LANKA GUARDIAN

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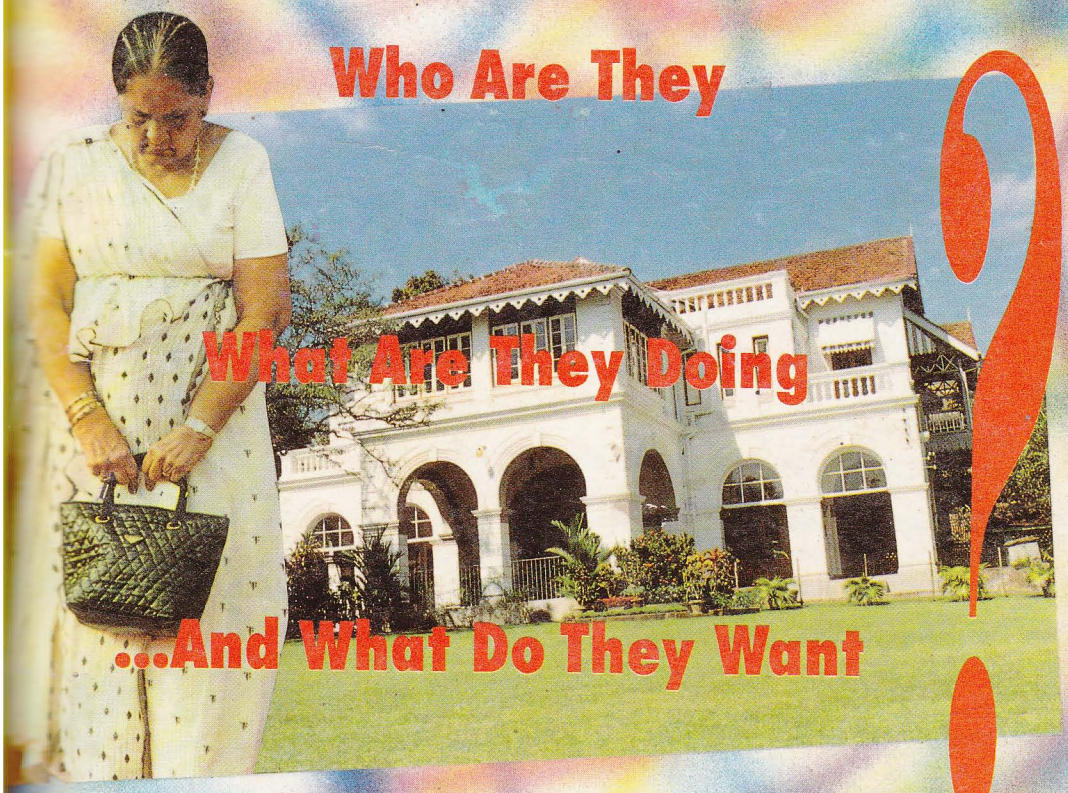
Special Report

POVERTY IN SRI LANKA

THE BANDARANAIKE PROJECT



Who Are They

What Are They Doing

...And What Do They Want

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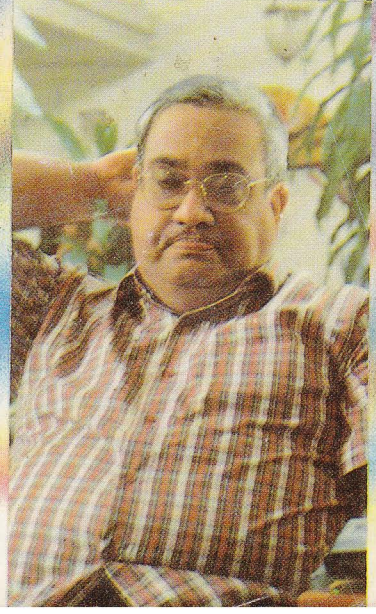

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THE PA'S SUICIDAL STREAK

Mervyn de Silva

Just two years and a few months old and the 7-8-9 party "Peoples Alliance" seems to have suddenly aquired a suicidal streak. How else does one explain the extraordinary events of the past week? An ISLAND editorial (4/I) presented an excellent summary of how it all began :

" A heavily packed lorry plying from Colombo to Vavuniya runs over a motor cyclist at the Miriswatte junction., and kills him. An irate public then sets it on fire, while he driver and cleaner run away.....goods from the lorry are looted. A TV crew which has been carrying out a special assignment in the area arrives on the scene and begins filming the burnt-out lorry. The next stage is the arrival of a Pajero inter-cooler with a well known politician and his bodyguards". An exchange of words..... The camera is assaulted. The film is "confiscated" so to say.

The scene shifts to the police station. And there, the camera crew is roughed up, the press reported... Alas, a case of mistaken identity. The TV crew worked for the state-run ITN! The politico and his thugs may have got the names mixed up. Their the hoped-for/sought after target was NOT the Independent Television Network, the state-owned, but rather, the TNL, the privately owned.!

The owner of the TNL, Shan Wickremasinghe, is the brother of Opposition leader Mr.Ranil Wickremasinghe. The latter's niece, Ishini Wickremasinghe Perera, is TNL's News Director. What shocked the political Establishment, the press, the diplomatic community, and the Colombo-based correspondents ***most*** was not the arrest the young woman but the use of the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act.

The UN's newly appointed special rapporteur on women, Radhika Coomaraswamy, a prominent figure in the island's women's rights movement told the press : "The Johannesburg principle which spells out press freedom explicity rules the use of criminal prosecution in cases of freedom of the press. The PTA should be repealed", Would President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, daughter of the world's first woman Prime Minister, Mrs.Sirima Bandaranaike, (she holds that office right now too) respect the Johannesburg principle?

First women's organisations, next Sri Lanka's Editors Guild..... a somewhat more spirited intervention.

"Central to the issue" said the Editors Guild, "is the use of the PTA. As we understand it, the PTA, is not concerned with the accurancy or otherwise of the impugned report. It is a ***special law*** intended to deal with terrorism. By no flight of fancy would anybody be convinced that any kind of terror was involved in this matter".

The lesson here is plain enough. From time to time in the first post-independence decades, popularly elected regimes did declare 'a state of emergency' for a month, sometimes three months...rarely more. The emergency regulations did allow a government to cope with crippling strikes (harbour, food distribution etc.) floods....and soon communal violence. Later, both parties UNP and SLFP found that these extraordinary powers were most convenient, even in situations that were not a threat to day-to-day administration. And so, the "abnormal " becomes the "normal", with the regime armed to the teeth, and acquiring some new characteristics.

MASSIVE RETALIATION : SIGN OF WEAKNESS

If the TNL had indeed presented a distorted (or even a dangerously distorted) picture, the PA government could have (a) used Rupavahini, SLBC and the press to set the record right and (b) punished the TNL under the normal law. "We are certain" said the Editors Guild, "that the station would also have issued a correction". So why

Contd on page 19

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THE IDEAS MAGAZINE

THE NATIONAL SANGHA COUNCIL AND BUDDHIST NEO REVIVALISM

Ajith Serasundera,
Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Colombo.

The main purpose of this commentary is analysing the origin of the recently formed National Sangha Council, its roots in Buddhist Revivalism and the political role of Buddhist monks.

The majority of anthropologists who studied Sri Lankan society have concentrated their research on Sinhala Buddhism (Obeysekere 1963,1972: Seneviratne 1978: Malalgoda 1976: Tambiah 1992: Gombrich and Obeysekere 1986: Southwood 1983: Carrithers 1983: Bond 1995). These scholars have attempted to emphasise Buddhist Nationalism and its significant ideological influence on Sri Lankan society. The anthropological research on Sinhala Buddhism in Sri Lanka represents in the main, two schools of thought: how Buddhism has historically contributed to justifying political processes in the pre-colonial, colonial, and post colonial periods and how Sinhala Buddhism has changed along with the social changes in Sinhala society.

Both of these schools of thought have given rise to a theoretical perspective with regard to Buddhism in Sri Lanka. It is proposed that Buddhism has continued to participate in the Sri Lanka state and its political ideology - which in turn has introduced changes in Buddhism itself. My basic theme of discussion in this article is that there is a ***continuation of the same process*** described by the scholars mentioned above.

THE COUNCIL'S PROGRAMME :

Four weeks ago, on 15th December 1996, the National Sangha Council was held at the BMICH in Colombo. The main purpose of that meeting was establish a National Bhikku Centre. At this meeting the National Sangha Council declared three major demands: dissolve the executive presidency, turn the commissioner of elections into an independent entity and change the entire electoral system.

The Council also opposed the PA government's political package and its privatisation programme. On the same occasion two publications were released by the National Sangha Council. These documents are very important in understanding the contemporary political role and ideology of Bhikkhus. In these documents there are many ideas that pertain to political and economic fields such as agriculture, industries, health, education, transport, power and energy, foreign policy, culture and society. They also emphasise some social welfare issues and public health problems (such as diabetes, blood pressure, gastric complications, family planning etc.) in an attempt to educate people who are living in the rural areas with regard to these problems.

BHIKKHU BLOCS

Since the Buddhist revival movement, the Sangha has been campaigning on the same social and political issues which the National Sangha Council has just emphasised. During this century, Sinhala Buddhist society has been influenced ideologically by the Buddhist revival movement - and we can discern these ideological influences from cultural, religious and political institutions. The Buddhist revival movement was mainly anti-western, anti-British and anti-Christian. Mohottiwatte Gunananda and Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Thero were the main pioneers of the movement. However it came out as ***an ideological movement of Sinhala Nationalism*** under Anagarika Dharmapala's leadership. Most ideas about economy, social welfare, rural development and discipline put forward by the National Sangha Council's contain ideological links with Dharmapala's teaching.

After Dharmapala, the Vidyalankara Pirivena emerged as a centre of Sinhala Nationalism. Those Bhikkhus who were politically sympathetic to Marxism and Indian nationalism were ideological products of Anagarika Dharmapala. Among them, Bhikkhu Walpola Rahula Thero played a leading role as a political Bhikkhu. His controversial intervention "Heritage of Bhikkhu", a book on social welfare and politics, emphasised the Bhikkhus' role in politics. While these developments were going on, another trend had emerged in the form of new Bhikku organisations such as the Eksath Bhikkhu Bala Mandalaya and Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna (EBP) which cut cross nikaya and caste boundaries and followed the idiom and tactics of the Colombo based national political associations and interest groups

(Malalgoda 1977). These presaged the role of political Bhikkhus grouped today in the National Sangha Council. During that period the EBP mainly concerned itself with anti-UNP, anti-Western and anti-Catholic issues, while they stood for the educational, religious and nationalistic needs of Sinhala Buddhists. To attain their goals the EBP campaigned for SWRD Bandaranaike's political project. SWRD's political victory and the celebration of the Buddha Jayanthi festival helped the Bhikkhus in their effort to restore the Sinhala Buddhist heritage and identity.

After 1956, there was another significant factor: the political Bhikkus had demarcated themselves into *two different blocs*. The two Bhikkhu movements represented the left and right wings of party politics. These divergences and the conversions of the two most reputed Buddhist monastic collages (Vidyalankara and Vidyodaya Prirvenas) into universities, weakened the political Bhikkhus' bargaining power.

Later, in 1971, young radical Bhikkus linked with the JVP, believing in armed revolutionary struggle. This third differentiation to weakened the Bhikkhu organisations further. *Between the period 1971 to 1977 there were no significant political developments among the Bhikkhus.*

FAR EASTERN FACTOR

The UNP government which came into power in 1977 introduced open economic policies. These economic changes not only affected the economy but also politics, religion and culture. Immediately the Maha Sangha responded to these developments as they believed these rapid economic changes would destroy Sinhala Buddhist culture'. At the same the then opposition political parties such the SLFP, the traditional left and the JVP also emphasised these ideas about the open economy. *However some Bhikkhus linked with new economic developments started various types of economic activities such as vocational training schools, pre-school education, organised tuition classes and trade unions and produced audio cassettes etc.. Parallel to these developments they received political patronage and donations mainly from Japan, Korea and Thailand which are precisely those countries which have rapidly expanded business links with the Sri Lankan economy since 1977.*

These Bhikkhus who were highly involved with economic enterprises were not directly engaged with Buddhist nationalism.

