human development report, 1992 Tables 13 and Table 25; Human Development Report 1996, Tables 7, 13 and 47; World Development Report, 1993, Table 2; World Development Report, 1996, Table 11

\* Southeast Asia includes the Pacific Region for the summery figures of per capita food production.

"Daily calories supply per capita is defined as the calorie equivalent of the net food supplies in a country, divided by the population, per day."

money, resources, and power. These are usually associated with efforts to transcend the sometimes ideological dichotomies of state and market (see for instance the *Human Development Report, 1993*). On the one hand, "safety nets" are looked to both to tide sections of the population over crises and to be part of a developing welfare system (public responsibility) for members of society who can't work because they are aged, young, or sick. On the other hand, it is widely recognised that a healthy and educated population is crucial for any national economic development, and that the poor themselves play a crucial productive role in the developmental process. Women and gender issues are increasingly admitted to be central to both concerns (UNDP, 1993).

Second is the environmental concern: the theme of *sustainability* (sustainable development, sustainable agriculture)

stresses that while growth is necessary it must not be at the cost of environmental destruction that will increase the probability of drought, land degradation, marginalisation, displacement and destitution - in the present or at some future time. Deforestation and ongoing drought, crisis in fish catches in many areas, land degradation in regions that were once flourishing, industrial pollution, have led to questions about the industry-centred development model. *An alternative path of development is needed, stressing small holders, agriculture and agro-based production, decentralisation and community control rather than production by bureaucratic centralised states or huge corporations. Agriculture in particular is now understood to be most efficiently and sustainably done by smallholding small farmers* (see for example Netting, 1993) and Nandy and Ruttan, 1992).

Neither "food first" or simple "growth first", then, is sufficient; rather **growth with sustainability and social justice** is the key to food security.

Women are central to "food security" by whatever definition or model we may use. However the life-and-death importance of issues of food, environmental and development makes it necessary to have a rational - not simply emotional - understanding of the causes of impoverishment and hunger.

This theme of women's centrality to food production and sustainable development has been argued most vigorously by those who call themselves "ecofeminists". However the analysis often used is not rational or realistic - to the point of being harmful to women themselves. For instance, *the extreme position that the cash economy is absolutely harmful*



*and women are inherently subsistence and not market producers, i.e. they are interested in food crops and not cash crops, has little basis in fact (aside from the fact that the "food"- "cash" crop distinction is erroneous). It also leads to policy recommendations that would hold back food production and economic growth, and bind women even more to the poverty of what most subsistence economies actually are.* (on the ecofeminist debate, see Mies and Shiva, 1993; Molyneux and Steinberg, 1995, and Jackson, 1993; also Nandy and Laughlin, 1996).

### MISSING WOMEN

But we don't have to accept the extreme romanticism of "subsistence production" to see women's centrality to food production and distribution. This means that they can be crucial producers and innovators for a small producer-based, decentralised, agro-industrially oriented form of development - if they are guaranteed the rights (including land rights) and resources to make this possible. Women's production often is market-oriented and should be more effectively so. At the same time, women's concerns for household welfare and nutrition are crucial to base any real needs-oriented welfare system on their informed participation in implementation and decision-making.

In spite of this centrality of women, they continue to be deprived in sometimes deadly ways in many Asian societies. The most stark measures of this is Amartya Sen's concept of "missing women". Sen points out that the low female/male sex ratio in countries such as China and India represent a total of nearly 100 million women in the region who would be alive today if women truly had equal chances with men (Sen, 1990; Klasen, 1994). But there are variations in Asian patriarchy. Southeast Asian societies, with their matrilineal and matricentric traditions, have more equalitarian social structures, while the patrilineal and patrilocal clan/caste structures of China and most of the South Asian subcontinent make these regions more oppressive to women.

Economic deprivation adds to social

oppression. The rural working women who are the majority in all Asian countries work much harder than men: time use studies reported by the UNDP showed that, including both market and nonmarket work, women did 51% of total work in industrialised countries, 53% in developing countries, and 55% in the rural areas of developing countries; in the two Asian rural areas surveyed, women worked 56% of total work time in Nepal and 73% in the Philippines. Since total work time was much higher in the rural areas, the greatest gap in terms of average work burden was between men in industrialised countries who worked 408 minutes a day, and rural women in developing countries who worked an average of 617 minutes a day. While a significantly greater proportion of women's time is spent in non-market activities, still women worked 36% of the total "market" (income-earning) hours in the Asian countries surveyed (HDR 1995, 88-93).

For achieving "social justice" and a sustainable human development, then, rural women are the key. And food security is a crucial indicator of how the great transformations in development policy from command economies to market-oriented economies with an increasing concern for environmentally sustainable development actually affect human welfare. With the interest of rural women at the centre, then, let us look at the performance and prospects of countries in the Asian region.

