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Pravada in contemporary Sinhalese usage has a range of meanings which includes theses, concepts and propositions.

RE-POLITICIZING THE ETHNIC QUESTION

While the opposition-led Pada Yathra (Long March) to the land of the warrior-god Kataragama was winding its way through the coastal belt of the once terror-stricken South, the two major Sinhalese political parties, the UNP and the SLFP, continue to play their familiar cat-and mouse-game on the ethnic question. They have decided not to place their specific party proposals before the Parliamentary Select Committee, whose mandate is to find an all party consensus on a possible political solution to the present crisis. Even a conservative newspaper like the *Island* could not refrain from expressing its sense of despair. It noted editorially that, in the absence of ideas from these two major parties, "it would be naive to expect the Select Committee to be successful in achieving its objective"; old attitudes had not changed, observed the *Island* editorial; "When one side makes a proposal, the other side will cry 'foul'."

Crying foul at the tactics of the opponent is part of the electoral game. And unfortunately, the ethnic question is so politicized, or contrived to be politicized, along partisan lines that politicians are still prisoners in a net of their own making. Both the ruling party and the main opposition party have not yet come to the realization that this is one issue on which electoral interests should not prevail over the broader national interest.

It is also rather difficult to understand why any of the Sinhalese political parties should still be so afraid of taking a clear

and public stand on the necessity of a workable political settlement. Obviously, the argument that one party may exploit the other's commitment to peace at the electoral level does not hold water any longer. If the controversy on the Thondaman proposals indicates anything about the current political attitudes of Sri Lankan society, it is that the political chemistry, in both the North and the South, has changed in a positive direction towards peace.

With regard to the South, take the extremely poor response of the Sinhalese masses to the propaganda of the Sinhala extremist war lobby. Despite the hyper-publicity it has received in the ultra-nationalist Sinhalese press, the Sinhalese Defence League of ex-Minister Gamani Jayasooriya has, in a matter of just four months, virtually lost all steam. The public meetings of the Sinhalese Bhumiputras of all hues have not been able to attract more than a handful of diehard faithfuls. The war lobby, which opposes any negotiated settlement, is still receiving larger-than-life publicity in the press; yet, the fact of the matter is that they are a tiny minority of convinced and unreformable extremists whose ability to shape Sinhalese public opinion now is positively insignificant.

The point then is that the Sinhalese people in general cannot now be easily swayed by slogan-mongers of the Sinhalese chauvinistic kind. The silent disdain already demonstrated by the people



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towards the war lobby of Jayasooriya, Rahula, Amarasekerae *et al* is an unmistakable indication of a new political moment, of an enlarged space available for opening up a new peace front. There is absolutely no need for any political party to feel jittery about the possibility of one's adversary exploiting the electorate on communal grounds, because communalist electioneering has lost its frenzied appeal.

To repeat a point we made in the last issue, the present turn of events, brought about by a number of simultaneous developments, is most favourable for taking the initial steps towards restoring peace in the country. Firstly, the very fact that a Parliamentary Select Committee is appointed to find, through consultation, ways to end the military conflict is eminently indicative of the legitimacy which the notion of a political solution has acquired. What needs to be done now is the creation of an all party political consensus on a framework for a solution the details of which could no doubt be

worked out subsequently. Secondly, a tangible peace formula will receive tremendous support and goodwill both internationally and nationally, and most notably among the majority of the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim people in Sri Lanka; the course of sectarian warfare and its inherent futility are now a matter of common perception. Thirdly, an unprecedented opportunity has arisen to undermine seriously the political base of essentialist Tamil nationalism that has been the foundation of the LTTE; in the new context, the moderate streams of Tamil nationalism are being more and more sought after by the Tamil populace. Essentialist Sinhalese nationalism too is now discredited, despite the militant voice of it being raised here and there.

Political openings of this nature are rare to come by. What, nevertheless, remains as a question is: who has the will and who should take the initiative?

It has now become quite clear that the leaderships of both the UNP and the SLFP are for a political solution, despite the fact that the war continues. However, their reluctance to go before the Moonesinghe Committee and table their own proposals also indicates a sense of utter irresponsibility which these two parties appear to share. Without explicit support and inputs from the party in power and the main party in the opposition, can the Moonesinghe committee conceivably say anything that is likely to arouse the wrath of the Sinhalese war lobby which enjoys privileged access to the mainstream press? Perhaps, there is a truth in the statement attributed to Mr. Anura Bandaranaike by *Reuters* recently: the Parliamentary Select Committee was the last chance for peace. If that is the case, no political party worth its salt should abdicate the responsibility of making its own proposals for a political settlement, either before the select committee or elsewhere.

The appalling indifference of the main parties to a negotiated political settlement, their blatant failure to agitate for such a settlement, is totally reprehensible. The Left parties are not immune to blame either; they appear to be rather

reluctant to bring the theme of ethnic peace to the centre of political debate.

Meanwhile, the realities of politics in Sri Lanka are changing in such a way that the terms of the political debate can now be constructively re-defined. A peace perspective, forcefully presented to the masses with a sense of commitment, would invariably set in motion a new political dynamic in which the social yearning for ethnic reconciliation, ethnic peace and national reconstruction would take precedence over the destructive forces of ethnic enmity and distrust. Our 'leading' political parties betray not only an ignorance of their responsibility but also a lack of capacity and will to intervene in the political debate on behalf of the democratic and peace aspirations of all ethnic communities.

The will, of course, is there for another purpose, that is to use ethnic sentiments in a callously opportunistic way. This was amply illustrated recently in the run up to the Pada Yathra. In the initial opposition alliance, the EPRLF, or the Eelam Peoples' Revolutionary Liberation Front, was a component. Notwithstanding the fact that the EPRLF is a party with representation in parliament and has renounced the campaign for a separate Tamil state, the ruling party had no shame to put up Sinhala racist posters against the EPRLF. The propagandist line in these posters of course - these were anonymous sheets - is that the Pada Yathra was an Eelam Yathra, merely because the EPRLF was to take part in it! One particular slogan asked the pointed questions: "Is it a Pada Yathra or an Eelam Yathra?" In another, Sinhalese Buddhists were warned of a plot by the Tigers, implying that the presence of the EPRLF in the Pada Yathra was an LTTE ploy! The UNP propaganda caucus is known to have in it one or two ex-Marxists who are supposed to be committed to ethnic peace. Yet, they have of course forgotten the fact that in the Pada Yathra itself, there was an ultra-Sinhala nationalist contingency called Hela Urumaya. How could it then be branded, even for the sake of crude humour, an Eelam

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Yathra, merely because a Tamil political party was to take part in it? Meanwhile, reports datelined Kataragama tell us that the ethnic question was a notable absentee in the public rally that marked the end of the yathra.

Opportunism is perhaps a legitimate means of mass mobilization in competitive electoral politics. Yet, the ethnic question is too serious a matter to be subjected to the opportunistic strivings of political parties. It needs to be de-politicized in such a way that narrow and partisan considerations are thrown aside. ■

LETTERS

Conflict Resolution: Alternatives

May I congratulate you on the excellent quality of your publication. Given the nature of politics in Sri Lanka today, there has been an urgent need for a quality magazine presenting an alternative perspective. I hope that *Pravada* will continue to appear on a regular basis.

I would also like to express an opinion on the recent call for UN mediation to the conflict between the Sri Lankan government's armed forces (regulars and irregulars) and the LTTE.

It is admirable from a Liberal or Humanist standpoint to call for such mediation and to envision political negotiations that lead to a secession of hostilities, de-militarisation, re-establishment of civil rule, release of all political prisoners on both sides, devolution of powers and resources etc. However, the chauvinism and animosity for the 'other' that is displayed on both sides of the divide, is a real stumbling block to any concrete steps towards the implementation of a policy of UN mediation. This does not mean that those who are calling for peace, whatever their motives, are not voicing a real concern, that of the civil population who are trapped with no foreseeable end to their plight. It is the unfortunate civilians, and not the armed protagonists, who inevitably bear the brunt of the casualties that occur in any civil war or low intensity conflict. From their perspective a secession of hostilities, either with or without UN mediation, will be a welcome relief to the vagaries of war.