There has also been the emergence and development of armed Tamil militant movements since 1980. These militant movements based on the separate Tamil homeland concept impacted emotionally on the Bhikkhus - and in turn was responsible for developing new Bhikkhus organisations. The 1983 July riots was the major turning point for this tendency. Parallel to these changes, there has been a political debate on the Tamil people's right of self determination. Within this debate we can find two main schools of thoughts: one is liberal and or/Marxist oriented and the other is Sinhala nationalist oriented. Among those Sinhala nationalist intellectuals a new school of thought came into mainstream media and discourse, called "Jathika Chinthanaya". During this period lay leaders from the Jathika Chinthanaya formulated on ideology of Bhikkhus.

However some Bhikkhus linked with new economic developments started various types of economic activities such as vocational training schools, pre-school education, organised tuition classes and trade unions and produced audio cassettes etc.. Parallel to these developments they received political patronage and donations mainly from Japan, Korea and Thailand which are precisely those countries which have rapidly expanded business links with the Sri Lankan economy since 1977.

Meanwhile there were anti-Tamil, anti-Indian and anti-Western sentiments growing rapidly within Sinhala society. Hand in hand with these developments there was a new Bhikkhu organisation called the 'Mavbima Surakeme Viyaparaya' formed in 1986. By mid-1987 this movement played a leading role in the struggle against the Indo-Lanka peace accord. This made the public aware, in a serious way, of the political role of Bhikkhus. Soon after the crackdown on the anti-peace accord riots, young radical Bhikkhus turned to JVP politics.

CONTEMPORARY CONVERGENCE

When we consider all of the above it clearly helps us understand the significance of the contemporary organisational and ideological trends among the Bhikkhus: since post Independence, Bhikkhu movements had been linked with right and left wing party politics, and polarised along those lines; but the new tendency is one of the National Sangha going against that trend. This will be a major factor of 'Bhikkhu politics'. At the same time the National Sangha Council ideology reflects the historical link with Buddhist Revivalism.

The National Sangha Council is a reflection and political symbol of *the continuing process of Buddhist Revivalism* in our century, albeit with changing leadership.

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"..... clumsily cunning, knavishly naïve, coltishly sublime, a calculated superstition, a pathetic burlesque, a cleverly stupid anachronism, a world historic piece of buffoonery and an indecipherable hierogliphic for the understanding of the civilised ....."
(Karl Marx - The Class Struggles in France).

THE CHOSEN ONES

Tisaranee Gunasekara

Once upon a time there was a small country whose ruler was assassinated by some of his disgruntled supporters. This ruler had an unscrupulously clever kinsman who, however, was not a member of the Court. One day this kinsman approached the dead ruler's 15 year old daughter (who was avidly listening to 'pop music' and resented this interruption much) and urged her to persuade her widowed mother to take over the reins of power. The young princess was at first reluctant but the kinsman eventually managed to convince her by saying "your father gave his life to this party; are you going to let it be wasted?" The young princess then talked to her 11 year old brother and together they successfully persuaded their mother (who was a political novice) to step into the dead ruler's shoes. The widow agreed and appeared before the country in her mourning attire and was soon selected to succeed her dead husband. The new ruler then honoured her husband's kinsman (who was instrumental in elevating her to the most powerful position in the land) by making him one of her chief counsellors. Then they all lived happily ever after.

This is no fairy tale, no story from the ancient past. It actually happened in Sri Lanka, (then, Ceylon) in the second half of the twentieth century, a bare four decades away from the 21st century and the new (Third) millennium. According to ***the documentary 'Sirimavo Bandaranaike'*** (twice telecast on the State run Rupavahini) this was how the problem of succession was resolved in the SLFP after the assassination of SWRD Bandaranaike. A key role in this drama was played by SWRD's adolescent son Anura and daughter Chandrika (both were not even old enough to vote!) who persuaded their mother to take over the leadership of the SLFP by saying "you have to save thaththa's party". The palace coup was the brainchild of SWRD's cousin, Felix Dias Bandaranaike - who at that time was ***not even a member of Parliament***. It was this troika which finally decided the fate of the SLFP and by extension, the fate of the country, and its peoples, South and North.

Going by an article published in 'Lakbima' the production of this documentary cost 35 lakhs. Politically and socially it is worth a million times more - because it helps us to better our understanding of that 'indecipherable hierogliphic'(Marx), the Bandaranaike-Ratwatte family, the SLFP... and today's PA government.

SIRIMA'S SWRD

In the beginning there were those Sinhala Chieftains in their walauwwas, who prospered like so many baytrees during the period of British occupation by the simple expedient of being faithful lackeys of the coloniser and supplying the white masters with all their needs - from information about Sinhala patriots, to elephants and buffalo meat. Prominent among these were the Mahawalatanne - Ratwatte clan from the upcountry, headed by the Mahawaletanne Ratemahatteya, and the Bandaranaike - Obeysekara clan from the low country, headed by Maha Mudliyar Sir Solomon Dias Bandaranaike (who had the felicity of being the First Servant of the British). The marriage between SWRD Bandaranaike of Horogolla and Sirima Ratwatte of Mahawaletanne was as significant for Sri Lanka as the marriage between Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon was for Spain or the marriage between Henry Tudor and Elizabeth of York was for England. It

laid the foundation for a new political dynasty which has ruled Independent Sri Lanka for more than seventeen years (and counting).

In Sirima Bandaranaike's on-camera version, SWRD'S life contained three important watermarks - his marriage, his splitting of the UNP and forming of the SLFP and his assassination. Indeed Ms.Bandaranaike should be congratulated on telling the unvarnished truth, at last : that SWRD left the UNP not because he was a progressive and the UNP was reactionary or because he was pro-people and the UNP was anti-people; but because he thought D.S.Senanayake was conspiring to deprive him of his rightful place as the next leader of the UNP. Ms.Bandaranaike claims that ***she was behind her husband's decision to leave the UNP*** because "I knew what DS was doing; he wanted his son to succeed him, and not my husband". In other words it was ambition-cum- power hunger and not principles or love for the people which made SWRD turn anti UNP, split the UNP and form the SLFP. Contrary to the popularly held belief that she was firmly kept out of politics when SWRD was alive, Ms.Bandaranaike also claims that she was involved in her husband's political work from very early on : during the 1952 elections ***"I allowed him to go round the country*** and looked after his electorate". (my emphasis -T.G.)

1956 (The Silent Revolution, as the SLFP - Left legend has it) comes and goes, without a single mention in the documentary. Another notable absentee is the Pancha Maha Balavegaya, long believed to be the main pillars of the 1956 victory. SWRD is assassinated and at the instigation of his nephew Felix Dias Bandaranaike and his own adolescent children Chandrika and Anura, Sirima Bandaranaike takes over the leadership of the SLFP and leads the party to victory in the general elections. The reason for this victory was the sympathy wave for the grieving widow - "when I spoke the women cried; women supported me fully ... otherwise I couldn't have won". Family ties, widow's weeds and copious tears, not principles or issues decided the fate of the country.

The documentary is based on interviews with Ms.Bandaranaike and her off springs and what strikes the viewer most is their extreme family-centrism. The Family is the Creator, the Protector and the Saviour. Everything depends on the Family. That includes the fate of the SLFP : without the Family "the party would have gone to pieces". There's not a single mention of the other giants of the SLFP such as D. M Rajapakse, Maithripala Senanayake and T.B.Illangaratne; obviously none of them (singly or in combination) had what was necessary to keep the party together (this contrasts markedly with the UNP). Also the fate of the country: Sunethra Bandaranaike relates how the "quivering masses" (this interesting category of hers included the Service Commanders and the IGP) rushed to Ms..Bandaranaike for leadership and guidance, during the 1971 JVP uprising.

FAMILIAL IDEOLOGY

Louis Althusser called it 'familial ideology'. The discourse of all four members of the family clearly indicate their sense of being ***The Chosen Ones*** - not democratically, by the will of the people, ***but by birth***. In other words a sense of their divine right to rule. ***Chandrika*** says that all three children "overcame better than most people, hurdles we faced, because of the grounding, the background....." ***Anura*** talks of turning the Horogolla Walauwa (the family seat of a man who was elevated to one of the highest positions in the land by the foreign occupier precisely because he willingly betrayed his country and his people) into a museum: "I was toying with the idea of turning it into a museum for the future generations to see about their former leaders". He sounds extremely proud that none of the other leaders of independent Sri Lanka - DS, Dudley, JR and Premadasa - could boast of such an ancestral home. Ms. Bandaranaike highlights this sense of being a family apart, with one of her final remarks: "*.....if the children get together with me we will be a very powerful group, more than any other group....*".

The picture that emerges is that of a family which perceives itself as something exclusive, a family ***pur sang***, a charmed circle the entry into which is strictly reserved for those who are born to the purple. If your birth is not suitable, then marriage (even marrying into the Family) will avail you nothing. ***Throughout the documentary there is not a single mention of the three men who were at one time or another, married to the two daughters of the Family***. Sunethra says that though her mother was disappointed about her daughters' choices she didn't oppose them; Ms.Bandaranaike reiterates this point. And there it ends. The men in question remain anonymous; they are but thinggummies as far as the Family is concerned. ***Not even Vijaya Kumaratunga who fathered Ms.Bandaranaike's only grand children, is considered worthy of being mentioned***. At the end of the documentary one knows the names of most of the maternal relations of Yasodhara and Vimukthi - ***but not the name of their father***. Vijaya did not exist - not for his mother-in-law who made use of him when she was challenged by her son; not for his widow who pledged on his coffin that she'll continue with ***his*** struggle. He does not even exist in and through his children; as far as the Family is concerned, Vijaya's own children do not take after him, do not resemble him in any way. Instead they take after ***their various maternal relations***. That seems to be one of the Cardinal Rules of the Family : if you do not get your birth just right, you ***simply do not exist***.

What of the SLFP? The Family created the SLFP and the SLFP cannot survive without the Family. The Family is both the necessary and sufficient condition for the continued existence of the SLFP - according to the Family. And how should one define a political party which is dependent on the leadership of a single (feudal) family for its survival and prosperity? The picture that emerges is not that of a modern bourgeois - democratic party but ***a piece of family property***; the family fiefdom. The discourse of the Family clearly indicates that it does indeed regards the SLFP as its exclusive private property. ***The only point of***

controversy concerns the line of succession. Who is the rightful heir - is it daughter Chandrika or son Anura? Chandrika freely admits that Anura is her mother's choice: "she tried very hard to give the leadership to Anura; quite understandably because he is the only son". But Chandrika believes the leadership belongs to her.. because she was her father's choice. SWRD considered Chandrika to be his "political daughter" and said so, according to Chandrika. Ms.Bandaranaike's brother Clifford Ratwatte is brought into the story as a witness to this claim. There is no question of anyone outside the family, however competent, intelligent or experienced, becoming the leader of the SLFP. The SLFP will never have its J.R.Jayewardene, Ranil Wickremasinghe and D.B.Wijetunga, let alone its Ranasinghe Premadasa. The top leadership of the party is the exclusive monopoly of the family, by the grace of birth. Ms.Bandaranaike wanted Anura to be the heir because he is her only son; but as far as Chandrika is concerned she is the rightful heiress because that was the way her Papa wanted it. But of course he died before he could anoint her as the heiress apparent. In this version Ms.Bandaranaike's role is that of the Queen Regent. But now that the Crown Princess is of age, her claim to the throne of her father is indisputable.