### Food Production and Consumption in Asia

#### Overall Changes in Food Security to the 1990s

The last two decades have seen quite divergent trends in growth in developing and developed countries. Asia, relatively speaking, is a success story of economic growth. In contrast to other regions, the decade of the 1980s saw rising economic growth rates and declines in poverty and inequality in most Asian countries - in some cases at a level that was historically unprecedented and even spectacular. Agricultural shared in this general growth, and sometimes led it, and whatever data we have relating to

"food security" - particularly food-grain production per capita and calorie intake - indicate that the rural women and men of Asia also shared in this general overall growth in prosperity. (see table 2)

In contrast to crisis and slowdowns in many regions in the world, the countries of East Asia saw a rise throughout the period (though a slowdown from otherwise impressive growth rates in agriculture in the early 1990s), and even the poorer, slower growing countries of South Asia saw a significant rise in the 1980s. While an early 1990s decline in South Asia lays a basis for concern, this has been over-influenced by the case of India which saw a heavy decline (negative growth rates) in the "crisis" year of 1991; aside from this 1990s growth rates have been similar to those of the 1980s.

It is on this background of overall economic development marked by individual years of crisis (and continuing problems for individual countries), that we can identify the following trends in relation to food security for Asian countries:

(1) A good performance in agriculture growth rates and per capita food production was achieved by most Asian countries between 1980 and 1990 - and per capita food production continued to improve between 1987-89 and 1991. China, Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam were particularly good performers in raising per capita food production; India also achieved a good record, followed by Thailand and Pakistan; while Philippines, Mongolia, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka were poor performers (See Table 2). This was clearly related to growth rates in agriculture as a whole. While per capita food production figures are for 1991, the growth rates for 1990-94 suggest a continuation of trends, except in the cases of Myanmar (which improved its growth rates dramatically) and Nepal (whose agricultural growth rate worsened)."

(2) daily calorie supply, our most important "indicator" of food security, improved in absolute terms for most countries; it also improved between



**Table 4: Poverty in Southeast and East Asia**

	Incidence in Percentage of Population			Number of Poor (millions)
	1970	1980	1990	
East Asia	35	23	10	180
China	33	28	10	100
Indonesia	60	29	15	27
Republic of Korea	23	10	5	2
Malaysia	18	9	2	0.4
Philippines	35	30	21	13
Thailand	26	17	16	9

Source: Gupta, 1995: Table 7

**Table 5: Poverty in Selected Asian Countries**

	Year	% of Population below poverty line		Number of poor (millions) below poverty	% of rural population
China	1971				6
	1978	28	270		
	1979				14
	1985	9.2		97	
	1990	8.6		98	
India	1964-5				53
	1972	54		311.4	
	1977	50		324.9	
	1983	43		315.0	45
Indonesia	1970	58		67.9	
	1976				47
	1984	28		45.0	
	1987	17		30.0	27
Malaysia	1959-61				59
	1973	37		4.1	
	1984	15		2.3	
	1987	14		2.2	22
Pakistan	1962	54		26.5	
	1969-71			43	
	1979	21		17.1	
	1984-5	20(23)		18.7(21.3)	29
Sri Lanka	1963	37		3.9	
	1969-70				13
	1982	27		4.1	
	1985-86				46
Thailand	1962	59		16.7	56
	1975-76				34
	1981	20		9.5	
	1986	26		13.6	

Source: World Development Report, 1990, Tables 3.2 (p.41) and 3.3 (p.43) and Jazairy et al., Table 3.16 P.45 for rural population below the poverty line.

1965 and 1992 in relative terms, i.e. as a percentage of the North. Again, the East Asia performance was best, followed by Southeast Asia. At this level, the major generalisation we can make about food security is that the best overall guarantee is a healthy economy!

However, the average masked some important country variations; and we can also see that countries did not always improve daily calorie supply by increasing their own food production - some did so by importing food. Table 3 shows that China, Indonesia and Malaysia achieved a high and growing daily calorie supply along with impressive growth in per capita food. Similarly, India and Pakistan achieved slower but still steady growth in food availability, though Pakistan did so by increasing food imports and India remains at a low level of nutrition. In contrast the Republic of Korea, by the 1980s had low agricultural growth and declining per capita food production but clearly had a strong enough economy to feed its people well on imported food. Imports in Korea's case (they were 50% of food supply in 1988-90) did not compromise its people's "food security"; they were eating better than ever, and better than the average of the North! (Korea, as we will see, also showed a decline in poverty ratios). Korea, however, is a small country which can afford major imports. For large and primarily agricultural countries, increasing internal food production is the surest route to food security (See Table 3).

Not all Asian countries were so successful in that economic growth with improvements in food consumption. Thailand, in spite of good growth rates, seems to have had a stagnant daily calorie supply with low imports throughout the 1965-96 period, while in contrast Myanmar, a poor growth economy in the 1980s, raised its relative daily calorie supply. The worst food situation was seen in Mongolia, which after a period of stagnancy in the 1980s showed a drastic decline similar to other ex-"socialist" CIS countries in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Vietnam, the



other "socialist market economy" of Asia, saw a good growth in per capita food production but not in food supply, which was stagnant in absolute terms and declining relatively. It may be noted that both Vietnam and Thailand were rice exporters - here indeed export (of food-grains more than of vegetables and fruit products) may have been partly at the expense of local consumption.