However, the existential crisis of the civil population trapped in the North and East is not the only perspective that has to be considered. If there is a negotiated political settlement between the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, it will be an arrangement of convenience between two hegemonic political elites. Both these political elites maintain their hegemony through coercion and the use of violence. In such circumstances, any arrangement agreed upon by these two elites, will not take into serious consideration the aspirations of civil society in general. Instead, the survival and

continuity of each political elite will be of paramount importance in such negotiations, rather than any democratic aspirations of any peoples.

This is the fundamental weakness in the cosociational approach to conflict resolution. Such negotiated 'settlements' rarely address the root causes of the conflict under review at any great length, but would rather tend to gloss over critical issues in order to reach short term political objectives, such as retaining power at any cost.

Given such a scenario, there is very little civil society can expect in the post-conflict resolution phase. Little or nothing would change, either in the North and East or in the rest of the island, as far as civil liberties and human rights are concerned. Sri Lanka under the present regime or a de-facto 'Eelam' under the LTTE, would never have the liberty to conduct its own Nuremberg-style trials for all the human rights abuses inflicted upon its long suffering peoples, be they Tamils, Muslims or Sinhalese. Justice then, in the contemporary geographical entity of Sri Lanka, would become a mere facade. Therefore, a simple negotiated settlement that is limited to the two hegemonic political elites, which are in conflict, is not a solution to the problems at all. Instead, there is a burning need for an alternative and truly democratic approach to the political power and negotiating positions of the two hegemonic elites. Such an alternative approach must take into consideration all possible points of view towards the resolution of the conflict.

Especially, the resident population in the combat-zones has to be able to voice its own wants and needs, free of coercion and the threat of violence. It will be only in the event of such a scenario, possibly facilitated through the help of UN mediation (and not the other way round), that any realistic attempt be made towards the achievement of lasting peace.

P.L. de Silva
Free University

LETTERS

Editor as Fabricator and/or Fabulist

I read with interest the piece in *Pravada* Vol 1, No 3, in which Charles Abeysekera details how an article he had written for the *Sunday Observer* on 'Human Rights and Foreign Aid' was so heavily and selectively edited before publication that the line of argument was substantially distorted. I would like to share with your readers my own comparable experiences which, while mainly with the *Observer*, unfortunately extend also to *The Island*. The difference in my case is that I have been persistently cited as having said things which I have never said, or even hinted at.

This all started in September 1990, when I gave a small address to the annual S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike Commemoration Meeting at the BMICH, on the theme of 'Sri Lankan Politics in a Third World Context' (full transcript available from me on request). After my talk, and in response to a question about the 'Mossad Affair' which should never have been addressed to me as I clearly knew nothing of such matters, I made a stray comment to the effect that there were probably some differences between the current UNP government and the one which preceded it. On the strength of this vague, casual comment, the *Observer* newspapers went to town, mainly in editorials, to the effect that I had enthusiastically endorsed the 'new regime'. I lost count of the number of times this story appeared. In response to my expressions of concern, the editor of the *Observer* interviewed me at length. The interview appeared in the *Sunday Observer* of 28 October 1990 and covered a wide range of topics. Only two questions related to 'new regime' issues. My responses can be summarised as follows: (a) I noted differences on political functioning, drawing attention to the relatively highly centralised and populist style of the current government, (b) I observed, and implicitly approved of, the fact that the current government had made considerable progress in

improving relations with the ethnic minorities. If I in any way 'endorsed' the current government, my 'endorsement' stopped there.

The practice of citing me (a) as if I had indeed endorsed the current government, and (b) as if Sri Lankans should in any way take my views seriously, did not cease. *The Island* of 25 August 1991 found a further use of my name when the political commentator, who writes under the name of 'Mahanama' - and whom I have never met - invented a story, complete with quotation marks, about a meeting I was alleged to have had with Chandrika Kumaranatunga and about what I was alleged to have said about her policies. My protests to the editor of *The Island* went unheeded.

The latest event in the saga to come to my attention is the editorial of the *Observer* of 17 March 1992, where I am twice cited as having identified a "NEW SOCIETY" (*Observer's* emphasis) in Sri Lanka "that was born from the ashes of the anti-democratic and terrorist era". Not only have I never made any such claim, but am a little too conscious of historical precedents and parallels to use such a term. The last time the term 'New Society' was widely promoted in Asia was in the Philippines, after the Marcos 'coup' of 1972. We all know that Marcos' cherished 'New Society' rapidly became 'Old Corruption' and 'Crony Capitalism'.

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TILL DEBT DO US PART: THE ATTACK ON 'SOCIALISM' IN INDIA

Jayadeva Uyangoda closes a good introduction to the issue of 'liberalisation' in South Asia with a question about how "political elites will respond to this inexorable world trend" (*Pravada*, January 1992). In India, the dominant voice of political elites is echoed in *India Today's* pronouncement that "socialists are out, reformists and free marketeers are in" (15 April 1992). B.P. Godrej, a leading industrialist, calls this a "second freedom for Indian industry." The first freedom came in 1947

from British Rulers and Capital and the second comes from the clutches of the bureaucracy (*Indian Express*, 9 March 1992). The "bureaucracy" conjures up images of what Indian industrialists have come to hate: the regime of licenses, the public sector and legal controls. S.K. Birla applauded Finance Minister Manmohan Singh's "clever thinking" which would allow Indian industry to think in terms of "growth". To the critics of Mr. Singh, Mr. Birla puts the following question: "After forty years of socialism and →

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economic bungling, should we carry on the same way?" (*India Today*, 15 April 1992).

Big Business and the Congress Party come together yet again to vilify what they argue is the cause of India's problems: "Socialism". This word, "socialism," now comes to represent the public sector and its necessary inefficiencies, trade unionism, fiscal and monetary independence from Euro-American financial markets, market controls through licensing and the Soviet Union. What is forgotten is a pact which Indian Industrialists made with the Congress party in the 1940s called the Bombay Plan. Its major architect, Mr. J.R.D. Tata (recently honoured with the nation's highest award, the Bharat Ratna) and his co-authors argued for the State as a buffer against the dual threats of Imperialism (foreign capital) and pre-capitalist social relations (communalism, casteism, etc.). The State would be allowed to dissolve, they argued, once the indigenous bourgeoisie felt that it was strong enough to tackle Euro-American finance capital. And, since 1947 Indian industry has flourished under the protective umbrella of the Indian State. From 1950 to 1980, the rate of growth was a moderate and healthy 3.5%. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) General Secretary Govindacharya represents the gains of economic nationalism for his party's major constituency, Big Business, Industry and the middle class: "given a chance even Indians can come up with items as good as the top Multinational Corporations. Look at the cases of Nirma and Thums Up." It is a mark of bad faith then, for Indian industry to attack the very grounds that made its existence possible.

Since about 1984, however, the economy did begin to demonstrate a down turn. Something did go wrong. To blame "socialism" for the problem is to ignore the facts of history. But, Mr. Birla is right to call the problem "Economic bungling," whatever political party performed the feat. In 1986-87, India's Import Bill added up to Rupees 12,452 crore; by 1989-90 it had increased three hundred percent to Rupees 35,412 crore. The external debt increased tenfold. It would be difficult for Mr. Birla to point to these years and argue that state spending on social welfare programmes and the public sector had created this massive debt problem, for these were the years of Mr. Free Market himself, Rajiv Gandhi. The late Mr. Gandhi, during the 1980s, provided incentives for export, yet the twenty top industrial houses ended up as net consumers of foreign exchange. It is estimated that, per year, US \$ 12 billion left the country through the black market. Meanwhile, the domestic bourgeoisie began to emulate the consumption patterns of that other economic Third World nation, the United States now in a recession due to its overconsumption and underproduction economic regime. Mr. Gandhi was cruelly let down by business and the bourgeoisie who enjoyed his profligate spending, but had so little faith in him that they continued to invest heavily in Switzerland and not India. The Gulf War certainly brought the debt issue to crisis, but the Indian deficit had already increased from US \$ 5.6 billion (1984-85) to US \$ 9.4 billion (1988-89). By 1990, India suffered from a serious debt problem; to blame this on "socialism" is to cheaply take advantage of the break-up of the

Soviet Union in order to attack the vibrant ideology of Socialism in India. "Socialism", as a fixed set of policies and institutions, fabricates a convenient bogey-man.