1956

Under the British colonisers the Bandaranaikes was the First (native) Family. Alas, when Sri Lanka gained Independence, the country's new leader was not a member of the Bandaranaike - Obeysekera clan, but an outsider; perhaps even an upstart by the reckoning of the Bandaranaikes. D.S.Senanayake was not of the traditional elite but of the ***nouveau riche,*** from a family whose claim to prominence rested on their new found 'graphite' fortune. However D.S.'s elevation was to be a mere interregnum after which the Bandaranaikes were to re-claim their rightful and historical place at the apex, this time through the person of Sir Soloman's only son, SWRD. When these plans were foiled by D.S.Senanayake, SWRD split the UNP and formed the SLFP. Obviously his belief in his right to the UNP's (and thereby the country's) leadership and his outrage at being deprived of this position were such that the possibility of the electorate preferring Dudley to himself never occurred to the man. The electorate however was not impressed by his claims to supremacy. They reaffirmed D.S.'s choice by voting for ***Dudley's*** UNP rather than SWRD's SLFP. The 1952 elections ended in a convincing victory for the UNP with 44.1% of the total valid votes. SWRD's new party finished a poor second with 15.5% of the total valid votes. Obviously the majority of the voters did not see SWRD as the rightful and wronged heir.

SWRD (unlike other members of his family) learnt the lesson of 1952 fast - and thus began the transmogrification of the SLFP. The SLFP's (and SWRD's) attempts to cultivate a progressive, nationalist image, it's search for leftist allies, the tie-up with Philip Gunawardena, the MEP factor, the Pancha Maha Balavegaya, the Sinhala Only policy - all these were the logical outcomes of the rejection of (the extremely well known) SWRD and his claim to the country's leadership by the electorate in 1952. What SWRD did in the wake of 1952 electoral debacle was a version of what the more intelligent members of the European aristocracy did when they were challenged by the newly emergent bourgeoisie: "In order to arouse sympathy, the aristocracy were obliged to lose sight, apparently, of their own interest, and to formulate their indictment against the bourgeoisie in the interest of the exploited working class alone". (The Communist Manifesto). This is pretty much what SWRD did. He put himself forward as the champion of the culturally marginalised and the socially underprivileged : an alliance of Buddhist monks, Ayurvedic physicians, Teachers, Peasants and Workers.

The post 1952 political strategy of SWRD is curiously reminiscent of the following description by Adolf Hitler of one of his early heroes, Karl Lueger, the leader of the Austrian Christian Socialists. "He was quick to adopt all available means for winning the support of long established institutions, so as to be able to derive the greatest possible advantage for his movement from those sources of power." (Mein Kampf). Similarly SWRD's populism was of the backward looking, reactionary variety. The best proof of this is the fact that SWRD gave the primacy of place in his grand alliance to probably the most archaic, inward looking and ethnocentric institution in Sri Lanka - the Sangha. The economically most important and numerically largest segments, the peasants and workers (the direct producers) were placed right at the bottom of the totem pole. It is small wonder that SWRD's policies turned out to be so divisive and destructive.

In the SLFP - left legends, SWRD is romanticised as the progressive par excellence, a great intellectual and a pro-people leader. ***Even his Sinhala Only policy is being glossed over, using his advocacy of federalism in the '20s. It will be instructive to examine the root causes of his advocacy of federalism. It cannot be due to his committment to democracy or national interests or the welfare of the people - because precisely during this time he was opposed to universal franchise, without which democracy, patriotism and the well being of the masses become mere words devoid of any meaning!*** It is difficult to find a single original idea or concept in SWRD's writings and speeches. He wasn't a path breaker or a leader who went against the tide. What he did was to implement a pale and ethnocentrically distorted version of the national - popular wave which, originating in 1905 (the Japanese victory over Russia), was sweeping parts of the Third World in the post war period and specially the '50s (e.g. Bandung). As for his much vaunted progressive measures, it would be most interesting to examine how many of these should actually be credited to Phillip Gunawardane. True, SWRD's rhetoric was extremely effective ; he was a successful rabble rouser. But this too is well within the tradition of what Marx and Engels called 'feudal socialism' : "...half lamentation, half lampoon; half echo of the past, half menace of the future; at times, by its bitter, witty and incisive criticism, striking the bourgeoisie to the very

heart's core". (The Communist Manifesto).

If the Sri Lankan left studied and took its Marxism at least half - seriously, it would not have had any difficulty in understanding the real nature of the SLFP. The left either forget or disregarded the Communist Manifesto's warnings about Feudal Socialism : "the aristocracy, in order to rally the people to them, waved the proletarian alms-bag in front for a banner". The Left's misconception reached such ludicrous levels, it was said that ***socialism*** can be built under the leadership of the SLFP. The Lankan Left's cardinal sin was not that it engaged in class collaborationism and tailism, but ***that it did so with a party hegemonised by a feudal leadership and ideology ; an entity which was far more reactionary and retrogressive than any modern bourgeois party. In this, the Lankan Left was and is quite unique.***

FEUDALS RULE, OK?

The SLFP was (and still remains) the exclusive property of the No 01 feudal clan of this country. Its 'progressive' image, was nothing more than an attempt to win the voters away from the UNP. Its ultimate objective is to protect and perpetuate not so much the capitalist system and multiparty democracy (let alone the national or the people's interests) as ***the rule of the Bandaranaike - Ratwatte clan.*** As Chandrika herself claims, ***"politics is the business of the Family"***. An electoral defeat is therefore always perceived not as the logical and inevitable result of a competitive multi party democracy with winners, losers and the rotation of elites, but as the outcome of an evil ('reactionary')conspiracy to deprive the country of its rightful rulers and the Family of its rightful Inheritance.

Therein lies the bitterness and rancour of the anti-UNPism of the SLFP leadership - which has percolated not just to the rank and file members but also to the traditional (and even segments of the new) Left. The UNP is seen not as a legitimate opponent but as an usurper, stealing what rightfully belongs to the Family (a 'crime' the UNP has consistently engaged in, since D.S. prevented SWRD from succeeding him as the leader of the UNP). This is the rationale for that extremely anti-democratic and confrontational slogan which every SLFP regime subscribes to: ***'we shall never allow the UNP to raise its head again'***. This is the hatred of the royalty towards the bourgeoisie; it is akin to the hatred felt by the Bourbons towards the leaders of the French revolution or the Stuarts towards Cromwell. It is the hatred of those who believe they have a divine right to rule, towards all challengers - who are considered, by definition, usurpers. S.C.Obeysekara (of the Bandaranaike - Obeysekera clan and an uncle of SWRD) is supposed to have dismissed the interest of the newly emergent compradore bourgeoisie in politics as "Nobodies trying to be somebodies'1. This eloquently expresses how the UNP leadership and their legitimate political activities were and are perceived by the Family, from SWRD downwards and onwards.

The SLFP's only authentic commitment therefore is to the Family. Neither the SLFP nor the Family has any real commitment either to the country or to the democratic system. Which is why they do not hesitate to align themselves with extremist, anti-systemic forces in order to recapture power - even if by doing so they endanger the market economy and democratic system. This is what happened in the late '80's when the SLFP established a close working alliance with the murderously anti-systemic JVP and engaged in joint, violent agitational campaigns some of which turned into bloody riots. It is the JVP that pulled out of the alliance, not the SLFP! The Family and the SLFP do not respect the rules of the multi-party system either. The 'People' are considered to be anti-UNP by definition. Therefore any victory of the UNP is always regarded as fraudulent and, illegitimate. Even when more than 50% of the electorate votes freely for the UNP it is never perceived as the legitimate government, because it is never legitimate - and is always a usurpation - in the eyes of the Family. As a result, from the moment the electorate displaces the Family and the SLFP from the seat of power, ***destabilisation becomes the name of the game***. Instability, chaos and even anarchy hold no terrors for the Family or the SLFP. When in office they are always authoritarian, repressive and violent - even when their main challenger, the UNP acts in a lackadaisical manner. When out of office, they are always insidious, unrestrained, disruptive and irresponsible.

This essential nature of the Family and the SLFP also explains their propensity to implement political and economic policies which are fundamentally damaging to the country and the people. The fact that the single most destructive policy cum piece of legislation in independent Sri Lanka, the Sinhala Only of 1956 was the doing of the SLFP is an excellent case in point. That, the Constitution of 1972 and another grotesque brainchild of the SLFP, the Standardisation policy, laid the groundwork for the conflagration in the North and East which is still raging (and which cost Rajiv Gandhi his life). Other examples include Chandrika's determination to hand over almost all economic enterprises (even those of strategic national and/or popular interest) to foreign capital; and her attempts to impose the drastic devolution - actually, regionalisation - package on the country, even using unilateralist, anti-democratic, anti-constitutional methods. After all, ***the nation state as we know it is a bourgeois construct and therefore incapable of commanding the loyalty of a feudal leader. So too are constitutions***. The recent declaration of the President that the constitution is a mere piece of paper which can and should be thrown out if it impedes her forward march should also be understood in this context, of the characteristically feudal/monarchical propensity towards ***absolutism***, untrammelled by a written constitution.

This perception of themselves as the only rightful rulers also explains why the Family and the SLFP are so insensitive and unreceptive to popular sentiments. In 1977 they were the last to know the havoc wreaked by their closed economic policies and the

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FILM REVIEW

SIRIMAVO BANDARANAIKE A DOCUMENTARY

Historicus

When Mrs.Bandaranaike became an octogenarian in April last year only one thing was missing in the wide range of official celebrations staged in her honour. That was a film on her life and times. It came several months after her birthday. The hour-long documentary, sponsored by the BMICH and shown recently on Rupavahini, took us through the main features of the life of the Grand Old Lady of Sri Lankan politics. Whatever debate there may be on the substance or text of the documentary, the professionalism with which it was presented was well above Rupavahini's normal standards. Who the director of the documentary was remains, unfortunately, a mystery, but the credits told us that the photography was Dominic Sansoni's.

Those who designed the film took the viewer through Mrs.Bandaranaike's childhood in Balangoda, her school days at Ratnapura and St.Bridget's Convent in Colombo, to her dramatic entry into national politics as the world's first woman Prime Minister, and on to the present day. Sri Lanka's political life being what it is, and Rupavahini being what it is, one could not have expected a "warts and all" study of the career of an individual. But once a documentary is screened the visuals and the commentary take on lives of their own, and a critical eye and ear can see and hear much more than producers, directors and cameramen intended to convey.

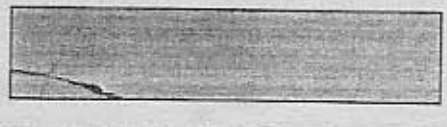
The documentary was designed, naturally enough, as a celebration of a life in politics; intentionally or unintentionally it became a celebration of family politics, or of families in politics. The Bandaranaike children were all there in the film, and disregarding their current political status and standing, they were, quite rightly, given more or less the same amount of time, and they were all treated as minor players on a stage in which the mother was the focal point. One striking feature of the documentary was that apart from Mrs.Bandaranaike's brother who makes a brief appearance, and M.D.D.Peiris who had been a civil servant at the Prime Minister's office in the early 1960's when Mrs.Bandaranaike first became Prime Minister, there was hardly any other person associated with her career in politics seen or even mentioned. *The text would have been enriched, and the visuals gained in depth had the producers ventured to give us the names and faces of those many men and women whose efforts had helped elevate Mr and Mrs. Bandaranaike to the prominence they achieved in this country's political life. What we get are bandleaders without that essential background of the band itself. There was so much talk of the family's past, and its present, that many viewers felt that much of the documentary was in bad taste especially because it excluded any mention of the democratic and, indeed, radical forces associated with the public lives of the Bandaranaikes, and Mrs.Bandaranaike, in particular.* One of the few plebeian individuals mentioned in the commentary and through Mrs.Bandaranaike herself, was a Nanayakkara who had served as match-maker in 1940. Nanayakkara was not so very plebian, after all, because he was, at that time, Chairman of the All-Ceylon Association of Village Councils when Mr Bandaranaike was Minister of Local Government.