Bangladesh saw a decline in food supply in the 1980's with some slight improvement in the early 1990s. Nepal saw a puzzling decline in the early 1990s in spite of increase in per capita food production. Sri Lanka has seen a steady decline in the 1980s and 1990s, perhaps reflecting the traumas of its disastrous ongoing civil war.

(3) Overall "averages" (including average calorie supply) clearly do not tell us enough about effects on the poor and vulnerable; however what available data we have also suggest that there was an overall process of poverty reduction in Asian countries, particularly in east Asia and at a slower and more halting rate in most South Asian countries.

China, Indonesia, Korea and Malaysia are the best performers in poverty reduction, just as they were leaders in increasing average food supply to their population. Impressive reductions in poverty have occurred between 1970 and 1990; in the case of China the largest reduction came in the 1980s (Table 4). India has, equally, seen a much slower but still significant reduction in poverty levels in the 1980s continuing into the 1990s after a decline following the "crisis year" of 1991 (2).

Thailand saw significant poverty reduction upto 1980, then a stagnation in the 1980s (evidently an increase in the early 1980s and then a decline; of Phongpaichit and Table 5). Pakistan data also suggest a slight reversal in poverty reduction in the 1980s. the Philippines has also seen a slow reduction in poverty, though slow, while poverty has clearly increased in Sri Lanka. (See Table 4 and 5)

**Table 6: Changes in income inequality in selected Asian countries: ratio of share of income held by top 20% to lowest 20% (Quintile ratio)**

	Early Years	Mid-1980s	1992-3
Bangladesh	7.6 (1976-7)	3.7 (1985-6)	4.0
India	7.0 (1975-6)	5.1 (1983)	5.0
Pakistan		5.8 (1984-5)	4.7
Sri Lanka	5.8 (1969-70)	8.9 (1985-6)	4.4
Indonesia	7.5 (1976)	4.7 (1987)	4.6
Philippines	10.4 (1970-71)	8.7 (1985)	7.3
Thailand	8.9 (1975-6)		9.4
Malaysia	16.0 (1973)	11.1 (1987)	11.6

Source: World Development Report 1986, Table 24; World Development Report 1992, Table 30; World development Report 1996, Table 7.

(4) Again, limited and uncertain data on income inequality show steady declines for most of the Asian countries covered between the 1970s and 1992-3. India, Indonesia and the Philippines showed continuous decline, while Bangladesh and Malaysia showed a decline up to the mid-1980s and then a rise (but not to the level of earlier years) to 1991-3; only Thailand of this group showed a slight rise between 1975-6 and 1992-3. It should be noted that all the South Asian countries plus Indonesia have significantly lower income inequality than the U.S. and some other "advanced" industrial countries, whose income inequality as measured by the quintile ratio is between 6 and 11. (See Table 6)

The general pattern can be illustrated by the cases of India and China. China had in the 1950s and 1960s a heavily state-commandist economy almost completely "delinked" from the world market. But while it achieved relative equality within communes, the industrial emphasis widened gaps between village and city, and the inability of peasants to migrate or protest left them helpless before the famine of 1960-61, when an estimated 17-30 million died. In 1978 economic reforms began and were enthusiastically taken up by the peasants, who seized land, increased crop production and expanded millions of local "township and village enterprises". With rising prices and a

return to individual farm production, especially in the years 1978-85, China saw the most significant reduction in poverty in its history and a rising standard of food consumption - to the point where experts like Lester Brown now fearfully ask "who will feed China?". Not because the Chinese are starving but because they want and can afford too much food! (Brown, 1993; see also Riskin, 1990, and Nolan, 1993). There has been a slowdown since 1985 with a greater emphasis on urban industrial growth, but China's success is evident.

India also had a heavily statist and protectionist economy through the 1970s, only with much lower growth rates and, though no major famine deaths even in the worst years, a high and stagnant rate of poverty and hunger. Policies of providing "cheap food" through the public distribution system hardly touched this. The beginnings of liberalisation in the 1980s saw a rise in overall growth from 3.5% to 5%, and declining poverty. Liberalisation took a "jump" in 1991 with the Narsimha Rao government, but in contrast to China it remained industry-oriented; prices for crops rose somewhat but otherwise restriction on sales and production remained. Thus agriculture in the 1980s and 1990s has seen only modest growth, and poverty has declined not spectacularly as in China and many Southeast Asian countries, but slowly and haltingly.

The question is thus not whether liberalisation or producing for the market destroys food security; in cases  
*Contd on page 22*



*Contd. from page 4*

framework essential for the success or failure of presidentialism - a powerful presidential secretariat, for instance - was never established. Nevertheless, the new system freed the President from worry about losing office whenever he - as head of government - should lose a majority, the kind of political defeat he had arranged for Mrs. Bandaranaike in 1964. He made certain also that he would not lose his 5/6 majority in Parliament by requiring that MP's who crossed the floor from the government would lose their seats. Among other innovations introduced was proportional representation on the list system in place of the conventional first-past-the-post Westminster system. The bloated parliamentary majorities that winning parties or coalitions had secured in 1970 and 1977 would be a thing of the past. But it also ensured that the UNP, as the party with the largest support-base in the country, would be solidly represented in a future parliament whenever it was in the opposition.