This attack on "socialism" is allowing the Congress and business to shift India's planned economy focus to a free-market focus and to make compromises with Euro-American finance capital: self-reliance and anti-imperialism gave way to Dunkel proposals and Pepsi Cola. Under the guise of readjusting a balance of payments crisis, the ruling coalition of Congress and Business has partially succeeded in changing India's economic ideology. The balance of payments crisis could have been tackled with standby credit from an international lending institution which comes with conditionalities (such as China has negotiated). Somnath Chatterjee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) argues that "temporary difficulties" must be treated as such. There is no need for such a reversal of direction. The public sector is indeed in need of revamping due to corruption and lack of care from the Government. To dismantle the enterprise on these grounds is beyond the demands of a balance of payments crisis.

Swept up in the euphoria over the construction of Euro-America's New World Order, India's ruling coalition could not wait to introduce their own new economic order. Meanwhile (ironically), Labour in Britain and the Democrats in the U.S.A. are calling for more public spending and a reversal of the policies of Thatcher and Reagan/Bush. To construct this New Order, the Finance Minister agreed to a massive loan with structural adjustment conditionalities. What indication is there that the wretched histories of Brazil and Mexico will not be replicated in India? Utsa Patnaice argues that in these countries, conditionalities have created a consumption boom for the elites, exacerbated income inequalities and created a general decline of per capita income ("Devaluation, IMF conditionalities and their implications," *Equality*, July-Sep. 1991). Mr. Manmohan Singh (8 March 1992) agrees that the IMF has hurt Brazil and Mexico. With India, however, the IMF (in his opinion) has "always shown great concern about our sensitivities and they have not, I think, done anything which would be injurious to our national interests."

But what, for Mr. Singh, is "our national interest"? Whose interests? Since the arrival of the Rao government, the cost of Indian labour has been depressed, so real wages have gone down. The devaluation of the rupee has dollarized the prices of commodities, but wages remain at deflated rupee prices. On 4 March, the Communist and other left parties held a rally to protest the 1992-93 Budget. The spectre of unemployment, further social inequalities, over consumption by the elites of soft drinks and Japanese packaged potato chips, over-exploitation of resources and destruction of ecological habitat was raised in discussions.

A social activist, Ms. Medha Pathak, confronted the World Bank's Chief of Mission in New Delhi, Mr. Oktay Yenal, in early March 1992. "We are trying to tell you that genocide of indigenous peoples has taken place in the name of development," she told him referring to the dams which World Bank money will fund and which will displace large populations from ancestral lands and forests. "We don't hold you personally responsible," she contin-

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ued, "but your organisation and its development policies. We will not allow it to happen."

Mr. Yenel did not wish to "meddle in the affairs" of India, since the World Bank was "a guest of your country." Lending vast sums of money with fundamental conditionalities does not count as interference. To meddle is to be like the CIA, to interfere with the *political* affairs. The IMF/WB simply deals in *economics*, a simplistic distinction. We are not meddling, he says, "we are in the development business. We can get better returns on that money we loan without going into these difficult things." The

consequences of the policy are irrelevant. Oppression and exploitation are "difficult things for Policy makers to manage, but easy as rhetorical devices for political leaders. "Please accuse us or warn us for not doing our job as good as we can," Mr. Oktay pleaded, "but don't accuse us of being against the poor and the tribals ... I think we have done quite a bit for the poor."

Indeed, in the name of attacking "socialism", the Indian ruling coalition and their new allies the IMF/WB have done quite a bit for the poor — they have made them poorer.

Vijay Prashad
New Delhi

Statement by the Civil Rights Movement of Sri Lanka

THE INACCESSIBILITY OF EMERGENCY REGULATIONS

The rule that "ignorance of the law is no excuse" when a person is charged with contravening a law, is based on the premise that "everyone is presumed to know the law." This presumption in turn rests on the basis that the law is always **ascertainable**. If the content of emergency regulations is not ascertainable even by lawyers, the question could arise as to whether they are in fact valid law at all, for the rule of law presupposes that there can be no such thing as a secret law known only to a few, which becomes known to others only when they are charged with breaking it.

The inaccessibility of the various emergency regulations and the rules and orders made under them has for long been a matter of concern to the Civil Rights Movement.

Emergency Regulations are made by the President under the Public Security Ordinance, bypassing the normal legislative procedure which is through Parliament. It is essential that members of the public, and lawyers who advise them, be able to know quickly and reliably what emergency regulations have been made and remain in force at any given moment, as well as what rules and orders have been made under them. These regulations, rules and orders are published in the Gazette but relevant issues are always not readily available at the Government Publications Bureau, the staff of which work under great constraints of lack of space and other facilities. Persons who

subscribe to the Gazette receive them by post often after considerable delay, and even then certain issues sometimes are not received.

On 8 August 1989 by Gazette No. 569/19 the Government did publish a list of 19 emergency regulations that should be deemed to continue in force. But this Gazette itself is hard to come by, and CRM has been unable to trace any similar list published during the succeeding two and half years though many emergency regulations have continued to be made.

CRM therefore requests the Government to take the following steps.

- 1 To publish a list of emergency regulations and orders made thereunder during the currency of the present emergency, namely from 26 June 1989, and to have a set of these available for reference at government offices and Courts of law in various parts of the country.
- 2 To ensure in future that the full text of every proclamation, regulation, rule and order relating to the exercise of emergency powers be forthwith published in an English, a Sinhala and a Tamil newspaper.

TIGERISM

by Ram Manikkalingam

Once again the possibility of a new round of talks appears to be receding, following the opposition expressed to Minister Thondaman's proposals. Sri Lankans, especially Tamils, who are hoping for a permanent respite from the war are, understandably, blaming Sinhala nationalism. Yet, Sinhala nationalism, despite its stridency, is in a weaker position now, than on previous occasions when the Sri Lankan government has conducted negotiations with the Tigers and other Tamil parties. This suggests that if a nascent peace process is blocked, it is as much due to the distrust caused by the behaviour of the Tigers in the past as it is due to the successful mobilisation of the Sinhala nationalists. Acknowledging the independent role of the Tigers in sustaining the war in Sri Lanka should not be construed as an apologia for Sinhala nationalism. Instead, examining why the Tigers have consistently prevented the achievement of a political settlement will lead to an understanding of how the Tigers have effectively subsumed Tamil interests to their own. And it is only by separating Tamil interests from Tiger interests, which both the Sinhala and Tamil chauvinists seek to conflate, can it become clear how the behaviour of the Tigers is not detrimental to peace, but also inimical to the interests of the Tamil people.

Tamil Ultra-Nationalism

The politics of nationalism, which began as a reaction to Sinhala nationalism, has now acquired its own internal dynamic. This independent dy-

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namic was impelled by the growing dominance of a vicious and extreme form of Tamil nationalism espoused by the Tigers. The emergence of this nationalism can be traced to the dilemmas of a nationalist movement. A nationalist movement uses a dual approach to oppose a dominant power. It invokes the violation of democratic norms, such as individual liberties and freedoms, in the status-quo, while it seeks to mobilise a community on the basis of ties of ethnic solidarity. While these ties are often strong enough to maintain unity in the face of struggle, they can weaken as differences of opinion evolve into rival politics programmes and strategies. At this point a tension arises between internal democracy and the need for unity in the struggle for collective emancipation. This tension may be resolved in different ways, ranging from democratic dialogue and non-violent confrontation to violent coercion.

In the case of Tamil nationalism, the Tigers set out to eliminate all opposing parties, organisations and individuals. Unity was asserted at the expense of internal democracy. The Tigers, thus, represent an extreme aberration of the emphasis on ethno-national solidarity at the expense of democracy. A counter example to this is the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). The PLO derives its legitimacy from the Palestine National Council (PNC), which is the Palestinian parliament in exile. Despite Fatah dominance of the movement and numerous incidents of interfactional fighting, major decisions are still made through debate and discussion in the council. The Tiger emphasis on a monolithic unity is a consequence of their attempt to invent a new Tamil identity, where the basis of political programmes and alliances are of an ethnically essen-

tialist character. In this framework, political identity is directly derived from one's ethnic identity. Class, caste, gender, individual aspirations and broader social issues are relegated to the periphery.