The film successfully blends two strands of Mrs Bandaranaike's heritage, the Bandaranaike and Maduwanwala, Veyangoda and Balangoda. The visuals capture the essence of it through the grand houses associated with the two families, at Balangoda, Nittambuwa and, of course, Cinnamon Gardens. *These grand houses dominate the documentary to the point where the one at Horagolla in Nittambuwa becomes in effect the best supporting actor in this celebration of family in politics, or family politics.*

The essence of Mrs Bandaranaike's substantial achievement in the political history of this country is the facility with which she transcended, indeed triumphed over, limitations which could have been fatal in the case of a person without her innate strength of character. Among those limitations was the family background from which she came and the lack of anything more than a good secondary education. In placing so much emphasis on family and grand houses the anonymous director of the film has shown a surprising lack of discernment. He is not the only one to blame for this. We have President Chandrika Kumaratunga herself claiming that the family was unique in sacrificing so much land to the public welfare - she described it as a few "thousand acres", ranging from plantations, to nindagam, from valuable assets yielding regular profits to what used to be called "waste land". No doubt the reference was to the transfer of lands under the land reform legislation of the 1970's when Mrs.Bandaranaike was head of the United Front coalition government. One of the prominent members of that coalition, Dr Colvin R.de Silva, rejected this argument of sacrifice in a speech he made in the National State Assembly in 1975 - the point he made was clear

enough, that no land-owner who lost land as a result of land reform could make such a claim, because the land was taken by an act of deliberate state policy and there was nothing voluntary about it. Those remarks were directed at Mrs.Bandaranaike herself when she made a similar claim of voluntary sacrifice of land twenty one year earlier.

While associates and political allies are generally ignored in the film, some of the more prominent of the Bandaranaikes' political opponents are mentioned. There was a reference to D.S.Senanayake who contrived to deprive S.W.R.D.Bandaranaike of his political heritage in order to instal Dudley Senanayake as his successor. There were reference to J.R.Jayewardene and to R. Premadasa. Naturally enough, there was a touch of bitterness in the remarks on the two of them. J.R.Jayewardene inflicted on Mrs.Bandaranaike a crushing electoral defeat, the worst in her career. When a Commission of Inquiry appointed by his government at her request held against her, she lost her civic rights and was temporarily excluded from Parliamentary politics. There was also R. Premadasa who had snatched a victory over her in 1988-1989. While bitterness was mixed with a touch of respectful acknowledgement of political skills in the case of J.R.Jayewardene, the references to R. Premadasa had none of that. Instead Mrs.Bandaranaike proceeded to make a thoughtless comment on the violent death he suffered and attributed it to the play of karma, the natural consequence of evil deeds. Coming as these remarks did from a person whose husband had been the first prominent victim of assassination in Sri Lanka's recent history, and whose son-in-law had suffered a similar fate, one could not help feeling that with regard to some individuals, at least, Mrs.Bandaranaike could not really transcend the limitations of her background and upbringing. *Are we to believe that the laws of karma apply only to one's political opponents, and especially those whose caste and class backgrounds were conspicuously different from Mrs.Bandaranaikes?*



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resultant anti-government wave which was sweeping across the country. In the documentary, Ms.Bandaranaike's former secretary M.D.D Peiris claims that when questioned by him whether she should be told what she wants to hear, or the truth, her instant response was "God save me from people who tells me what I want to hear". The facts, however, do not add up. Take what was happening to the country, the economy and the people during the 70-77 period. Either Ms.Bandaranaike didn't know - in which case her advisors and officials erred by not telling her the truth; or she was told the truth, but chose either to disbelieve it or to disregard it. Chandrika and her government too are completely ignoring the public opposition to many of their policies, particularly the unrestrained, all-out privatisation programme. This lack of response to public sentiments is but the natural outcome of the Family's belief that it has been chosen by virtue of birth to lead the country.

SLFP VS DUDLEY SENANAYAKE

Despite their differences, there is perfect consensus in the Family regarding its inherent supremacy and its role in Sri Lankan politics. Anura Bandaranaike says that 'the people will vote for a Bandaranaike irrespective of which party he or she represents'. However historical facts belie him just as these facts ***convincingly prove the (electoral) correctness of D.S.'s choice of Dudley (over SWRD)*** as his successor. The SLFP, ***whether singly or armed with no - contest pacts with the left, never succeeded in polling more votes than Dudley Senanayake's UNP.*** The outcome of the 1952 elections was mentioned before. In 1956, the SLFP led coalition did poll more votes than the UNP (MEP - 43.7%; UNP - 31%); but we must bear in mind that it was a UNP weakened by the Hartal and Dudley's withdrawal and led by a completely inorganic, eccentric leader, Sir John Kotelawala. (Considering Sir John's outrageous conduct and even more outrageous discourse, it would correct to say he defeated himself). ***After that, the SLFP contested the UNP under Dudley's leadership four times and on every occasion it polled less votes than the UNP :***

1960 March - UNP 29.4%, SLFP 20.9%;
1960 July - UNP 37.6%; SLFP 33.6%;
1965 - UNP 39.3% SLFP 30.2%;
1970 UNP 37.9%, SLFP 36.9%.

These facts not only prove the correctness of the choice D.S. made; they also contradict and disprove Anura's claim about the 'peoples preference for a Bandaranaike'. In fact, the Bandaranaikes succeed in polling more votes than the UNP only thrice - and only in extremely exceptional circumstances i.e. when the UNP was led by inorganic and/or weak, anachronistic personalities: Sir John in 1956; D.B.Wijetunga at the 1994 General Elections and Srima Dissanayake at the 1994 Presidential elections.

WHAT THE BANDARANAIKES THOUGHT

The documentary not only helps us to understand the Bandaranaike Project; it also removes the veils of concealment and enables us to see the members of the Family as they really are - arrogant, pretentious, and petty-minded intellectual featherweights. Even their vocabulary is far from being extensive. Take Ms.Bandaranaike's reflections on the current situation: "Prabhakaran (is) a quite different man" (!); "... we can win over the ordinary Tamils... I am not saying to give them everything.... the problem is how to satisfy them.... they are very demanding....no government can satisfy them". Also illuminating is Ms.Bandaranaike's comment that President Premadasa died a violent death because of the 'wrong things he did'. This from the woman whose husband and son-in-law were assassinated! (May be she thinks these are divine retributions as well). ***And if one goes by Ms.Bandaranaike's brand of reasoning, then scores of great historical figures from Jesus Christ to Abraham Lincoln and Mahatma Gandhi died violent deaths because of the 'wrong things' they did.***

Then there's Chandrika who believes that her mother's regime of 70-77

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THE MAKING OF 'SIRIMAVO BANDARANAIKE'

MANIK SANDRASAGARA'S VERSION

Talking to the Lanka Guardian, Manik Sandrasagara reconstructed the sequence of events that led to the movie's making and critiqued the final product.

When Tyronne Fernando was Minister of Information and Broadcasting in the D.B.Wijetunga government, he authorised ITN to produce documentary programmes on outstanding political personalities. Presidential award winning film maker Manik Sandrasagara was picked as Producer/Director of the series by ITN's production consultant Ranjan Cooray. Sandrasagara wanted total artistic control and no censorship. He also decided on the first two subjects. President J.R. Jayewardene and Ms.Sirimavo Bandaranaike. This was approved and Sandrasagara commenced on his research and pre-production. Elections intervened and the UNP lost and the project was shelved. However Sandrasagara had already commenced work on his own steam. Recognising this, Sunethra Bandaranaike who was co-ordinating the project continued to work with Sandrasagara in spite of the fact that ITN sponsorship was not forthcoming. Sunethra Bandaranaike had already arranged for the Bandaranaike museum to sponsor the production.

Between commencement of pre-production work and actual taping of the programme - i.e. a period of two years - Sandrasagara suffered from a mild heart attack, so when he once again embarked on the production he recommended that Sunil Sittunayake be hired as producer to undertake the administrative aspect. Sandrasagara would retain overall artistic control.

Sandrasagara had decided to structure his interview programmes with both Mrs.Bandaranaike and President Jayewardene in a particular way. He would be the animator who would interview, amuse, cajole, persuade and make his subjects relax in order to tell their own story in their own inimitable fashion. Sandrasagara had directed every major actors and actresses in Sri Lanka.

He believed that politicians were the best performers, and with this belief he choose to eliminate himself an interviewer/animator from the programme. The Bandaranaikes would tell the public their own story. The cameras would be here to record what was taking place. This was Sittunayaka's task. Sandrasagara would personally help edit the programme. That was the deal.

Sandrasagara interviewed the Bandaranaikes, each and every one of them. The interviews were candid and the performances real. The programme is an audio visual record of a family that has played a central role in post colonial Lanka. It is not a publicity video. In fact it exposes the hypocrisy of modern day political families - the post colonial elite. Patrick Peebles, Eric Meyer, Michael Roberts, Gananath Obeysekara have all done the same in their published works..

Two days before the premiere of this production at the BMICH under the patronage of the Prime Minister, Sandrasagara was told that his name was to be removed from the credits. He was told that his name appears in a special list of people under investigation. File No.33. In a Kafka like plot Sandrasagara was unable to find out who was behind this obvious denial of an artists fundamental right to be credited for his work. ***He was also not paid.***

Out of respect for Mrs.Bandaranaike whom Sandrasagara had got to like, he kept quiet. Anura Bandaranaike was aghast. He was made to believe that Sandrasagara had agreed to make the programme without a credit, and was upset when the programme exceeded all his expectations without mentioning his name!

Sandrasagara does not accept artistic control of the final programme. In fact he condemns it as "a bad production that wasted public money". "Only the interviews work" - The rest is an amateur effort. It is indeed a pity because had it a proper direction the programme would have been exceptional.

"One camera when there should have been 3", says Manik.

IN A STATE OF PERMANENT REVOLUTION : THE ARTS IN THE 20TH CENTURY

H.L.D.Mahindapala

(A senior Sri Lankan journalist,the author is the former Editor,Sunday Observer)

When Marcel Duchamp, a great modernist, put his signature to a urinal, it caused more than a public sensation: it cast serious doubts about art itself. Naturally, this iconoclastic act provoked the question : Is that art ? To a Dadaist like Marcel Duchamp it was an act that not only defied the conventions of the traditional salons but also defined the new meaning of art. At the height of Dadism in the early 1900s, its nihilism was outlined by Hans Arp, one of the high priests of this cult : "The important thing about Dada, it seems to me, is that the Dadaists despised what is commonly regarded as art, but put the whole universe on the lofty throne of art.....Art can be evil, boring, wild, sweet, dangerous, euphonious, ugly or a feast to the eyes. The whole world is art. To draw well is art...The nightingale is a great artist. Michelangelo's Moses : Bravo ! But at the sight of an inspired snowman, the Dadaists also cried : Bravo !"

Western art had gone through many revolutions before — from the Greek "Kritios Youth" (480 B. C.) where the frozen human figure, coming down from Egyptian art, breaks loose for the first time and relaxes as if man had been liberated from its political and social rigidities, to the Impressionists, who, in the 19th century, visualised the world through the prism of light. But the history of art had never seen anything comparable to the revolution that exploded in the 20th century. In the new dawn where academic rules were thrown out of the window, art took a giant leap into a state of permanent revolution where the individual gained the unfettered freedom of self-expression. By the second half of the century Andy Warhol, the pop artist, had discovered art in junk material like Campbell's Soup Cans. Jackson Pollock was letting paint drip down the canvas to create its own designs. TIME magazine called him "Jack the Dripper". Duchamp himself enthroned Dadaist nihilism by putting a moustache on Leonardo Da Vinci's enigmantic Mona Lisa. Duchamp's anarchism scandalised those who revered the original Mona Lisa as a sacred icon of Western art. Can both be works of art ? If not, what is art ? In raising this question are we not trying to impose only one, all-encompassing, almost imperial, definition of art ? And can this one definition be adequate to cover the multifarious expressions of art in different cultures and ages ?