*To make sure that such a fate would not befall it any time soon, he initiated a radical shift in the UNP's electoral support system, by brining in a larger, non-goyigama component into the party and the Cabinet than ever before. He was more generous in this regard than all his predecessors in office, and especially those of his own party. One decision above all else ranks among the most significant ever taken by a Sri Lankan leader, his bringing to an end the goyigama monopoly on the position of head of government and head of state. Thus his welcome to R Premadasa as Deputy Leader of the UNP and later as Prime Minister in the new government in itself symbolised a social revolution. In picking him as his successor JR had deliberately breached two barriers - caste and class. Nothing of the sort had happened anywhere else in South Asia till the recent appointment of Deve Gowda as India's Prime Minister.*

#### **The End of Duopoly.**

*His victory in 1977 brought to an end the duopoly in political leadership that the two family compacts of the Senanayakes and Bandaranaiques had*

*established since independence, a change that gave him great satisfaction. He believed that Sri Lanka's multi-party democracy deserved something better than that and he set about opening the doors to the leadership of his own party, quite deliberately, to men who did not belong to founding family or to elite families in general. In doing so he believed that the examples he set would have its influence and repercussions on the hold of the Bandaranaike family on the SLFP. But he reckoned without the tenacity of Mrs. Bandaranaike in her single-minded determination to keep the family in control of that party despite the succession of electoral defeats she suffered in 1977 and after.*

His many accomplishments have to be balanced by his misjudgements and failures. One such was his benign neglect of necessary action when evidence of corruption among his ministers and senior officials closely associated with him was brought before him. It is important to keep this sordid business of corruption in Sri Lankan politics in its proper perspective; in comparison with the rest of South Asia, and many countries of South East Asia, Sri Lankan politicians were and are small-timers in the accumulation of ill-gotten wealth. The expansion of the state sector under his SLFP predecessors in the national leadership had provided politicians and officials alike with more opportunities for demanding and taking bribes. It could be argued that the SLFP regimes of the past had democratised corruption and brought it within the reach of the common man: corrupt politicians and officials could rely on a large and rapid turnover of relatively small bribes, for favours done, and jobs secured. When he led his party back to power, JR was expected to insist on higher standards of probity from his Ministers and MPs especially because he increased their emoluments and perquisites (tax exempt vehicles, for instance). Sadly, he failed to do so. Instead the expansion of the private sector of the economy, the massive high-profile projects undertaken, the equipping and re-equipping of the armed services provided politicians with greater opportunities for graft.

Once more he relied on the personal example he set of incorruptibility - he had a career of 40 years in politics, more than half of them in ministerial office - to keep his ministers, parliamentarians and officials honest, but that example was not followed by many of them. Then again there was the scrupulous care with which the official gifts he received on his travels abroad as head of state were catalogued and retained, first at President's house, and then at the Jayewardene Cultural Centre. How many of his predecessors as head of state and head of government had done so in the past? Once more an example had been set for the future.

Then, there was his ambiguous attitude to political violence. Here we speak not so much of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict but to violence as an aspect of political rivalries between the government and its opponents. The fact is that the terms of political competition had changed since the 1960s, and JR and the UNP while in opposition faced unprecedented violence and intimidation, directed against its leaders and supporters alike. But as a man who often spoke of *ahimsa* and non-violence, praised Gandhi and admired Asoka, he was expected to do better. In fact he was as ready to tolerate the use of violence in trade union organisation and agitation as had the left parties and the SLFP who had already set the pace before. He came to office intent on curbing the left-wing and left of centre trade unions and their well-known proclivity for irresponsible strike action: he would not allow a British-type trade union situation to develop, and cracked down on the strikes of July 1980. When a group of trade-union activists responded with violence in the city of Colombo on 8 August 1980, they played into his hands. JR refused to allow such demonstrations in future on the grounds that they would lead to violence.

There were other ambiguities in his record. He talked movingly of democracy and open debate, but in the aftermath of the presidential election of December 1982, with encouragement from his Prime Minister and sections of his Cabinet, he



obtained undated letters of resignation from all his party MP's, to be called in if necessary. Hailing from a family well-known for its legal professionalism and with a father and uncle as Puisne Justices of the Supreme Court, he was only slightly less disdainful of the higher judiciary than Felix Dias - who came from an even more distinguished legal and judicial background - had been in the early 1970s. When the new constitution came into force in 1978 the judges of the Supreme Court were appointed afresh, but some-a few-were sent on early retirement, while others were given appointments in the Court of Appeal, a lower court. The number of seats on the Supreme Court had been reduced. His relations with the Chief Justice, whom he appointed in 1978 from the unofficial bar overlooking the claims of the Supreme Court judges, soured in time, and the tensions between JR and the latter often erupted to the surface in unseemly public controversy. *Although the constitutional structure he introduced did recognise a separation of powers unlike that of 1972, JR was as prone to asserting the primacy of the executive and legislature over the judiciary as his predecessors in the UF government were.* On one occasion, irked by an adverse decision of the courts on a matter the government regarded as sensitive for security purposes, he turned a blind eye when a boisterous crowd of party supporters shouted slogans outside the houses of the judges who had delivered that verdict.