The Tigers invented a new Tamil identity by, simultaneously, drawing upon and denying history. This identity claims to be tied to history on the basis of language, region and tradition. But the Tigers are anti-historical, in that they are committed to denying that the Tamil identity also includes a history of co-existence with other communities. The denial of pluralism among communities is only a step away from the denial of pluralism within a community. Thus, one implication of this newly invented Tamil identity (through ethnic essentialism) is that the Tigers have to deny and eliminate real or potential differences of opinions and interests among Tamils. The monolithic unity violently asserted by the Tigers is both the cause of and the consequence of Tamil essentialism, and ultimately culminated in a new political ideology - Tigerism.

The development of this Tamil essentialist ideology is evident in the political attitude and approach of the Tigers towards the Muslims of the Northeast. With the growth of this virulent brand of Tamil nationalism, the Muslims of the North and East became steadily alienated from the Tamil community. The Tamil nationalist project at first unwittingly, and then wittingly excluded Muslims, as it set about the invention of a separate identity. This separate identity, which was initially a defensive strategy with regard to Sinhala discrimination, took on an offensive form with regard to the Muslims. The increasing domination of Tamil nationalism by the Tigers, ulti-

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mately led to the massacres of hundreds of Muslims and the expulsion of thousands from the North and East. The exclusionary logic of a "traditional Tamil homeland," a direct outgrowth of ethnic essentialism, had been taken to a fanatical extreme. The new Tamil identity, invented by the Tigers, denied not just political space, but even physical space to all non-Tamils in the Northeast.

The Tigers have also successfully manipulated the Tamil struggle in order to dominate Tamil politics. This has been achieved by a two-pronged strategy. The first, simple and brutal, has been to murder all political rivals of the Tamil movement. In addition, the Tigers have sought to intimidate and threaten all cultural, social and human rights activists in the Northeast, apprehensive of their possible emergence as an alternative source of leadership for the beleaguered Tamil community.

The second strategy has been based on their cunning use of the peace process. The Tigers, when pushed to a corner, have resorted to ceasefires and negotiations in order to rearm and consolidate themselves. In doing so, however, they have had to pay a price in terms of their loss of control over the Tamil people. A return to peace and normalcy in the North and East meant that the gun no longer ruled, and that people could express themselves more freely. This automatically resulted in an erosion of the Tiger dominance of the Tamil community. Thus, it was precisely at those moments when the possibilities for peace seemed to be emerging that the Tigers broke off negotiations in order to continue the war and regain the "support" of the Tamil people.

This "support" is obtained neither from genuine sympathy for the Tiger programme nor through direct Tiger coercion, but from a shrewd manipulation by the Tigers of the political options available to the Tamil people. By shutting the Tamil people off from the possibility of a negotiated settlement with peace and regional autonomy, the Tigers compel

them to choose between Tiger rule or Sri Lankan military rule. When faced with such a stark choice, the Tamil people invariably "support" the Tigers, because they fear the inevitable carnage that would result from war. This fear is then trumpeted as "support" for the Tigers, both by the Tigers, themselves, and by their ideological twins in the South - the Sinhala chauvinists.

Thus, the ideology and practice of the Tigers is antagonistic to a negotiated settlement. A negotiated settlement requires, among other factors, a willingness to trade power for peace, the building of alliances across ethnic boundaries and the recognition that ethnic solidarity is not the sole basis of political mobilisation. But ethnic essentialism is just that; it cannot make space for anything other than itself. Peace, democracy and human rights vitiate the commitment of ethnicity, because they require loosening the presumption of an ethnic essence. Such an admission would automatically weaken the Tiger stranglehold on Tamil politics. Hence, it is no surprise that the Tigers have eliminated all other political alternatives available to the Tamil people in order to pursue their chimera of a separate Tamil Eelam.

War or Peace?

The Sri Lankan government must bear moral and political responsibility for aggravating the conflict by refusing to grant an adequate devolutionary package that could satisfy all non-chauvinist Tamil opinion. The excuse that the Sri Lankan government has hitherto put forward - that peace is blocked by the intransigence and fickleness of the Tigers - is not a sufficient reason to shun genuine negotiations with other Tamil political parties. The failure of the UNP government to grant and institutionalise regional autonomy, such as federalism, has only complemented Tiger efforts to shut off the political options available to the Tamil people. Instead of keeping the door to a politically negotiated settlement open, the government has only stood by and watched, if not actively helped,

the Tigers slam it shut in the face of the yearning for peace of the Tamil people.

A comprehensive federal package of devolution put forward by the government (irrespective of whether the Tigers cease fire or negotiate) will serve a dual purpose. First, by indicating to the Tamil people that their voice is being heard at the centre, it will practically demonstrate the availability of a political opportunity for them to exit from under Tiger domination. This will exert pressure on the Tigers to negotiate, and then to enter democratic politics. However, if the Tigers flout Tamil opinion, despite the actual granting of a federal package of devolution and continue the war, the Sri Lankan government will then have the moral and political legitimacy, internationally and among the Tamils, to defeat the Tigers.

Meanwhile, Tamils must come to terms with two important developments in Sri Lankan politics. The first is that the nature of Sinhala nationalism has been transformed since the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord. The Sinhala opposition expressed at the time of the Peace Accord was the culmination of Sinhala nationalist opposition to Tamil rights and Indian intervention. This opposition was spearheaded by the JVP, which represented the ultra-nationalist segment of Sinhala politics. The JVP was uncompromising with regard to the Tamil question, and based its anti-state campaign on the combined platform of populist social change and anti-Tamil jingoism. The Indo-Lanka Accord was undoubtedly signed under duress. Yet the granting of limited self-rule to the Tamil areas resulted in a strategic compromise on the part of the Sri Lankan state with Tamil aspirations. Key aspects of this compromise also included the recognition of Sri Lanka as a multi-ethnic society and Tamil as an official language. This is now a baseline position from which the Sri Lankan state cannot deviate. Even extreme Sinhala political parties have accepted the basic notion that any political settlement will involve the granting of regional autonomy



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to the North and East. The issue now is not whether there should be regional autonomy for the Tamils, but how much. Thus, the peace accord, followed by the defeat of the JVP, created added political space for the Sri Lankan state to reach a negotiated settlement to the ethnic conflict, and has transformed the terrain of Sinhala politics.

Undoubtedly, Sinhala nationalism is still a major impediment to the achievement of a political settlement, but it is different from the Sinhala ultra-nationalism of the early 1980s. And more importantly, although Sinhala nationalism may continue to be a part of the state ideology, it is no longer the dominant part. Thus, the trite claims made by Tamil nationalists about Sinhala nationalism, as

monolithic, permanent and unchanging, do not ring true in the face of the drastic developments of the past few years.

The second important change is the gradual political isolation of the Tamils from the international community, corresponding directly with the increasing dominance of the Tigers over Tamil nationalism. As long as Tamil interests are seen as Tiger interests, the struggle of the Tamil people to redress their grievances will only receive tepid support, at best, both in the South and internationally. The Tigers have posed as the saviour-leaders of the Tamils by shrewdly linking genuine Tamil interests to their narrow political project. Unless the aspirations of the Tamil people are politically and ideologically delinked from those of the Tigers, the Tamil struggle will not

progress.

Finally, the instinctively defensive reaction of some Tamils towards any criticism of the Tigers and Tamil ultra-nationalism was understandable in the past, though based on morally shaky grounds. Today, such a defence of the Tigers is morally and politically reprehensible, given the crimes committed by the Tigers against the Muslims and Sinhalese of the Northeast, and the Tiger denial of political freedom to the Tamil people. Moreover, it is precisely through a critical analysis of Tamil nationalism, in general, and the Tigers, in particular, that a new political programme for the Tamil people can be articulated - a new programme that may enable Tamils to attain peace with dignity. ■

REFLECTIONS ON FEAR

by Gameela Samarasinghe

Fear!

Fear and the child are born together

Fear is our faithful companion, our twin

Brother, our shadow

It will never let go its hold

Until, remorselessly, it sees us into our grave

Frederick Leboyer
Loving Hands, Collins,
1977

Leboyer's words raise fundamental questions. Fear indeed manifests itself throughout life. Fear is perhaps one of the most complex emotions because there are such wide individual variations in fearfulness.

There are chronic fears and acute fears, normal fears and pathological fears, fears which are considered natural or ordinary

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like the fear of death, fears that are innate, like the fear of heights, and fears that are learnt, like the fear of snakes.