The meanings, the values and the uses of art have never been the same to (1) the primitive cave dwellers and to the rulers of Egypt, or (2) to the medieval Churches of Europe and to Buddhist temples in the east, or (3) to the craftsmen who produced the Hindu icons and to the art dealers at Southeby who auction at exorbitant prices the looted treasures of the Orient. Consider the case of the primitive artists. Before the very latest discoveries of Aboriginal art, which date back the first known artist to about 80,000 years, the oldest known cave paintings were found in the panels of Chauvet (named after its explorer Jean-Marie Chauvet) near the estuary of Rhone. As to why these artists ever drew those fighting rhinos, bisons, horses and lions about 32,000 years ago is anybody's guess. It could be because man hates a vacuum. Or it could have served the function of gaining magical power over the hunted animals. Or it could have been a "religious" practice to propitiate a primitive pantheon. Or it could have been aimed at displaying the prowess of the first "technocrat" (shaman ?) to control the minds and exercise power over his tribe. Or it could be considered as man's feeble mark against total oblivion.

Later, when culture assumed the greater role of bonding organised groups of people and defining their identity, arts played an integral part in maintaining the socio-political structure, particularly as a means of indoctrination to hold the ideological line of a community. For instance, the monumental figures of Egyptian royalty, standing or sitting in stylised sculpture, were designed to play the political role of overawing the citizens into total submission. Those larger-than-life figures symbolised divine authority and earthly power.

The variety of meanings, values and uses makes it almost impossible to reduce the meaning of art to a singular theory. Each individual artist and each culture would interpret and reinterpret art to validate new techniques, perspectives and socio-political needs. At the state level, the communist and fascist cultures engaged in what Walter Benjamin called "aestheticisation of politics". Both political cultures projected their "new man" as serving the higher goals preordained by the state. Art began to move in this direction of serving a centralised authority ever since society drifted away from primitive cultures. The centralisation of political and religious ideologies in secular and ecclesiastical instrumentalities turned art into a handy tool of the ruling elites. It was a primary means of anaesthetising the discontented masses and diverting their attention away from their misery

into idealised utopias of an ethereal nature. Art became a substitute for bread.

Art is also a substitute for the inadequacies of the limited experiences of isolated and deracinated individuals tied down to a boring daily routine. Art became the means of experiencing, either voyueristically or vicariously, other worlds which were not accessible to them in reality. Reality is too limited. Art knows no boundaries. Icarus, for instance, could very well be the symbol of that deep desire to escape the narrow maze in which we are trapped and fly away into other realms, however disastrous that may be. Art, in this sense, is also escapism.

From time to time art also leaps out as an ideological force for radical changes. Artists with a vision possess the gift of imposing their perspectives on their respective generations — and beyond. They become the arbiters of taste, values, techniques, rhythms, idioms and metaphors. The white heat of their creative power has forced new generations to view the world only through their eyes. Great artists become great powers by moulding the minds of contemporary and succeeding generations.

At the turn of this century, art, like politics, science and technology, was about to burst out of the conventional dams and flood the 20th century with new and irrepressible forces. In fact, the first decade witnessed some of the ideological and political tsunamis that were to sweep down the century. In 1905 the Japanese beat the Russians at Port Arthur signalling the rise of the east as a new political force. In 1905 Leon Trotsky had the first draft of his theory of the Permanent Revolution in his pocket. (I tend to believe that Trotsky's creative imagination in some respects is superior to that of Lenin.) In 1905 Einstein presented his magnificient vision of space and time by "combining both in a four-dimensional object called space-time" (Stephen Hawking). Picasso painted his Les Demoiselles d'Avignon in 1907. And T. S. Eliot was not far behind. This early spring of 20th century creativity produced some of the remarkable geniuses who left their indelible imprint on the generations that followed them. Even in the fin de siecle phase we are in now, it is difficult to shake off the intellectual legacy they left behind.

THE SCREAM OF OUR TIMES

Consider, for instance, Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, the Damsels of d'Avignon, which depicted a brothel scene. The theme was a favourite among the artists in Paris. Henri Toulouse-Lautrec's (1864 - 1901) glimpses of boredom among the un-Renoirian female figures lolling in bordellos had captured some of the best brothel scenes. But it was the way Picasso saw the Damsels of d'Avingnon that changed the art world. Art history records it as a revolutionary representation of the human figure. Though the angularities of Les Demoiselles d'Avignon were very seminal and experimental, it proved to be the precursor to Cubism — perhaps, the most influential art movement of our time. Its later geometric symmetries solved the perennial problem of artists struggling to give depth to flat surfaces. Though some trace Cubism to as far back as the Renaissance artist Giotto (1267 -1337) and as late as Paul ("everything in nature is shaped after the cylinder, the sphere, the cone") Cezanne (1839 - 1906), Cubism reached its full potential in the hands of Picasso. Braque too was a partner with young Picasso in pioneering Cubism. But it was Picasso who developed it into a medium that reinvigorated and redefined art. Earlier, he had gone through mood changes reflected in his El Grecoish "Blue" and "Rose" periods. In Les Demoiselles d'Avignon he waded boldly into his most rebellious phase. Sir Kenneth Clark noted that the "dismemberment of the nude....was a totally un-Hellenised stylisation of the body." He added : "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon is the triumph of hate. Starting from a brothel scene....it developed into an enraged protest at everything invovled in the conventional notion of beauty." (The Nude, p.348, Penguin).

It was also a time when the young rebels felt that the new age demanded a new vision, a new idiom, a new way of expressing the zeitgeist of the new century. The artistic explorations of surface features, from the Renaissance artists to the Impressionists — including the play of light on surfaces — had been almost exhausted. Besides, the new technology of the camera was beginning to invade the exclusive territory of artists. Portrait and scenic painters were about to be overtaken by the mechanical eye of the camera. Simultaneously, new perspectives from other cultures were invading the musty, dusty salons of Western art. Primitive African scultpures and Japanese art, with their distinctive cultural techniques and forms, had a lasting visual impact on the young artists of Paris. In fact, Les Demoiselles d'Avignon carry more traces of African art than Cubism. But as Picasso progressed in Cubism he broke new ground. Cubism, to Picasso, was the equivalent of X-rays to science which in the 1900s had already established itself as a revolutionary means of penetrating the surface features of solid matter. Through Cubism he could penetrate the two-dimensional veneer and go deeper into the third dimension of space unexplored by any artists before. Other artists before him saw only a part of a given object. Picasso's multi-dimensional eye saw it in its entirety.

All artists create space within their limited framework. But only Picasso created that extra dimension which was hailed both by the left and the right. Marxists hailed him as the only artist who perceived the dialectics of nature in its dynamic relationships. He was seen as the artist who synthesised the opposites. The right, particularly the religious right, saw him as an artist gifted with a "divine" eye to visualise all angles — front and back, top and bottom, sides and insides — simultaneously. There was also the rising competition between art and technology. Technology was beginning to imitiate art. Sensing this threat, art began to imitate technology. Toulose-Lautrec's snap shots freezing the evanescent moments plucked from Moulin Rouge gaiety or despondency were matched by Duchamp's kinetic Nude Descending a Staircase,(1912). It is a vivid dramatisation of fluent motion in stillness. The movements of the nude were unfolding in Cubistic frames similar to the motion pictures of Auguste and Louis Lumiere — the two brothers who were the first to develop a smooth, workable technique for taking and projecting moving pictures on a perforated celluloid strip. The Lumiere Cinematographe took Paris by storm when they held their first public performance at the Grand Cafe, 14

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LISTENING IN AN OPTIONLESS WORLD

This is a research into and survey of **Janasaviya** - President Ranasinghe Premadasa's poverty alleviation programme, which was implemented during the period 1989 - 94. *The main objective of this study is to evaluate the performance of the Janasaviya programme (henceforth referred to as JSP) from the perspective of its intended beneficiaries i.e. Janasaviya recipient families.*

The JSP has been a controversial topic of discussion and debate from the time of its inception. This debate/ discussion has been joined by such diverse segments of the populace as politicians (of all hues), bureaucrats, academics and journalists. However, there has been ***one group of people whose opinions of the JSP were neither sought nor heard*** (except on one or two rare occasions) - ***the very people the JSP was intended to benefit,*** the poorest of the poor of Sri Lanka.

The time when the Third World countries could experiment with different economic systems or even radically different economic models, is over. Today developing countries are actively encouraged to limit themselves to policy measures based on economic neo-liberalism ; any major departure from the norm is frowned upon and even punished. In this optionless world, the favoured policy prescription for dealing with the issue of poverty is high growth and ***de facto*** 'trickle down', with a little bit of 'social infrastructure' thrown in. Welfare, once generally accepted as desirable and an effective and necessary bulwark against instability and anarchy, has become a dirty word. Third World (and even First World) governments no longer have the luxury of spending large sums of money on ambitious welfare programmes ***despite*** the sharp ***increase*** in poverty with all its attendant social ills. Any pro-poor programme which goes beyond the narrow boundary lines laid down by neo-liberal dogma is likely to be stigmatised as welfarism and condemned to death by asphyxiation.

Politicians and policy makers in the Third World are therefore caught between a Scylla and a Charybdis. On the one hand there is tremendous external pressure on them to drastically curb spending on 'welfare' (pro-poor) programmes and to concentrate more or less exclusively on achieving growth; on the other hand, povertisation and pauperization are increasing rapidly, pushing more and more people beyond the pale of the economy and society into economic destitution and social marginalisation. The survival and the growth (however slow) of Third World economies ***depend*** on accepting the policy prescriptions of major donor agencies which control the flow of aid (and to a degree, investment) to our countries. However, these very same measures our countries are forced to accept in return for much needed funds and guarantees, are causing the - exacerbation of poverty and other social ills - thereby threatening socio-economic, political - and (eventually) ***systemic stability.***

The increasing polarisation of the development debate further limits the options available to governments. A zero sum game of growth vs equity has, in practice, replaced the necessary search for growth with equity. Though paying lip service to growth with equity, the policies advocated by the majority of protagonists in the development debate are based on the premise that growth and equity are mutually exclusive, ***or that one has to***

This research report was produced by the Premadasa Centre. The research was conducted by a team comprising U.G.Tilakaratne, Hasantha Srilal Hettiaarachchi, Senaratne Ponnamperuma and S.H.A.Mohamed, under the direction of Tisaranee Gunasekara and Dayan Jayatilleka. The work was carried out with the advice and assistance of the Research Subcommittee Centre. The Subcommittee consisted of Bradman Weerakoon (Chairman), Desmond Fernando, P.C., Susil Sirivardhana, Dayan Jayatilleka and Tisaranee Gunasekara. The research project is the first of three completed by the Centre. The other two research projects deal with the 200 Garment Factories Programme and the 1.5 Million Houses Programme. The three comprehensive reports constitute an overall research programme launched by the Chairman of the Premadasa Centre, B.Sirisena Cooray and the Board of Directors. The Janasaviya research report, which we commence serialising, was written by Tisaranee Gunasekara and Dayan Jayatilleka.

be prioritised over the other, at least in the initial phases. This leaves the beleaguered governments of the Third World with very little room to manoeuvre, in their desperate search for a policy matrix that will satisfy to some degree, both external economic actors (such as donor countries/agencies, foreign investors) and their own increasingly disaffected and disillusioned masses (who, in many cases are also their electors).

The explosive issue of poverty cannot be ignored or de-prioritised in the Third World - if we want to achieve some degree of growth and development. In fact, ***the very success of the structural adjustment programmes is dependent on the relatively successful handling of the issue of poverty, because it is the only effective way of ensuring a stable political and social climate which is a sine-qua-non for growth. The challenge therefore is to come up with anti-poverty programmes which can utilise scarce resources for maximum effect,*** addressing at least the most pressing concerns of the poor. The solution is not 'improved targeting' as some would have it, because in real terms this amounts to depriving a large segment of the poor of any sort of assistance. Narrowing the focus and scope of pro-poor programmes is not coterminous with increasing their efficacy. What then is the way out of this policy cul-de-sac ?