In the opposition he championed the cause of a free press, and passionately opposed the take-over of the national press, during a long campaign that stretched from the early 1960s to the mid 1970s. His record in office in regard to the press was far better than that of the UF government and during his years in office the press was livelier and more critical on matters of public concern than it was under his more authoritarian successor. Nevertheless, he did not think it necessary to return the nationalised Lake House group to its original owners (who happened to be his relatives). He declined to do this, claiming that the owners themselves had preferred to accept compensation for losses suffered rather than take on

the responsibility of running these newspapers on their own. But there was no doubt that he saw the advantages of having these newspapers conveniently available to him as his and the government's publicity organs and was intent on keeping them under government control for that purpose.

No assessment of his overall record would be complete without some reference to the referendum of December 1982, a grossly partisan device for postponing a parliamentary election for six more years. In resorting to this, he was yielding to pressures from his Prime Minister and some Cabinet colleagues, some of whom wished to inherit that majority in case JR did not complete his second term. In holding this referendum he was acting within the law of the constitution he introduced in 1978, but such political advantages as he derived from this have to be balanced against the serious breach it made in Sri Lanka's well established tradition of direct election of legislators and free and fair elections. Above all, it tarnished his reputation and enabled his opponents to shift attention away from the genuine mandate he had won at the presidential election of 1982. JR was the first and, so far, the only head of government in Sri Lanka to have won two consecutive terms of office. The tide of electoral advantage was flowing so much in his favour and that of his party at this time, that a more conventional approach would probably have given them much the same result but without the controversy and recrimination that followed from this referendum. Indeed by the early 1980s the UNP had consolidated its hold on the electorate, and had defeated its opponents in four consecutive elections held on a national level between July 1977 and October 1982. The opposition SLFP was reeling in the face of self inflicted wounds stemming from internal division, and others contrived for it by him.

#### **JR and the Ethnic Conflict**

The greatest disappointment - his, as well as many of those who voted for the UNP in 1977 - came from the harsh

fact that on his watch the country suffered its worst post-independence domestic crisis, the violent conflict between Tamil secessionist and the Sri Lanka government, a conflict that dragged on from at least 1983 until long after he left office. *At the time he came to power the passionate emotionalism of ethnic conflict had periodically broken through the parliamentary game. And little had been done to turn the subjective attention of the populace from self-regarding ethnic rivalry. But it was his tragedy to have been in power at a time when these hostilities reached their peak. JR suffered from the double misfortune of following seven years of rapidly deteriorating communal relations that flowed from the UF government's misguided policies and having to deal with Mrs. Gandhi who was in power in India from 1980 onwards.* To be sure any Indian Prime Minister would have had to respond in some way to the excitement in South India that resulted from violent ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, but only someone like her would have given RAW, India's version of the CIA, the free rein it used to give direct assistance to the Tamil separatist movement in Sri Lanka.

If his predecessor as head of government - Mrs Bandaranaike - had not been so short-sighted as to sow the whirlwind in the unthinking way she did in the 1970s, the outcome may well have been different. Then JR's political inheritance, so far as the Tamil minority was concerned, would not have been the poisoned chalice it turned out to be. The old political leadership of the Tamil community G. G. Ponnambalam, S.J.Chelvanayakam and M.Tiruchelvam had all died within a few months of each other in 1976 and 1977: had they been alive, it might have been possible to devise a political settlement acceptable to both sides of the encounter as he was able to do with S.Thondaman the leader of the Indian Tamils, who joined his cabinet in 1978. Perhaps, more to the point, given Sri Lanka's geographical position if Morarji Desai and not Mrs.Gandhi had shaped Indian policy, in the early 1980s he would surely have restrained rather than encouraged Tamil separatist activists, and would not have



encouraged the equipping and training of their cadres, nor would have tolerated safe havens in India for separatist activists on the run after attacks on state properties or indeed killing of security personnel, political rivals and opponents or just some unfortunate by-standers during internecine struggles.

To unsympathetic Tamil critics, it appeared as if he was not prepared to exert the full powers of his office to meet the most urgent - and very real - grievances of the minority. But the fact is that he refused to accept the *status quo* he inherited, and quickly sought to correct legal and constitutional discriminations that confronted the minorities. When he took office as Prime Minister in July 1977, he promptly set about overturning the principal legal grievances and discriminatory regulations inherited from the Bandaranaike period. Some of these were removed through administrative decisions almost as soon as he came to power - such as the UF government's controversial policies on university education - while other changes - especially on language policy - were effected through the new constitution introduced in 1978. The leadership and rank and file of the Indian Tamils responded more positively to his initiatives than their counterparts in the TULF and others who claimed to represent the Sri Lanka Tamils. Indeed he did much more for the Tamils than any of his predecessors in office. JR's efforts at accommodation could hardly keep pace with the demands of the Sri Lanka Tamil community's most militant activists, not to mention its principal party, the Tamil United Liberation Front. They regarded what was on offer as too little too late.