Fear can also be a stimulating emotion for some, when for example, it engages a person to correct his/her behaviour, but more often, fear paralyses. The type and degree of fear and the context within which fear appears influence the manner in which one reacts to fearful situations.

In the recent past, Sri Lankans have been exposed to a particular type of fear, a fear

provoked by sudden, novel and intense stimuli. This fear did exist earlier but did not manifest itself as frequently. Though it possesses some features of the fears listed above, it also has particular characteristics.

The fear is caused by exposure to traumatic stimulations. The traumatic stimulations we recall are recent: the 1983 July riots, the JVP insurrection, the North-East conflict. The images that confront us are of the killing, the burn-

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ing, the looting, the massacres, the ambushes, the abductions and finally, and irrevocably, the disappearances.

The fear was intense; acute soon after the traumatic experience and subsequently decreased because it had been provoked by tangible stimuli or situations.

If the Conditioning Theory of Fear - developed in the 1960's over a period of a few years by Wolpe, Eysenck and Rachman - can be proved, we could expect a decrease in the magnitude of our fears and a progressive change in our reactions and behaviour.

The Conditioning Theory of Fear supports that repeated exposure to fear-evoking situations may:

at times sensitize us;

increase the fear when we anticipate trouble.

at times habituate us;

decrease the fear when the situation often re-occurs or prolongs itself. The reaction will diminish in magnitude.

The young child learns very fast that if a balloon is about to burst, soon it will make a terrifying sound.

After having heard a balloon burst a number of times, the child learns to fear the sound less. The sound is no longer unfamiliar.

Similarly, we have been conditioned to expect and fear violent reactions from human beings during political tension.

We, too, grew 'accustomed' or 'resigned' to many fearful situations. It became 'natural' for us to be ordered to stay indoors by the JVP, even stocked goods in 'anticipation' of the curfews. Today, the fighting in the North and East is no longer 'extraordinary'; not having safe

and easy access to a large part of the country is no longer 'unusual'.

Not such a long time ago, the killing of thirteen soldiers generated very violent behaviour. Again, at present, a political alternative to the ethnic war feared by some, the nationalist spirit widely criticised and feared by others, are fundamental issues which provoke extreme and long repressed reactions.

We have learnt to live and continue to live with this 'acquired' fear. We must, however, not be indifferent to it. We must not let it become an 'ordinary' fear, like the fear of death; a fear that, we are taught to believe, does not need to be justified. ■

GENDER AGENDA

STATE CO-OPTION OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

by Khema de Rosairo

Women, we have been told, are half the sky. But politicians, in Sri Lanka as elsewhere, have been always acutely conscious that they are half the electorate. This consciousness becomes sharper when, as in Sri Lanka today, women's labour accounts for the largest share of our foreign exchange - earnings from tea, garment exports and work as housemaids abroad. It is therefore not surprising that the state in Sri Lanka has recently "discovered" the woman question and has not only created a National Women's Day (to coincide with the day the Buddhist missionary Sanghamitta came to Sri Lanka), but has also co-opted March 8th - Inter-

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national Women's Day (originated in 1910 by the German Communist, Clara Zetkin).

Up to the late 1970's, March 8th was celebrated with meetings, demonstrations, exhibitions and cultural activities involving women of all communities. The main organisers were women party activists and trade unionists and women Socialists from a range of autonomous feminist groups. The association of the women's movement with the Left necessarily brought within its ambit certain anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist slogans on democratic and trade union rights, economic policies and foreign relations. During this period, International Women's Day was celebrated without either interference from the state or feminist-bashing in the media.

VIOLENCE ON WOMEN'S DAY

A major shift was seen after the change to an executive presidency in 1978, when attacks on dissident movements including trade unions and student organisations became a regular manifestation of the state's obsession with political stability. Women's Day became an occasion for state violence against women, as well as an opportunity for demonising feminists in the media.

In 1982, women demonstrating on March 8th in Colombo were tear-gassed and March 8th 1983 became a cause celebre; women of the SLFP, CP and LSSP had organised a picket outside the US Embassy against US army bases in the Indian Ocean. Returning afterwards, the

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women also protested outside Temple Trees against the rise in the cost of milk foods. The Kollupitiya police removed their banners and arrested a photographer, and when the women went to the police station to inquire, they were attacked. Former LSSP member of Parliament Vivienne Goonewardena recalls: "A policeman threw me like a sack of potatoes across the room and kicked me twice ... and stood with one foot on top of my stomach." (*Sunday Times*, 6 January 1991).

Violence continued in subsequent years; on March 8th 1984 and 1985, women were tear-gassed, baton-charged and arrested. During these years, the media (English and Sinhala) also had a field day attacking feminists for being influenced by the West. An editorial - "Women's Liberation" - in the *Island* in 1984, typical of this anti-feminist inclination, said :

"The feminine consciousness as it obtains today is another article of the contemporary ideological baggage borrowed from the West... to which our alienated intellectuals genuflect."

The sexist bias in the media continued through the 1980's - totally ignoring increasing international consciousness on women's issues during the "Decade of Women" (1975-85). After International Women's Day in 1989, the *Island* published a letter complaining that a programme on TV on March 8th, portrayed the woman as "innocent and humble" and the man as a brute. This occasioned an editorial on 'Female Chauvinism' which said, "over the years, since women libbers began bra burning in the West, Lanka libbers have got into the habit of bashing males. They do so with gusto on this so-called International Women's Day. This sort of female sexism got to cease (sic)." (*Island* 13 March 1989)

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But after the presidential election of 1989, and the further centralisation of state power backed up with

populist ideology, the tendency has been to incorporate rather than to confront. In the case of the women's movement, the state has moved to appropriate feminist discourse, its symbols, language, slogans and, maybe in the future, even its persons.

In 1990, a significant change took place. The state began to officially celebrate March 8th with public meetings, campaigns and supplements in the newspapers. The media obliged and made a sharp about turn; the *Island* even had an editorial on the event, entitled "The World at Their Command," hailing the achievements of women political leaders and claiming that "the much flogged male chauvinist pig is as dead as a dodo ... Women are on the march and all major obstacles have been cleared. It is now only a matter of time for the goal of equality."

By 1991 the state's theme on Women's Day was "the strengthening of women through women's organisations," which of course meant the Seva Vanitha Movement. This movement, based on the Indonesian Dharma Vanitha, organizes the wives of politicians and officials in government departments in support of state policies, and to promote charitable projects.

This year, there have been further noticeable changes in attitudes: the *Island* (March 9th) in an editorial entitled "Liberating Women" even went as far as to express the hope that "the strident voices of those women's libbers keep going throughout the year on issues that will improve the status of women," and praised "the progress women are making rapidly."

But the *Divaina*, the Sinhalese daily published by the owners of the *Island*, proved that, whatever is said in editorials in the group's English newspapers, the Sinhala public gets the mixture as before. In an editorial "Women's Liberation!" the paper (March 7th) claimed that feminist slogans and drum beats are not only borrowed from the West but are also propagated with foreign money with the aim of promoting sexual license and therefore cultural decline.

What is new this year however is a Women's Charter, a document including and expanding on the economic, social and political rights of women as expressed in the UN Charter against discrimination of women. The ideological "new look", as displayed by newspaper articles in English, is also revealing. For example, "Women in the Context of Social Change" by Indrani Iriyagolle, has radical thoughts on patriarchy, women's subordination and a tribute to the feminist consciousness-raising groups of the 1970's. She calls for changes in "male domination, female repression, sexual assault, rape, violence, forced motherhood, and pornography" calling for state intervention to deal with issues ranging from "unequal pay to reproductive rights." Though she is the President of the Sinhala *Kanthaabhivurdhi Sanvidhanaya*, (The Movement for the Advancement of Sinhalese Women) there was no reference to Sinhaleanness.

But the Prime Minister gave a traditional message in the same Women's Day supplement "Our history is adorned," he wrote, "by women such as Soma Devi, who bravely faced the Chola invaders ... Vihara Maha Devi who came forward to sacrifice her life to save the country from disaster, and Sanghamitta Therini who brought about a significant change in our country"; a message more appropriate for Sanghamitta Day.