ASK, LISTEN

We believe it lies in ***listening*** to and learning from the poor. Poverty alleviation programmes cannot succeed so long as they are fashioned solely by politicians, bureaucrats and foreign and local experts who have no real conception of poverty or the poor[1].

It is the poor who know what their most pressing needs and concerns are - what ***can*** wait and what ***can't wait*** ; what should be prioritised and what should not be prioritised. They have their own evaluation of the various pro-poor programmes implemented in their name - an evaluation based on experience. They also have their own notions as to what the strong or weak points of these programmes were/are. In other words, they have knowledge culled from practice, from real life experience. Therefore they are capable of telling the policy makers **what** should be done and ***how. The problem is that they have never been asked*** ; their opinions have never been sought. The current impasse can be broken only by learning from the poor - and that is precisely what we have striven to do, through this research project on the JSP.

Why research the JSP ? Because the JSP was the most ambitious poverty alleviation programme implemented in Sri Lanka. It was qualitatively different from a classic welfare programme, though it contained a strong welfare component. It was a multi-faceted programme which sought to cause an all round improvement in the conditions of the poor by alleviating their economic, social and psychological marginalisation. Evaluating its performance therefore is of significance not only to Sri Lanka but also to the many other Third World countries faced with the same daunting and urgently imperative task of integrating the poor into the economy and society while implementing some version of the structural adjustment programmes favoured by the donor agencies.

HISTORY OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN SRI LANKA.

In Sri Lanka, policy makers have been concerned about the issue of poverty since before independence. A number of poverty alleviation measures were implemented in the pre-independence period particularly during and in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War[2]. The fact that the colonial rulers introduced or countenanced the implementation of such a vast number of welfare programmes clearly indicate the importance they attributed to keeping poverty under control and the poor from getting too restive. Obviously ***they*** understood the direct correlation between the provision of welfare and political stability. It is noteworthy that even as early as 1934, a majority of the Ceylonese people regarded "free medical assistance" as a right and "free elementary education has come to be regarded as a right of every citizen in Ceylon." (GOC, 1934 : 71).

The post Independence period saw the continuation of this trend ; a number of pro- poor measures (direct or indirect) were introduced by successive governments[3]. It must be remembered that these pre and post independence welfare measures were instrumental in the country's outstanding performance in areas such as literacy rate, infant mortality rate, death rate, maternal mortality rate and life expectancy. It is also important to bear in mind that in Sri Lanka the belief that the Government/State is responsible for the poor, is deeply rooted in the popular psyche and no government can relieve itself of this responsibility without incurring grave political risks.

BACKGROUND : CRISIS OF THE POST '77 MODEL

When the UNP of J R Jayawardena assumed governmental office in 1977 with a massive Parliamentary majority, they inherited an economy which was on the brink of ruin. Seven years of state capitalist 'closed economy' under the SLFP/ United Front regime led by Ms Sirima Bandaranaike had retarded economic growth[4] , increased unemployment[5] and even reduced the school enrolment ratio[6]. The adoption of an open market economic strategy (Sri Lanka was the first Third World multi-party democracy to opt for this path; and it did so before the election of either Margaret Thatcher or Ronald Reagan) by the newly elected UNP regime in 1977, resulted in rapid economic expansion[7], declining unemployment[8] and a boom in exports[9].

However, this significant and necessary growth in the forces of production took place at the expense of equity[10]. By the late '80s it was becoming evident that a large mass of people had no access to the benefits of this rapid growth. By 1987 nearly 30% of the population was living below the poverty line. The percentage of income received by the lowest 10% of the populace ***declined*** from 2.2 in 1981-82 to 0.4 in 1985-86, while the percentage of income received by the highest 10% of the populace increased from 37.3% in 1981-82 to 49.3% in

1990-91[11]. ***Literacy rates too began to decline***[12]. In other words ***the benefits of high growth were not even trickling down*** to a majority of the populace. This was further evidenced by the Gini Coefficient : 0.49 in '78/79, 0.52 in 81/82 and 0.58 in '85/86. (The increase in the Gini Coefficient demonstrates the growing inequality of income distribution). The fact that the growth oriented open market economic strategy (which was in force since 1977) was structurally incapable of fighting poverty and achieving equity, was becoming too glaring to be ignored. If the issue of poverty was to be handled successfully, it would be necessary to adopt a new policy matrix. It is noteworthy that the growth oriented strategy of post-'77 was not only creating the most unequal society in the history of Sri Lanka - by the mid-'80s it was also becoming incapable of ensuring high growth. By 1985-88 the economy was beginning to slow down drastically. The purely growth oriented/trickle down strategy had become inimical not only to equity but also growth and development by the late '80s. The fast growing JVP led insurgency in the South meant that the adoption of a new development strategy was imperative not only to ensure high growth and reduce income disparities but also to save the democratic political system itself.

It was in this context that Ranasinghe Premadasa, the then Prime Minister and the UNP"S Presidential candidate, unveiled his ambitious poverty alleviation programme, Janasaviya. Unlike most of the UNP's top leadership who were too dazzled by the obvious successes of the 'open economy' to discern the subterranean current of growing poverty and inequality, Premadasa understood that 'there was something rotten in the state of Denmark'[13].

In 1988 he appointed a high powered committee chaired by the Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Dr Warnasena Rasaputra, to study the issue of poverty. The report highlighted the gravity of the situation and the need for remedial measures. Premadasa responded swiftly by making poverty alleviation the main plank of his Presidential election platform.

THE JSP

The JSP was based on Premadasa's belief that "development necessarily involves change and therefore a choice of alternatives or a choice between several options" (30.9.80). Janasaviya signified an unequivocal departure from the neo-liberal dogma of trickle down which turned out to be an important aspect of President J R Jayawardena's economic strategy. The JSP was based on the premises that poverty alleviation is ***not*** a ***result*** put a ***pre-condition of sustained high growth*** and genuine development. ***The JSP turned poverty alleviation from a long or medium term goal in to an urgent and immediate task***; one which could neither be postponed nor de-prioritised.

Premadasa had a multi-faceted conception of poverty. Poverty was identified not only as economic deprivation but also as social marginalisation and psychological debilitation. The JSP was therefore designed with the objective of addressing all these diverse symptoms and consequences of poverty. It was meant to be a multi-pronged attack on poverty in all its forms and manifestations. The JSP was a pathbreaker in another sense - it was ***the first Sri Lankan poverty alleviation measure which was both consumption oriented and production oriented simultaneously.*** In other words, the JSP was an imaginative, unorthodox and indeed a radically new attempt at poverty alleviation, at least at the conceptual level.

The first step of the JSP was to identify families whose total monthly income was less than 700/-[14]. A total number of 1,118,331 families were identified throughout the country and were provided with Janasaviya Entitlement Certificates. The JSP was to be implemented in 11 rounds with each round taking 2 years. During this period each family was to be entitled to a total grant of Rs.2,500/- (around US$ 62.50 according to the exchange rate prevailing in 1989) per month - divided into two components - consumption and investment. The consumption allowance was Rs.1,458/= (US$ 36.45 according to 1989 rates) per month, of which the families were encouraged to save Rs.458/- The consumption allowance was granted not in the form of money but in kind. Cooperative Societies were to supply a basket of goods consisting of essential food items and other consumer goods, to the value of Rs.1000/-. The investment allowance Rs.1042/= per month was to be deposited in a bank by the state. At the end of the 2 year period, each family was to have a lump sum of Rs25,000/- in their name in the bank, with which they were supposed to start/upgrade a self employment project. During the 2-year period the JSP families were to be entitled to loans from State banks. They were also expected to spend a certain number of days a month doing voluntary work on various community service projects.

The main objective of the JSP was to integrate the economically and socially marginalised poor into the development process and in to society. Setting up of self employment ventures was regarded as the main instrument to attain this goal - by empowering the poor economically, socially and psychologically. This was also expected to create a mass of small producers/sellers who would eventually amount to a strong, viable and vibrant 'peoples sector' in the economy, a third sector, on par with the State and the private sector.

IMPLEMENTATION

The first round of the JSP commenced in Oct.1989 and covered a total number of 151,704 families in 29 AGA Divisions. The second round commenced in Dec.1990 and covered a total number of 98,800 families in 22 AGA Divisions. The third and fourth rounds commenced in Feb 1992 and March 1993 and covered 103,812 and 100,816 families respectively, in 23 and 25 AGA Divisions. The fifth round was commenced after the assassination of President Premadasa..

The JSP was discontinued after the assumption of office by the People's Alliance, led by Ms Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga.

It is the poor who know what their most pressing needs and concerns are - what *can* wait and what *can't wait*; what should be prioritised and what should not be prioritised. They have their own evaluation of the various pro-poor programmes implemented in their name - an evaluation based on experience. They also have their own notions as to what the strong or weak points of these programmes were/are. In other words, they have knowledge culled from practice, from real life experience. Therefore they are capable of telling the policy makers what should be done and *how*. *The problem is that they have never been asked*; their opinions have never been sought.

From the very beginning, the implementation of the JSP was fraught with difficulties and problems. For example, there were allegations that the selection process was not always fair. It was alleged that families with income less than Rs.700/- were left out while families earning more than this amount were selected. The Co-operatives were accused of off loading low quality and overpriced products on the JSP families. It was also said that despite state directives, banks often tried not to give loans to JSP families using any and all pretexts - from the lack of necessary documents to the inability to furnish guarantors/ collateral.

There can be little doubt that the **lack of finances was the most important difficulty which faced the JSP.**

When Ranasinghe Premadasa assumed the Presidency in January 1989, he inherited an insurrection - battered economy. This forced him to request an extended structural adjustment facility from the IMF and the World Bank. The harsh conditionalities which were part of these facilities imposed a number of extremely stiff constraints on Premadasa's development programmes, particularly the JSP. *It was this factor which caused the widening of the gap between the original conceptualization of the JSP and it's ultimate implementation. The initial promise of granting every family a lump sum of Rs.25,000/- at the end of each JSP round was allowed to drop, after a while.* The government maintained a silence on this issue for some time while the Opposition alleged that the money would never be given to the JSP families. The government was facing severe financial constraints (the restarting of the North east war in June 1990 by the LTTE was a tremendous additional burden on the Treasury) and there was external opposition to this scheme[15]. Finally Premadasa came up with *a compromise formula* : the families would be given a certificate stating that they have a sum of Rs.25,000/= credited to their names in the National Savings Bank. However, they will not be able to withdraw this money. Instead, a monthly interest of Rs.250/- would be paid to each family after the completion of the two years. This certificate could also be used as collateral when requesting a loan from State Banks.

By 1994 a total number of 455,132 families in 99 AGA divisions had been covered by the JSP. A sum of Rs.12,650 Million was spent on providing 'baskets of goods' to these families. According to the estimate of the Janasaviya Commissioners Department the total savings of the families amounted to Rs.2,163.79 Million while the value of the community work done by them was Rs. 455.89 Million. The total amount of loans granted to these families by various State and cooperative community banks exceeded Rs.1,314.02 Million, benefiting 238.889 borrowers (Databook of Progress-Janasaviya Commissioners Department).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Target Group

Since our objective was to get the Janasaviya recipients themselves to evaluate the JSP, the relevant population was the JSP families who came under Rounds I to IV. It was decided to leave out Round V because it was only partially implemented; therefore its inclusion may have caused a bias in the final findings.

The population was a more or less homogenous one in socio-economic terms because only the poorest of the poor (i.e. only those families whose combined stable monthly earnings was less than Rs.700/- US$ 17.5 according to 1989 exchange rates) were entitled to Janasaviya. The heterogeneity of the population was in geographical terms. Therefore the 2000 families were drawn from AGA divisions representing all districts and provinces in the country (except the war torn North and parts of the Eastern Province).