In the aftermath of the riots of August 1977, he hesitated to vigorously negotiate some form of regional devolution from the over centralised structure of Sri Lanka's government - a long standing Tamil demand. To be sure, a number of key party members and some members of his Cabinet were sceptical about the political viability of concessions to the Tamils at a time when the new and untried leadership of the TULF seemed unwilling to cut

themselves off from youthful zealots within the party and outside it who opposed anything short of independence and who, moreover, indulged in well-publicised acts of violence. The TULF welcomed whatever concessions JR offered, but they generally combined this with public statements that the concession they obtained was only the first of many to come till they had secured their principal objective, an attitude and frame of mind which needlessly embarrassed JR and his government in dealing with large sections of the Sinhalese electorate.

It was characteristic of the times he lived in that Sinhalese hard-liners held this against him, while the Tamil leadership never gave him due credit for it. Thus JR did not think it was prudent, let alone necessary, to risk alienating the bulk of the Sinhalese population by offering more than he did to a Tamil leadership *that seemed committed to always asking for more*. He remembered what had happened to him and his party in 1956 when the Sinhalese masses had turned against his party; and he could vividly recall what an unpleasant place Mrs. Bandaranaike had made the political wilderness for him and his party. Moreover, there was no guarantee that had JR shown as much zeal on this issue as he devoted to his other projects a way would have been found to meet the requirements of the Tamil leaders, beset and intimidated as they then were by their youthful and increasingly violent followers.

Caught in the middle between those who argued he should move with greater boldness and those who warned of political retribution against the party and its leader if they were seen to be conceding too much to the minority, JR moved slowly, hoping to induce the Tamil leaders to be more patient than they were inclined to be, while he persuaded the electorate at large to accept the form of devolution that he favoured and which the Tamil themselves could accept. For whatever reasons, two years were lost before the two parties became engaged in serious negotiations. In the early 1980s a scheme of devolution of power to district level councils (25 in all) was

introduced as part of a political settlement with the Sri Lankan Tamils, a major political achievement considering the failure of nerve on the part of Bandaranaike in the mid and late 1950s, and Dudley Senanayake in the late 1960s, when they had confronted this same problem.

A second tier of government had been recommended as early as 1928 by the Donoughmore Commissioners; it had taken 52 years before such a scheme could be introduced. Yet these councils failed to give the restive Jaffna peninsula a durable peace. As a result of the violence of July 1983 the political support, from the Tamils, for these councils evaporated rapidly and they were abandoned in less than two years of their establishment. Thereafter, in association with the Indian government of the day the demand arose for larger units of devolution with a wider range of powers.

In the event, no resolution was found, violence increased, both on the battlefield and in the city of Colombo. Thousands fled the country, and India which was earlier actively involved, in support for the secessionists, then attempted mediation but in the end, no settlement was reached, either of the war or the issues that brought on the conflict. At a press conference held with Rajiv Gandhi after the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, JR made a remarkable admission. When asked why he had not moved more rapidly, he is reported to have said, "... *It is a lack of courage on my part, a lack of intelligence on my part, a lack of foresight on my part*". It is perhaps unfair to make much of what an exhausted leader says when he was as hard pressed as JR had been during the preceding two weeks. But it was so rare that JR should admit to any weakness that the words took on an enhanced significance.

The opprobrium attached to the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord was focused on its architects within the government, principally JR himself. The JVP, the most vocal, violent and consistent opponents of the accord called for his assassination through hand-written posters and inflammatory pamphlets.

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and speeches (transmitted through cassettes). The slogan "Kill JR" was painted on public highways throughout the island, and on walls in public place, in the universities for example. On 18th August 1987, the JVP very nearly succeeded in assassinating him within the parliamentary complex. Reflecting on this incident, he kept thanking on how the whole government - cabinet ministers and MPs alike - could have been eliminated that fateful afternoon if the exploding grenades had done their work as effectively as they could have. Thus when his 81st birthday came just a month later he savoured it all the more because it was one he was not expected to live to enjoy. The peace that prevailed in the north and east of the island and sustained by the IPKF in 1988 was very fragile. *The controversial decision to bring in the IPKF owed a great deal to JR's political acumen and astute and innovative mind, but he knew as much as any of his critics that despite all the efforts of the IPKF, resolution of this problem was as elusive as it had been before they came in. When things began to go wrong for the IPKF and the objectives assigned in support of that venture were patently beyond practical accomplishment, many of Rajiv Gandhi's Indian critics argued that he had fallen into a trap laid for him by the wily Sri Lankan President. JR himself wished this had been so, but for once he had not contrived the discomfiture of an opponent through a complex scheme. Indeed JR paid the price for this botched Indian intervention in a steep drop in public esteem. Nowhere was this seen more dramatically than in the stark contrast between the euphoria and the seemingly unrestrained optimism of his accession to power in 1977 and the complete lack of ceremony and publicity in his departure from office at the end of 1988.*