What does all this signify? Does it mean the recognition of the economic and social rights of women and a greater respect for their right to speak out on International Women's Day? (In which case, why was the march of the members of the Ceylon Mercantile Union on March 8th 1991 and 1992 banned?) Or does it signal the state's appropriation and manipulation of women for a specific political agenda based on radical rhetoric and populist slogans? Is the state on a path to mobilizing different segments of society in a corporatist fashion? One can only speculate as events unfold. ■

Of Rural Heroines and Urbanized *femme fatales*

by Malathi de Alwis

Along with the Sri Lankan state's 'celebration' of International Women's Day in Matara, we were also treated to quite a creditable teledrama courtesy of the Women's Bureau to mark this special day. This hour-long single episode teledrama was titled - *Yaso Hamine* - and documented the heroic struggles of a rural woman of the same name. The sudden death of Yaso Hamine's mason husband leaves her destitute with one son and three daughters. In order to support her family she becomes a wage labourer. The fact that she is doing *pirimi wada* (men's work) horrifies her fellow villagers while she becomes the butt of her brother-in-law's (husband's brother) drunken rantings on how she has ruined their *pavule nambuwe* (family honour). The suggestion is that she should get herself another man to support her and she has to constantly fend off the propositions of the boutique mudalali who wants to keep her as his mistress.

Yaso Hamine's daily struggles are ably shared by her elder daughter who though a keen student has now left school in order to attend to the housework and their vegetable garden. Juxtaposed against this heroic mother and daughter is the counter example of Yaso Hamine's sister-in-law and niece. While Yaso Hamine is so busy that she does not even have time to stop by the wayside boutique for a quick gossip, her sister-in-law's entire day seems to be taken up with snooping on Yaso Hamine's family and gossiping about them. Her husband is a drunkard and a rogue and when he is arrested by the police it is Yaso Hamine

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who comes along to help her and her child.

Yaso Hamine's elder daughter who is hardworking and 'good' is always decorously clothed in simple dresses or with a cloth tied over her dress. Though she is in love with the wealthy school teacher's son and it is her dream to marry him one day she is resigned to the fact that the wretched life she is leading is her *laba upankama* (fate) and that it may never change. Her suitor too is a hardworking, upstanding man who does not want to partake of his parents' wealth and takes a teaching post in a *dura palatha* (remote area) so that he can earn his own money. Despite the stigma attached to Yaso Hamine's form of employment and her lower class position, he defies his parents and the rest of the village by marrying Yaso Hamine's daughter.

Yaso Hamine's niece on the other hand, is the epitome of the village lass gone 'bad'. She is 'cheeky' and argues with her parents and has been 'spoilt' by her mother who has done all the work for her. She spends much of her time combing her hair, putting on make up and gadding about in 'western' clothing and high heels. Finally she elopes with a friend from the village whose form of employment and attire is negatively coded in opposition to Yaso Hamine's daughter's suitor. The niece's suitor who has started a small 'business' in Kandy rides a motor bike and wears trousers, a leather jacket and sunglasses while the daughter's suitor who is a school teacher, wears a sarong and shirt and drives a tractor!

Though it all ends happily for Yaso Hamine's daughter this is not the case for her mother which made the teledrama much more credible for me. The characterization and the struggles of Yaso

Hamine reminded me of Swarna Mallawarachchi's portrayal in *Sagara Jalaya* and more recently Malini Fonseka's role in *Sthree*. While it is quite standard now to portray the single mother/widowed rural woman in heroic terms, it is the urban, 'westernized' woman that continues to be positioned as her degenerate 'other'.

This is especially highlighted in an advertisement for male cologne that is being telecast in Sri Lanka. The opening shot is that of a dark alleyway where an Elton John look-alike is spotlighted strumming a guitar. In the shadows a few yards away stands another man nonchalantly smoking a cigarette. Suddenly, a woman in a black dress and high heels 'swings' through the alley her black mane of hair swirling around her face. The man in the shadows makes a grab at her, she glares at him, tosses her head dismissively and continues on her way. Next shot, the 'spurned' man sprays cologne on himself. The concluding shot is a replay of the first one but with a major development. The guitar plays on and through the shadows once again appears the 'desirable object', the woman. The man grabs at her again and SURPRISE she turns towards him and her yielding to him is signified by her painted finger nails curling around his shoulders and her high heeled feet arching upwards, on tiptoe.

The message here was clear, direct, and horrifying. If you wear the correct cologne even sexual assault can be alluring to women. The cologne being advertised here was thus 'appropriately' titled *Avenger*. A recent news blurb about this product continued this metaphor of macho aggression with the header '*Avenger hits the market*' (emphasis mine, *Sunday Times* 11/24/91).

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Avenger which is marketed by International Cosmetics (Private) Ltd, a subsidiary of The Maharajah Organisation was launched at 'My Kind of Place' on November 16th 1991. The positioning of 'My Kind of Place' which is widely accepted to be a hang out of Colombo's upper class teenagers, in this ad campaign, reflects the marketer's focus on the urban youth of Sri Lanka as this product's primary consumers. In this context, the urban setting of the advertisement seems appropriate. Yet, I would also suggest that the assault and subsequent conquest of an urban, 'westernized' young woman makes the 'event' doubly alluring and exciting as it feeds into all the negative stereotyping within Sinhala Buddhist nationalist discourses (from Anagarika Dharmapala to the Jathika Chintanayists), which pose the sexually loose, urbanized/'westernized', Christian (often Burgher) woman as the 'other' of the chaste, domesticated, Sinhala Buddhist woman¹.

This is a theme that gets played out once again in *Sisila Gini Ganie* recently screened at the Regal. Sanath Gunatilake's script centres around the passionate love affair between a married, lawyer turned politician from a reputable Kandyan Sinhala family (played by Sanath Gunatilake) and a 'half breed' Sinhalese/Burgher Christian woman (played by Sabitha Perera) who until she falls in love with the politician, ridicules marriage and its incumbent imprisoning familial ties and merrily flits from one relationship to another.

While we are informed that the politician's name is Harris Makalande from the inception at the film, his mistress Annette is rarely mentioned by name.² Rather she is primarily defined in terms of her (sexual) practices and attire. When Harris first sees her on the dance floor and inquires who she is, his friend smirkingly replies "Oh, she will grab onto anyone who will dance with her...everybody around here knows her..." As the plot thickens, she becomes known as the 'woman in the white dress'³.

This sexually loose half breed's 'other' is Harris' wife Kumari, who like him is from a well established Kandyan Sinhala family. While Kumari is always impeccably groomed in rich Kandyan sarees or a decorous housecoat, Harris mistress Annette is always in dresses and in one scene, in just a sheet. Kumari is also the perfect wife and mother while Annette becomes too demanding of Harris' time and though she now longs to get married to him and have his babies she fails miserably in this task. While Harris sets his mistress up in a beautiful house and garden in which she happily plays the devoted housewife — decorating, cooking, gardening and serving tea, she lacks the final binding link to Harris which is the bearing of a child. We are treated to a rather extended shot of Annette lovingly hanging a painting of a mother and child in her sitting room and various scenes of her vain attempts to befriend Harris' son.

In all fairness to Sanath Gunatilake, the characterization of the half breed *femme fatale* is done quite sympathetically. Harris' mistress has much more spirit and personality than his wife. While Kumari rather despairingly accepts the fact that Harris has a mistress, Annette refuses to be sequestered in Harris' beautiful house for days on end without seeing him in order that his political campaign can continue smoothly. When a furious Harris hits her for 'abducting' his son she hits back and fells him to the ground.

However, once in police custody she becomes the victim of various forms of abuse. Her private diary is 'edited' and used to the advantage of the Police Inspector who now derives great pleasure in taunting Annette from his position of power. The media in turn uses her as the pivot of a massive sex scandal. One of the most insightful moments of the film for me was the conversation between the journalist and his newspaper editor, towards the beginning of the film. The journalist is having a hard time collecting 'facts' about the disappearance of Harris' son until he begins to realise that a woman is involved in this case. When

he reports this suspicion to his editor, the immediate reaction is "excellent, this will add to the mystery...let us headline the story 'beautiful woman..." at which point the journalist interjects that he has no details of the woman and is not sure whether she is beautiful or not. This leads the editor to launch into a very perceptive exposition on how people's curiosity is better captured by a reference to a beautiful woman irrespective of the fact of how she actually looks.