Sample Size

The sample consists of 2000/- of the JSP families (i.e. 0.4% - 0.1%) drawn from the 99 AGA divisions which came under the first four rounds of the JSP. This method can be regarded as a variation of multi-stage cluster sampling. Since the population is economically and socially homogenous, the 0.4% - 0.6% families from each AGA division was chosen at random. The study which lasted 3 ½ months (from 1st November '95 to 15th February ' 96) was carried out by four full time researchers, using the face to face interview method.

PROBLEM AREAS : / CONSTRAINTS

- Certain categories of information are not available for all districts/ AGA divisions. Therefore the sample for these categories is slightly smaller than the general sample. However in all these cases the sample is larger than 1500, which is considered by professional polling organisations in the USA as adequate to draw conclusions about the entire adult population.

- A significant percentage of the

families did not respond to certain questions either because of the sensitive nature of the questions or their inability to comprehend the question.

The research findings are divided into two basic segments :

Section I This will contain demographic and socio-economic data for area under focus with the purpose of enhancing the readers understanding of the actual living conditions of the poor, currently.

Section II Evaluation of the JSP by analysing how and in what ways the JSP has changed the lives of the Janasaviya families.

NOTE:
The term 'population' is used to indicate the population covered by he research i.e. the 455, 132 - JSP families coming under rounds I to IV.

The findings of Section 1 can be considered valid not only for Janasaviya families coming under found I to IV, but for all families who received a stable total income of less than or equal to 700/- a month in 1989 - in other words all families entitled to Janasaviya benefits. This is because the sample of 2000 families can be regarded as being representative of the poor in general, when the area under study is the demographic and socio-economic conditions of the poor. Therefore though the term population will be used to indicate the 455, 132 JSP families coming under rounds I - IV, this can be extended to the poor in general, concerning the findings in Section 1.

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Footnotes

1 "IMF stabilization often means political and social destabilization. Governments face a choice between refusing to cooperate with the IMF and thus losing their international creditworthiness which could have serious social consequences) or using repression to force through IMF measures at the expense of the lower classes." (The IMF and Debt crisis - Peter Korner, Thomas Siebod, Gerro Maas and Rainer Tetzlaff). During the past two decades IMF riots have become a widespread phenomenon in the Third World : Casablanca, Morocco (June 1981), 'Bread Revolt' in Tunisia (Jan.1984), Egypt (Jan.1977), Liberia (April 1979), Sudan (early 1982 and 1985), Peru (1977-84), Ecuador (Oct.'82, March '83 & Jan.'85), Bolivia (March '82), Jamaica (June '85).

2 These included the Food Subsidy Scheme (introduced to alleviate the difficulties experienced during the Second World War), a Milk Feeding Scheme (introduced in early 1944), a mid-day meal for school children (1940-53), Charitable Allowances Scheme introduced in the 1930's, provision of free medical facilities, free education facilities and Village Expansion Schemes (introduced around 1935). All these can broadly be categorised as consumption oriented anti-poverty programmes. The most important production oriented anti-poverty measure implemented during this period was the development of irrigation facilities and settlement schemes in the dry zones (for further details see **Poverty Alleviation in Rural Sri Lanka**. A critical review of the experience since 1930 - Nimal A Fernando, Staff studies. Central Bank of Sri Lanka - Vol. 16 No. 1 & 2).

3 According to Fernando the consumption oriented measures implemented during the period of 1948-1986 include the Rice Subsidy scheme (continuation of the Food Subsidy Scheme), the Food Stamp Scheme (1979), the School Biscuit Programme (introduced in 1968 and expanded in 1973), the Triposha Programme (1973), the School Kola Kenda Programme (1982), Public Assistance Scheme (continued from the pre-independence era) and the continuation of free health and educational systems and the village expansion scheme. The major production oriented measures were settlement schemes, land tenure reforms, small farmer development measures, the guaranteed price scheme for paddy, research on high yielding varieties of paddy, institutional credit to rural sector via state banks, Kandyan peasantry rehabilitation scheme and the Integrated Rural Development Programme.

4 The GDP growth rate (at 1980 prices) was 2.9% during the 1970-77 period compared to 3.4% in 1950-60 period and 4.8% in 1960-70 period.

5 Unemployment was as high as 24% in 1973.

6 The school enrolment ratio for the 5-14 age group declined steadily from 100 in 1970 to 80 in 1976.

7 GDP growth rate was 8.7% in 1978 and 5.5% for the period 1977-85.

8 14.7 % in 1978-79 and 11.7% in 1981-82..

9 Rs.4840 million in 1976 and Rs.13,193 million in 1976.

10 In 1979 the Government replaced the Food Subsidy Scheme with the Food Stamp Scheme. Initially food stamps were issued to all members of households with a monthly income below Rs.300/-. The food stamps could be used to purchase certain basic consumer items. This scheme was renamed the Poor Relief Food Stamp System in 1985 and extended to include all households receiving a monthly income of Rs.700/- or less.

11 The trend was one of the rich and the super rich getting richer, while

the poor and the middle class got poorer. From 1978/79 right up to 1990/91, the trend was one of increasing income inequalities. During the period of '81-82 and '85-86 there was a sharp decline in not only the percentage of income received by the lowest 10% of the population but also the second lowest (from 3.6% to 1.1%), the third lowest (from 4.4% to 2%), the fourth lowest (from 5.2% to 3.6%) , the fifth lowest (6.4% to 4.9%), the sixth lowest (from 7% to 6.8%), seventh lowest (from 8.7% to 81.1) and the ninth lowest (from 14.5% to 6.8%), the seventh lowest (from 8.7% to 8.1%) and the ninth lowest (from 14.5%to 12.2%). Apart from the highest 10% of the populace only the third highest managed to increase its share of the income, albeit very slightly (from 10.7% to 11.1%). The lowest 50% of the populace received only 12% of the income while the top 10% received almost 50% of the income (49.3%). What we see here is a highly skewed income distribution, the only real beneficiaries of which were the top 10% of the populace. Their share of the income increased by a massive 12% during this period while the share of the income received by the rest of the population decreased by 11.9%. (Source - Statistical Pocket Book 1995). By mid-'80s, the growth oriented strategy of the Jayawardena regime was creating a highly unequal society a la South/Latin America. For example, during the late '70s and early '80 the richest 10% of the Brazilian population received 54% of all income while the lowest 50% got only 9.7%. Further evidence of the increasing social bankruptcy of the post '77 economic strategy : 'the per capita daily calorie consumption levels of the three lowest deciles declined between '78/79 and '81/82 ... malnutrition among children increased particularly in rural areas between '75/78 and '80/82" (Dr Warnasena Rasaputram, Governor, Central Bank - 25.11.87). And according to a UNICEF study (Sri Lanka : The Social Impact of Economic Policies during the last Decade - June '88) between '77-84 real wages deteriorated among all categories of workers and consumer prices increased by over 200%.

[12] Literary rates decreased for all age groups (5-18) between '78/79 & '81/82 and so did the school avoidance rate (i.e. those who have never been to school as well as those who been to school but currently not attending).(See Table)

"Reduction in educational expenditure to 2.3% of the GNP by the mid-eighties on account of Structural adjustment policies has impoverished the infrastructural facilities of schools that have no access to non state resources and has been a constraint on the implementation of quality improvement programmes. A proportion of the school age population remains outside the primary and secondary schools largely as a consequence of the hardship caused among poorer groups due to their education needs. The education system therefore appears to assist in reinforcing the effects of poverty." (Prof. Swarna Jayaweera, Economic Review - Feb.'90)

[13] The UNICEF study "Sri Lanka : The Social Impact of Economic Policies during the Last Decade' was presented to a group of high ranking Lankan officials in, however, nothing happened. The findings were not even discussed, let alone attempting to find ways and means of dealing with the problems (and impending problems) highlighted in the Report. Premadasa however was aware of the findings of the study and was deeply concerned about them., according to one of his top officials (Private Conversation with Susil Sirivardana). In fact, poverty became one of the three main themes (together with Shelter and Nationalism) in his speeches from '84 - '85 onwards.

His innovative housing programme was aimed helping the 'have nots' to build/upgrade a house. As the Chairman of the National Health Council he appointed ..... Family Health Workers and introduced a free midday meal programme in 1988, aimed at arresting several negative trends in the field of public health - such as increasing malnourishment among children.

[14] This was because in 1985, Rs.700/- per month was chosen as the cut off point for food stamps.

[15] It was widely known that the donor agencies were unhappy about this aspect and urged the government to scrap it.

TO BE CONTINUED

NEXT : THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Age Group		Literacy Rates % 1981	1985/85
10 - 14	literate	89.8	88.8
	illiterate	10.2	11.2
15 - 19	literate	90.4	89.0
	illiterate	9.6	11

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came to grief because it followed a closed economic policy " while the world was moving towards the free market economy". By 1977, the *only* Third World country following a free market/ neo-liberal strategy was Pinochet's Chile ; even Thatcher was yet to arrive! In the 1970-77 period what was hegemonic globally was not the free market/economic neo-liberal ideology - as Chandrika claims - but precisely the inward looking, closed economic strategy Ms.Bandaranaike's government was adhering to.

LEOPARDS AND HORSES

Among all this, my personal favourite is Anura's anecdote of how he introduced his pet leopard to a Cabinet Meeting. This engaging prank seem to have been a highlight in the life of Anura, and even today brings a reminiscent spark into his eyes and a gleeful smile to his countenance. One day, before the cabinet meeting commenced, Anura's pet leopard was kept under Minister Michael Siriwardane's chair. When Minister Siriwardena and the leopard discovered each other, all hell broke lose. Minister Siriwardena ran out of the room yelling "kotiya" "kotiya". (At this point of his anecdote Anura bursts into laughter on camera). According to daughter Sunethra, her mother was "very practical". The latters only response was "if this man dies, we'll lose Minuwangoda as well'. (Daughter Sunethra praises her mother for being "unemotional" and says that she would "walk into Cabinet meeting looking very stern and that set the pace for Cabinet meetings". One cannot but wonder about the pace and the tone of that Cabinet meeting which was graced by Anura's pet leopard).

In yet another one of her candid remarks Ms.Bandaranaike calls Horagolla *"the Bandaranaike kingdom"* and says *"I hope they will maintain family tradition whoever lives here"*. After SWRD came his widow, followed by their daughter and son. Then there is the younger generation, represented in the main, by the children of Chandrika (and that faceless, nameless man she was married to). According to their fond Grandma, granddaughter Yasodhara wants to be a doctor while grandson Vimukthi is exceptionally intelligent. Vimukthi takes after ... his maternal great grandfather Sir Solomon (i.e. the First Underling of British Colonialism, who epitomised castiesm and elitism) says Ms.Bandaranaike. This supposed similarity to a man whose conduct was as reprehensible as that of pre-revolutionary French aristocrats is not causing the lady any unhappiness. After all, why should it? According to her Sir Solomon was a "Big Man" who entertained the royalty; a "nice man" who was "loved"! It couldn't have very well been by those poor and oppressed-caste people who had to get to a side of the road or even the ditch whenever they came across the "big man" out on his horse. Or by those who were never allowed into "the Bandaranaike Kingdom" except through the back door. Incidentally grandson Vimukthi is fond of riding horses just like great grandfather Sir Solomon, according to grandma Sirima.