Nevertheless, as he got ready to step down from office, in itself a notable political rarity in a country where party leaders cling to office like limpets to a rock, he took consolation in the fact that his objective for the last and very difficult year in office had been achieved; the UNP had won a third consecutive term of power, something

that no party had done before in Sri Lanka's political history; and the transition to a new leadership within the party had been effected. He was 82 years old, but physically fit. He had enjoyed excellent health throughout his period in office. Apart from an occasional cold his medical advisors had nothing at all to worry about during that time. His mind was clearer than that of many who were a full twenty years younger. His colleagues did notice a slowing down especially after the riots of 1983 but even those who did notice this admitted that they were full of admiration as he stood up to the myriad problems that beset him in his last few months in office. All of them were agreed on one point - nobody other than JR could have survived and on occasion even prevailed over the seemingly impossible difficulties that confronted him then.

#### **The Final Political Reflections**

The story of his days in retirement has yet to be written. When it is written one would have to refer to his refusal to intervene in the affairs of his party under his successor to its leadership when individuals and sections of it sought his intervention. JR had decided that retirement is retirement, and that under no circumstances would he be persuaded to intervene in a political controversy within the government of his successors as leaders of the UNP or on matters of public policy, and much less serve as a stop gap in the leadership even if the situation seemed to warrant such a measure. *Even in this he was a unique figure, the only head of government in South Asia to have retired from office without being driven out by the collapse of a parliamentary majority (as in the case of Morarji Desai) or a disillusioned and disgruntled electorate (as in the cases of V.P.Singh or Sir John Kotelawala). In the aftermath of R.Premadasa's assassination, a section of the UNP looked to JR to take over, at least temporarily, until a suitable leader was chosen. But JR remained unmoved by these entreaties. Instead he took pride in the effectiveness of the clauses of the 1978 constitution dealing with the filling of a vacancy on the death of an executive president.* More surprisingly, even opponents of

his party sought his help at moments of difficulty. A very powerful figure in the People's Alliance sought him out during the parliamentary campaign of 1994 and urged him to influence the then head of state in his choice of a prime minister in the event of a hung parliament. The appeal, in this instance, was on behalf of a member of the People's Alliance. When the approach was made he listened with his customary patience and courtesy and made no promises.

In his retirement he devoted his time to the establishment of the Jayewardene Cultural Centre to which he transferred his library of books and documents, the largest such collection ever accumulated by a Sri Lankan political leader after independence. The library also contains his personal papers which I and my colleague Howard Wriggins used in the writing of our two volume biography of JR Jayewardene. He took enormous pride in what he was doing and, as a token of total commitment to this new exercise in institution building he and his wife willed the house in which they had lived almost all of their married life, Braemar at Ward Place, to the Centre. In that he followed the example of Sir John Kotelawala, who left his palatial house and its extensive gardens to the state.

JR was a silent spectator, watching with a melancholy sadness as the party leadership he had kept together all his 11 years in office, fall apart through his successor's implacable hostility to the slightest dissent even within the Cabinet, *and the impetuosity of two of the ablest ministers in the government in resorting to a motion of impeachment when other measures may well have served the same purpose - in other words, of continuing to fight within the party.* More sombre still, that leadership was eliminated by assassination over a three year period, beginning in March 1991 when Ranjan Wijeratne who had served as party secretary with great acceptance was killed by a car bomb. None of the violent deaths of former colleagues that came later on touched JR so personally as did the killing of Ranjan Wijeratne by the LTTE. A few weeks later the LTTE had an even more



prominent victim, Rajiv Gandhi. That assassination came as a shock to JR. Despite their differences he had grown to like Rajiv Gandhi, and the latter and Sonia Gandhi had reciprocated the warmth and affection JR had shown them with a courtesy and deference to his experience as a senior political leader that his immediate successor and the latter's close associates had not shown him once JR had left office.

Two years later came the assassinations, first of Lalith Athulathmudali and R.Premadasa himself. These killings left JR numb. He realised that the death of Lalith Athulathmudali had deprived the country of the service of a major political talent, and the UNP of the logical successor to Premadasa. Emotionally drained by Athulathmudali's assassination JR had to cope with the shock of Premadasa's killing, the second head of government in Sri Lanka to meet with a violent death at the hands of an assassin. On this occasion the level of violence was several notches higher than in 1959 when a lone gunman killed

Bandaranaike. Finally there was the assassination in October 1994 of Gamini Dissanayake. I met JR a few days after that massacre of the party leadership and found him, for once, in a mood of deep despondency. *Can you think of another country in which the cream of the second generation of national leadership had been so ruthlessly eliminated, he asked me? I could only turn to Myanmar for an example, reminding him of the assassination of Aung San and several Ministers of his provisional government in 1947, a slaughter of the leadership from which Burma had never really recovered. His reply was characteristically shrewd - that, he said, was the result of a power struggle at the highest levels of the national leadership, not the case of a terrorist leader of one community ordering the elimination of a head of government and potential heads of government from the majority ethnic group. The Myanmar situation was not a real parallel for Sri Lanka, he insisted, because the foundations of the UNP have been strong enough to withstand a series of shocks that could have*