Though some critics of *Sisila Gini Ganie* have described it as a nihilistic film which ends with the question 'What is the truth?' I felt that there was a calculated attempt to establish the innocence of Harris mistress⁴ and thus a certain 'truth', for the viewer, despite the fact that the accused may not receive a similar judgement from the law or the media in the context of the film. However, I was disappointed that the only way the viewer's sympathy for this spirited and passionate woman was enlisted was by reducing her to that of a victim of patriarchy. From a carefree woman who cogently criticizes the patriarchal institutions of marriage and the family, she is reduced almost overnight to being a frustrated housewife who longs for the gilded cage that she had evaded for so long. When confronted by the highly fanciful deductions of the Police Inspector she can only weep and call upon God as her witness.

Finally, I would like to emphasise the central point here that however sophisticatedly (*Sisila Gini Ganie*) or crudely (Avenger ad) the urban 'westernized' woman maybe portrayed, she remains the site of loose morality that invites sexual transgressions. That is, it is easier to say the 'westernized' woman "asked for it" than the rural woman. It is high time we start producing teledramas and films that attempt to shatter this good woman/bad woman dichotomy.

Notes

1 See especially Anagarika Dharmapala, *Return to Righteousness*, ed. Ananda Guruge, Govt. Press, Colombo, 1965; Richard Gombrich & Gananath Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Trans-*

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formed: *Religious Change in Sri Lanka*, Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, 1988 and Kumari Jayawardene, "Some Aspects of Religious and Cultural Identity and the Construction of Sinhala Buddhist Womanhood", paper presented at the International Conference on *Women: The State, Fundamentalism and Cultural Identity in South Asia*. March 13-17, 1992.

2 Sabitha herself draws our attention to this when after their first 'encounter' she tells Harris "What sort of woman must you take me for, you don't even know my name...."

3 Sabitha appears mainly in white dresses in this film which is a disruptive signifier in her characterization of a 'loose' woman. I am grateful to Pradeep Jeganathan for suggesting that this colour coding may be an attempt to signify her innocence in the context of the crime that is committed in the film rather than her moral/sexual innocence or purity.

4 All the flashbacks the viewer was privy to were the mistress version of the events, the conclusive one being the episode of the childrens picnic near World's End in the fast encroaching mist. ■

More on the Gordimer Critique

by S. Sumathy

Neloufer de Mel's comments on Nadine Gordimer in *Pravada* Vol 1, No 1 along with her easy dismissal of Reggie Siriwardena's response to them in *Pravada* Vol 1 No 2 throw up quite a number of thought provoking questions for the modern reader, constantly assailed by the contradictions and biases involved in interpretations. Nadine Gordimer, the South African writer of novels and short stories was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1991 - a prize fraught with contradictions. Dr. de Mel points this out quite forcefully exposing some of the ideological underpinnings of that rather questionable institution.¹ This is timely for it serves in some measure to remove the scales of reverence for prizes, awards etc., from one's eyes. But, while agreeing, by and large, with the criticism she levels at the awarding body, I wish to disagree categorically with the qualifications she makes about the value of Gordimer's works. To lend support to her views she invokes Dennis Brutus - a South African poet - which I think is unfair by Gordimer as well as Brutus. Her discriminatory selection of Brutus's comments chooses to disregard the point he makes about the challenge she (Gordimer) poses at the

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apartheid system in operation. To quote Brutus more fully;

But Gordimer too is making her protest against the system ... The principle characters (in the Late Bourgeois World) both black and white, at the end of the novel are on the edge of not merely an emotional but also a sexual experience. I think the whole novel is by implication a condemnation of white society in South Africa today.²

Saying this Brutus proceeds to make the qualification that occurs in the extract de Mel lifts from his writing on protest literature. His article makes more sense and possesses an internal balance in the context of the comparative analysis he makes about different writers and the political and/or subjective stances that transpire in their works. One should also note, importantly, that it's the *Late Bourgeois World* he refers to and not *July's People*. The qualifications he makes are based on subtle distinctions he draws between different writers and also on different criteria. De Mel, on the other hand, takes rather broadbased categories operative in a certain kind of intellectual discourse and attempts to schematize their (writers') works according to those patterns. I think this is what Reggie Siriwardena in his own inimitably simple style implies when he says:

However, the more important questions I wish to raise concern the way in which Dr. de Mel uses her political categories to evaluate Gordimer's work as fiction.

The crucial sentence in Dr. de Mel's critique that invalidates her approach is where she complains that Gordimer's exposure of the political ambivalence of the privileged white liberal 'falls short of what is needed as a *political programme* in South Africa'.

One can write a political programme as a theoretical construct, but for the creative writer there is no substitute for experience.³

In her reply to his (Siriwardena's) position she says thus:

Mr. Siriwardena's essentialist emphasis on individual 'experience' implies that only whites can write about whites, only blacks can represent blacks. Does this mean that only peasants can write about and speak for themselves, and that men cannot write about women and vice versa?⁴

This is a misreading bordering on carelessness. The narrative in *July's People* quite committedly progresses from 'white liberal' awareness to a consciousness



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that renders everything, even their own selves and bodies, strange and unknown. At the beginning of the novel Bam Smales' cocksureness does not desert him, even in adversity.

No, I mean it. If we can get hold of a bag of cement we can make a foundation. It'll be much better to drink than river water.⁵

The self same Bam Smales is abject and unrecognizable at the end of the novel in the status of powerlessness.

He heaved himself up. Some surge of adrenalin summoned, sending him, striding out, ... But he walked immediately into their gaze again. He lay down on his back, on the bed, the way he habitually did; and at once suddenly rolled over onto his face, as the father had never done once before his sons.⁶

July's People are July's black people - from the Smales's position.⁷ But can that be considered identical with the perspective the novel adopts which is open ended in many ways? From the beginning an irony of tone governs/qualifies the privileged position of the Smales's and the sneaking feeling keeps jabbing at one's consciousness that it's the Smales's who will ultimately turn out to be July's People. Yes, it is true, that even when the crucial term 'July's white people' oc-

curs, the novel's focus does not change. Its shift from objective conditions to the subjective musings of the Smales's, particularly Maureen's, keep the central thoughts of the novel sharply focused on them. But this unchanging focus does not in any way valorise the values or privileges of the white family. Also, the novel is unequivocal about the subversive transformation of the relationships between black and white and also white and white. Furthermore, to its credit, the novel is alive to the contradictions involved in the dynamics of black and black and white militancy. De Mel's branding of the questions and explorations of the text as 'failure of perspective' is irresponsible and self righteous. Reggie Siriwardena's reply to that charge is perhaps a trifle too general to make his point valid in the context:

If Gordimer had tried to write fictionally of black experience, she would have come a cropper as surely Neloufer de Mel would, in spite of her intellectual position, if she tried to produce a novel of peasant life in Sri Lanka.

The framework that de Mel adopts to approach a text seems to tend towards categorisation and slot-isolation through the employment of a model based on binary oppositions such as the Caliban-Crusoe yardstick. Even Reggie Siriwardena, despite his obvious attempt

to steer clear of all isms and generalisations does not escape rigid categorisation at de Mel's hands. Models are useful and perhaps inevitable too as long as they remain viable. But once they have said their piece and had their day, they should be discarded. At such a time as now when struggles are increasingly converging (despite problems) and South African politics itself is increasingly exposing manifold ideological and other biases, for writers to carp on a commitment to a political programme already carved out for one and also deeply engaged in its own complexities is unrealistic.

Notes:

- 1 Neloufer de Mel: Nadine Gordimer: Notes on the White Writer's Burden, *Pravada* Vol 1. No 1.
- 2 Dennis Brutus: Protest against Apartheid - Protest and Conflict in African Literature.
- 3 Reggie Siriwardena - *Pravada* Vol 1. No. 2.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 Gordimer, Nadine: *July's People*, Penguin Books, 1982, p.25.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 145.
- 7 Michael Neill: Twisting the Present - Language and Identity in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*, *Journal of Commonwealth Studies*, Vol XXV. No 1, 1990. In this article the author expresses a similar view.

Pravada would like to apologise to readers for the delay in bringing out the March/April double issue which was due, in most part, to the elongated holidays of April and the abbreviated supply of electricity.