Whatever guise the Ratwatte-Bandaranaikes may adopt, the inescapable truth is that they are primarily and essentially a throwback to the pre-capitalist era, a feudal residue which acts as an impediment to the completion of the modernising, bourgeois-democratic revolution in Sri Lanka. The transformation of the SLFP into a modern bourgeois - democratic party can never take place so long as the Ratwatte - Bandaranaikes are at the helm of the party. And the Family will resist to the last SLFPer (and Left hanger-on) any attempt to dislodge it from the leadership. In this context, the documentary 'Sirimavo Bandaranaike' performed a function which cannot but be described as both historically necessary and progressive. By exposing the Family, the Family project and the SLFP, for what they are, the documentary has made a significant contribution to the fulfilment of that extremely important task of the country's democratic revolution - the liberation of Sri Lankan politics (and if possible the SLFP) from the Family's stranglehold. The documentary represents a major step in exposing the 'old feudal coat of arms' on the 'hind quarters' (Marx & Engels : The Communist Manifesto) of the Family and in hastening that day when the voters will 'desert them with loud and irreverent laughter', (Ibid) thereby consigning this anachronism to where they belong: some museum or the rubbish heap of history. .

Footnote:

1. J.R.Jayewardene - A Biography K.M. de Silva and Howard Wriggins.

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this massive retaliation? Does it reflect the Chandrika Administration's strength or weakness?

In taking a tough line on TNL and Ishini Wickremasinghe, the PA has blundered quite badly. Her husband, Mr.Asitha Perera, is a P.A. MP. No emergency regulation can silence him: "The PTA was enacted to fight terrorism, not to silence or censor the free media," he said. When the PTA is used against the free media, what does it imply? Mr.Rauf Hakeem, General Secretary of the SLMC, a coalition partner, is "concerned" and evidently unhappy over "infringement" on "the free media".

In a strongly worded protest, Mr.Robert Menard, Secretary General of **Reporters sans Frontiers** pointed out that the Defence Ministry had NOT issued a prompt denial of the TNL report. "The same news item with fewer details was broadcast (by others) ..... No action has been taken against them..."

The PA may not be sinking, but it certainly is drifting... In the post-Cold War world, we see new forces, new ideas and issues influence national and international process and outcomes. The free media constitute one such force. Women's rights, another.

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VANIK-PIONEERING "FINANCE FOR THE FUTURE".

HOLMES POLLARD & STOTT

Contd from page 12

Boulevard des Capuchines on December 28, 1895. In recreating the energy of motion cascading down the stairs in 1912, Duchamp reflected the rising power of cinematography — the medium that transformed technology into the Tenth Muse, capturing the imagination of the 20th century

But Cubism was more than a reaction to technology. It was basically an intellectual movement which grappled with techniques of harmonising the inner and the outer worlds disintegrating under the impact of modernity. Cubism was everywhere. It even conquered the space of the modern temples of commerce rising to high heaven in glass cubes. The juxtapositioning of the interior and the exterior, of motion and stillness, of time and space in a continuum of geometric patterns, eventually gained acceptance in the public's eye, perhaps because it struck a hidden chord in the dislocated modern mind which was struggling to make sense out of an incomprehensible, fragmented world. T. S. Eliot's dictum that good poetry was felt even before it was understood is applicable to Cubism too. The childlike quality of its techniques puzzled and fascinated the public imagination. Even those who did not appreciate its finer points were drawn to it by the irresistible attraction of its "primitive" conceptualisation. When Picasso, who could draw like Raphael at the age of 14, said that it took a lifetime for him to learn to draw like a child, he was proclaiming the rebirth of his creative self which had shed the past and was born again as a "primitive" child.

From another point of view, it seemed that the disoriented universe was coming apart at the weird seams of Cubistic fragments — fragments which were seen either as dovetails that were holding everything together or breaking it up into irreparable pieces. Either way it captured the imagination of the disinherited modern mind. It was also a mind full of fear. The eerie echoes of Edvard Munch's haunting Scream (1893) of a frightened, androgynous figure, approached by two dark, Kafkesque shadows, reverberated down the 20th century canyon teeming with hungry hordes fleeing wars, ethnic cleansing, droughts, floods and persecution of man by man. The tortured soul in Scream, recoiling from an unknown fear advancing near, was "painted", in the words of Munch, "as actual blood (where) the colour shrieked." (Diary, 1899). It is, perhaps, the only silent picture where the sound of human agony bounces off the frame and strikes the ear with a piercing pain. The Scream coming out of the helpless, ghost of a man (resembling one of those who later walked out of German concentration camps) symbolised the primal fears of those lost in a world of disintegrating certainties with nothing to replace them except the approaching darkness of threatening shadows. In all the art galleries it is rather difficult to find a more chilling portrait of man terrorised by the unknown fear. Even those who had not seen this portrait would have heard the Scream in the Holocaust, in the Gulags, in the Zero Year of Pol Pot, in the ethnic cleansing of Bosnia and Rwanda and in the 30 million that died in the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

The world would never be the same again. The derelict individual was meandering in the grimy, corrupted Dickensian city spreading its tentacles through the highways and byways of menacing urban growth . The arid, concretised landscape had alienated the pastoral poets. The rootless, cosmpolitan urbanite found his lost voice in T. S. Eliot's modern Inferno. Not surprisingly, Dante's lines were plucked from Inferno and pasted, almost word to word, on The Wasteland. :

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought that death had undone so many. (Canto III — 55 - 57)

Eliot's poetry, in a sense, is a reflection of his perception that man cannot bear too much reality, particularly the grim realities of a world accelerating out of its traditional moorings. He saw the hollowness and the decadence of existence — virtually in Buddhistic terms as in The Wasteland — and dared to "Disturb the universe" without retreating like Yeats into The Lake Isle of Inisfree, or into some idealised Byzantian kingdom, or into occult mysticism of the Orient. Eliot elevated the "demotic" idiom, through an incantatory rhythm, to evoke haunting images of the 20th century Inferno. His lines were on the lips of every disillusioned undergraduate wandering among the ruins of the World Wars. Like Picasso he imposed a new world view. Eliot, a conservative in many ways, argued for continuity. Yet he was a radical in changing the tastes of literature. His definitions of culture and art were more inclusive of the past than the future. Yet he led the way into a whole new culture that shaped and refined the sensibilities of the better part of the 20th century.

CRISIS AND REVALUATION

Both T. S. Eliot, an American domiciled in England, and Pablo Picasso, a Spaniard haunting Paris, loosened the Victorian strait-jackets in which the arts were suffocating. The liberating influences of innovators like Eliot and Picasso changed the meanings and the values of traditional art. The difficulty in arrving at a common definition of art is deepened not only by geniuses imprinting their own values and perspectives on art but also by the best of artists who fail to arrive at a consensus on, practically, every aspect of art. What is acceptable to one may not be acceptable to another. While Shelley proclaimed that poets were the greatest law-makers of the world, W. H. Auden, asked flippantly : "What has poetry done to mankind ?" Consider again W. B. Yeats who dropped Wilfred Owen, one of the great war-poets who was killed in the fields of Somme in the last days of World War I, from his anthology of Oxford Book of Modern Verse in 1936, saying that "passive suffering is not a subject for poetry." Despite this rejection, Wilfred Owen's reputation as a poet continued to rise with practically every anthology since 1936 giving him his due place.

The crisis in English literature has now taken a new turn with academics in English Departments questioning the validity of established canons of literature. The Great Tradition defined so precisely by F. R. Leavis, is under fire. Why should only Dickens, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad be canonised by The Great Tradition and not Vikram Seth, Romesh Gunasekera, V. S. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe, Michael Ondaatje, or Patrick

White ? This argument has gathered a force of its own after England ceased to produce its traditional English literary giants. Not long after World War II English literature was hijacked by non-English writers. The first signs of the slow but steady disappearance of Englishmen from the literary scene emerged during World War II when Meary James Thurairajah Tambimuttu of Atchuvely, Jaffna ("the egregious, Mr. Tambimuttu", remarked Sir Stephen Spender) came out with Poetry London in 1939. From 1939 — 1945 Tambimuttu played various roles as General Editor, Associate Editor and Business Manager of Poetry London. His literary reputation rested mainly on publishing "the best verse and the newest verse in English" (Kenneth Rexroth) during all the years of the World War II. Dylan Thomas, George Barker, David Gascoyne are some of the poets he published in the first editions. Even Eliot said : "It is in Poetry London that I can consistently expect to find new poets who matter." In subsequent decades, with the eclipse of the English writers, there was a remarkable decline in talent which led to the mass production of DWEMS — Dead White English Males. So is the homage paid to The Great Tradition another form of cultural imperialism which ignores the contributions made to English literature by creative writers burgeoning in the ex-colonies ? This argument can be extended to cover even the non-English literary traditions (e.g. Russian, French, Hispanic etc) which are equally great.

Besides, values in English Departments are changing purely for political reasons, both within the departments and outside it. The Melbourne University English Department, dominated mainly by the Irish Mafia, tend to place a greater emphasis on Irish writers. Or, to take a local example, Mr. R. Siriwardene, who taught English at the Kelaniya University, has condemned Jane Austen as "boring" whilst praising, in rather hyperbolical terminology, the Barbara Cartlandish fiction of Karunasena Jayalath. What is more, Mr. A. J. Gunawardana, who is a Professor of English at the Kelaniya University, rushed to defend Mr. Siriwardene. He thought it was politically correct not to defend Jane Austen but to attack this writer who critically assessed Jane Austen's moral ambience of her "little commonwealth" located in Mansfield Park. (See Lanka Guardian — February to March, 1994). Rightly or wrongly, the evaluations of Messrs. Siriwardene and Gunawardana must be

A GATHERING OF THE DINOSA'URS

At the civil service lunch
What a sad, unlovely bunch!
On this uninspiring scene
Many a mandarin 'has-been'
Hopes to re-live for an hour
Memories of his days of power.
A brace of obsolete perm.secs.
Peering dimly through their specs
Tell each other wistful stories
Of bygone successes and glories.
A bright young spark of sixty-nine
Decides that he will rise and shine.
Sipping on his watered whisky
He tells a story somewhat risque
Though not enough to raise an eyebrow.
The conversation is not highbrow!
In fact they haven't much to say
To make this a memorable day.
And as for lunch they're in no hurry
(A modest meal of rice and curry).
For it's always much more fun
To get some serious drinking done.
By-'n-by they eat and go away
To meet and eat another day.

* * * * * * * *

But after all is said and done
Why begrudge their day of fun?
For dinosaurs of a bygone time
Nostalgia can't be a crime.
In fact it is their only chance.
Honi soit qui mal y pense!

Vijaya Perera

taken into consideration in view of the changing cultural and political attitudes.

It is, indeed, a valid question to ask whether Barbara Cartland and Karunasena Jayalath — two writers who succeeded in stirring the romantic emotions of a segement of the younger generation — are better than Jane Austen. If, however, these two writers do not rate as high as Jane Austen and Martin Wickremesinghe respectively, is it because there is a snob value in art ? Are the value judgements that selectively define art (as opposed to pop culture) a form of cultural arrogance ? Is culture then the upmarket notion of aesthetic pleasures derived by an elitist minority from classical music, opera, ballet, fine arts, and literature as opposed to the pop pleasures enjoyed uninhibitedly by the masses at the bottom from Elvis Presley, rock muscials like Jesus Christ, Superstar of Andrew Lloyd-Webber, tap dancing, celluloid Rambos, bill board posters, Barbara Cartlands and Karunasena Jayalaths ? If the impact on the emotions and the imagination of high brow and pop streams are very similar, if not identical, then what is the difference between high brow culture and the pop culture ? Is it the intellectual content ? Or is there a greater aesthetic refinement which separates and elevates to a higher plane the minority elitist culture from the mass culture ? If so what determines the values and standards of a higher culture ? Should each age by guided by the pronouncements of a prototype of F. R. Leavis or a Northrop Frye ? Or the literary saints annointed by a Criterion ? I know of a scholar with a reputation as an authority on Shakespeare who claims, quite seriously, that each age should be judged by its attitude towards Shakespeare. Considering the mesmerising power of Shakespeare's genius to recreate every nuance of human feelings in practically every human situation, it is, indeed, an admirable standard. But there is a fatal flaw in this argument which leads to the inevitable question : How would this scholar judge the ages before Shakespeare ? Are not standards then in the arts based on arbitrary tastes and personal preferences ?

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