*destroyed a less solidly built party. The UNP, he added, has the inestimable advantage of not being linked with bands of steel to a family group.* Gladstone once described politics as "at once a game and a high art". JR's long political career illustrated the truth of this aphorism. By any standard of assessment he was a great man, one of three outstanding figures in Sri Lanka's public life of the 20th century (the others being D.S.Senanayake and S.W.R.D.Bandaranaike) and only the most prejudiced or irrationally hostile of his critics, would deny him that position. All three of them set the agenda for their day, and for those who succeeded them. J.R.Jayewardene was human enough to crave the indulgent affection that was lavished on D.S.Senanayake; he did get some of this from his younger colleagues, but for the most part all he got was respect. Even his most virulent critics were inclined to give him a grudging respect. As the years pass by that respect will increase as posterity takes a more discerning view of the man and his achievements.

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as disparate as India and China economic reforms have aided it. The question is what type of liberalisation, and what types of support for market oriented production will best aid a growth in incomes and well being of the rural poor. These general comparative data suggest that an agriculturally-oriented liberalisation, at least in the case of large countries, provides the best basis for increasing food supplies to both rural and urban people.

#### Footnotes

1 It has to be remembered that agricultural exports as a major source of foreign exchange are important to a number of industrialised countries including the U.S. and Australia, and have been so through all their stages of development.

2 There has been a good deal of concern expressed in India regarding a claimed rise in poverty after the beginning of "economic reforms" in 1991. Supporting data for this appeared to come from several articles in the well-known left journal, *Economic and Political Weekly*, in 1995. While the authors of these articles (especially Gupta, 1995

and Tendulkar/Jain, 1995) themselves took a cautious position (in particular Tendulkar and Jain argued specifically that the rise in rural poverty in 1992 could not be blamed on the reforms), there has been a good deal of publicity to the effect of rising poverty. In fact, while poverty in India remained high and stagnant during the three decades of "Nehru model" command economy, it began to come down in the 1980s, and then rose again - according to the data reported in 1995 - to about 1987 levels. This rise could easily have been predicted, since 1991 was a crisis year of negative growth; following this economic growth resumed, which could be expected to bring down poverty - but no data were given on poverty as such after 1992! Obviously, data for 1992 were too premature to gauge the effects of reforms which were announced only in the middle of 1991 and did not begin until later. More recent data (somewhat tentative and based on smaller samples - as were the 1992 figures) - did in fact show a subsequent decline in rural poverty in 1994-94. (See *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 27, 1996, pp.184 and Swaminathan, 1996). At this point India continues to represent a case of slow and halting liberalisation, with economists and intellectuals on various sides of the political divides arguing about

the significance of economic data.

In fact India has seen hot and heavy accusations not only about increasing poverty, but about environmental destruction and loss of food security following "SAPs" and the increased role of the market, with very little systematic reliance on data to back them up. For the most recent example, a conference on "food security" held by an NGO in Delhi saw self-proclaimed "experts" ranging from British and American intellectuals to India's Vandana Shiva argue that food security was being endangered all over the world, and quoting one statistic from India to prove their point: that food consumption had declined from 510 gm per day in 1991 to 466 in 1993 (*Times of India*, July 29, 1996); where these figures came from can only be guessed, but they contradict the UN data presented here. There are data to the effect that foodgrain availability (defined as production plus net imports minus government stocks) had declined temporarily in 1992-3 and since many supporters of the anti-market position often seem to assume that the poor eat only "foodgrains" and that producing fruits and vegetables etc. can only be alien to them, this may be the source of the "experts" dire warnings.



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**Contd on page 8**

**project.** However the fact these two developments did take place at all (under the leadership of Vijaya and largely due to his initiative) did make a contribution to the eventual defeat of the Polpotist JVP and the saving of the democratic system.

**Parallel Stripes : The LTTE**

The stark parallelism of the LTTE's onslaught on the Eelam Left, beginning with the abduction of Jaffna campus student leader Vijitharan, *also in 1986*, has to be noted here. Unlike in the South though, the Eelam left and democratic forces were - and have remained - unable to prevail over *'their'* JVP, the LTTE. The reasons for this necessitates a separate venture into the realm of political sociology and comparative politics. It is especially when we remember what happened and is happening in the North and East that we can decidedly conclude that Pathirana's death, like the death of Vijaya and those of several thousand left activists including Pathirana's successor as the leader of the ISU, K.L. Dharmasiri (who was shot in the back of the head by a young JVP killer, while riding on the pillion of a motorbike early one morning in Kotahena in late July '89) was not in vain.

**Footnotes**

1. A small revolutionary group led by Dayan Jayatilaka, linked to Padmanabha's EPRLF.

2. SJV - led by Jayatilaka Silva, linked to Maheswaran's PLOTE.

3. NJVP - an anti racist breakaway from the JVP, also linked to Maheswaran's PLOTE.

**Contd from page 10**

character is treated with sympathy and compassion. She is not just a bad woman. Henry Jayasena produced some very good adaptations of internationally well known plays, notably "Ahas Maliga", an adaptation of Tennessee Williams "Glass Menagerie".

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