THE *ECONOMIC* COST OF WAR

PADDY - IMPUTED LOSS IN PRODUCTION IN THE NORTH AND EAST: MAHA SEASON (1984/85 -1989/90) (in metric tons)

Districts	Potential maximum Production	Imputed Production	Imputed loss in Production
Northern	1,395,753	996,351	399,402
Eastern	2,699,666	2,150,684	548,982
Total (Northern & Eastern)	4,095,419	3,147,036	948,384

Source: Staff Estimates.

PADDY- IMPUTED LOSS IN PRODUCTION IN THE NORTH AND EAST: YALA SEASON (1985-1990) (in metric tons)

Districts	Potential maximum Production	Imputed Production	Imputed loss in Production
Northern	132,448	111,196	21,252
Eastern	1,952,222	1,598,184	354,038
Total (Northern & Eastern)	2,084,670	1,709,380	375,290

Source: Staff Estimates.

EXPENDITURES ON REFUGEES (JANUARY 1 TO JULY 31, 1991) (in Rs. million)

Actual Allocation to GAs:	1,358
Allocated to the Ministry of Reconstruction Rehabilitation & Social welfare	672
Total	2,030

Source: Office of the Commissioner General of Essential
Services

EVOLUTION OF DEFENSE EXPENDITURES

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992 Budget
Army	—	—	—	—	2563	2463	4301	4429	7024
Navy	—	—	—	—	971	749	1070	1259	1574
Air Force	—	—	—	—	1357	905	1536	1390	1868
Police	—	—	—	—	1605	1690	2405	3294	4543
Ministry (non-civil) Administration	—	—	—	—	1694	2638	4644	1022	951
Supplementary 3/ Percent of GDP Total 2/	—	—	—	—	3.7	3.4	4.3	5000 4.3	— 3.6
Percent of Total Current Expenditure Total 2/	—	—	—	—	17.8	14.8	19.4	20.2	18.9
Defense wages as a percent of total Government wages and salaries	6.0	6.6	9.4	13.0	10.3	15.4	15.3	19.6	—

1 Functional classification of defense expenditures (Navy, Army and Air Force only)

2 Economic classification of defense expenditures (Navy, Army, Air Force, Police and Non-civil Administration of the Defense Ministry)

3 Allocation into different items of 1991 supplementary is not yet known.

Source: Central Bank and the Treasury

NUMBER OF FAMILIES DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY THE CIVIL CONFLICT AS OF SEPTEMBER 1, 1991

Location and Status of Affliction	No. of Families
In Welfare Centers	58,718
Outside Welfare Centers (with friends and relatives)	94,224
Economically Affected	276,766
All Locations	429,708

Source: Office of the Commissioner General of Essential Services

Students, Soldiers, the Princess and the Tiger:

Contradictions in the Iconography of the Nation.

Pradeep Jeganathan

On the 4th of February I watched TV with my family. Watching the spectacle of docile bodies dancing in a theater of power, I realized, as usual, that my reaction was different from that of others in the room. As such I was reminded that the collective representations of the 'imagined community' of a nation need not be consensual: Even though I watched what was dished out, I didn't cheer on cue. Rather I formulated a critical response in my mind. This response turns on a simple premise, culled from Marx: modern nations are inherently contradictory¹. It is the play of these contradictions that the State attempts to manage; it is in these breaks, oppositions and cracks that radical social struggles emerge and operate.

As viewers of live TV broadcasts, we are positioned in an 'imagined community'. The construct, pioneered in recent years by Benedict Anderson is now widely used in the literature on nationalism². Anderson argues, that any community which is not small enough to be 'a face to face' one, must be 'imagined' into existence. So much is obvious. But what may not be is simultaneity of the 'imaginings' of the inhabitants of a modern nation. Anderson captures this 'simultaneous imaginings' by highlighting the emergence of readers of mass

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circulation newspapers in modern nations, who 'observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barber shop or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in every day life...creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations'³. Live TV coverage goes one better. Reading a newspaper is a practice of simultaneous consumption, but it is always yesterday's news that makes the paper, and in Sri Lanka we never believe what we read. In the context of live TV, both the viewing community and the event are simultaneous; furthermore it is positioned as 'real' and 'true': it takes more work to argue that live images are 'fictions taken for the real.' This then is our positioning as viewers, as we sit down to watch TV on Independence day.

The spectacle we see, must be understood as an ideological product, which, Althusser argues, is not only a system of ideas; it is also what we do: a set of practices⁴. The apparatus of state, such as the schools and army become sites of ideological practices, in other words, how they train people becomes important. In Althusser's categories, ideological practices 'interpellate subjects'.

What are the ideological practices foregrounded in this spectacle on Independence day? The practices of the docile, disciplined body are central. The radical French historian, Michel Foucault argues, that our age has 'discovered the body as an object and target of power'⁵.

The disciplining of the body, hitherto restricted to the monasteries and armies, is extended to schools, prisons and asylums. Discipline in its attention to the 'micro-practices' of the body - for example, how a student dresses, walks, stands - produces 'subjected and practiced bodies,' 'docile' bodies.

The opening sequence of the live TV broadcast of the Independence day show depends upon, and is produced by such disciplined docile bodies. Students stand to attention; collectively their bodies make up a map of the nation, and icons of its religions. So what?, you may ask: isn't discipline a good thing? But note the center of the map where the navy band fits in so easily. Note that the disciplined bodies of students and soldiers are continuous here, the soldiers and students could replace each other, stand in for each other, and the iconography of the nation would not change. This, I suggest, is dangerous. A disciplined docile body is not a dissenting body, nor a creative body. The training of school children for mass 'drill displays' - to use the common revealing term - has blurred the subject position of student and soldier. Simply put, these students will become soldiers and fight and die in the war, in a chronology of activity which many may not think to question. Or put another way, the interpellation of soldier has been pre-figured in the schools, the subject position of the student has been militarized. As such, the ideological iconography that makes claims of ethnic harmony, is a grim reminder of

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Students, Soldiers, the Princess...

war: a contradiction in the iconography of the nation has emerged upon the screen.

In the next sequence, another contradiction in our iconography emerges, along the axis of gender. The image here is of an anchor being released and raised, the voice over tells us that the 'anchor' is produced by naval bodies, the sea which 'parts, waits and waves' is made up of dancers from a troupe known as the peace ballet. There is here a vague, superficial reference to peace, yet the ideological thrust links masculinity to military authority. It is the anchor—the icon of the navy—that is the agent here, it moves, disturbs and marks. The sea is passive, waiting to be acted upon, parting as the anchor drops, waving as it raises. What is more, the sea is also a sign of nature. As Sherry Ortner has argued in a classic paper⁶ dominant patriarchal ideologies, often posit nature as feminized, while masculinizing culture. In terms of dominant ideological norms, I argue then, a passive image, linked with nature is also a feminized image, which here sharply reemphasizes the active masculine icon of military authority⁷. It is important to note that my critique here turns on the gendering of the icons themselves, not on the biological sex of the bodies that make them up. That is, in the images of anchor and the sea, the presence of women soldiers, and male dancers do not affect my argument: gender, as an ideological construct is not reducible to biology. It is, in this context, that we observe the defiance of death by military motor cyclists, a sign of violent masculinity, produced by the practices of female soldiers. Once again, I suggest, a contradic-

tion in the iconography of the nation has emerged; the collective representation of the nation has begun to crack.

Finally, I want to move to what was presented as the special feature of the celebrations, the enactment of the coming of Vijaya. Throughout the evening this performance was billed as a sign of the nation's ancient history and heritage. This was not, however, the first time 'history' appeared in the spectacle. Earlier, a message of peace was read by four couples taken to represent the four ethnic groupings of the nation. Here the message explicitly stated: "we are bound together by a common history...." So I waited in anticipation for a re-enactment of this common history. Now, the coming of Vijaya is not a tale with any historicity; it is a particular version of the past produced in different socio-historical contexts: the shifting nature of myth, has been demonstrated by scholars⁸. So as I waited for this common 'history,' I wasn't looking for a lesson in ancient history. Rather, what I anticipated was a recreation of the myth that would speak to the unity of the nation. In particular I recalled that since Vijaya's second wife was a *Pandian* princess, perhaps this marriage would be foregrounded, and the Tamils, albeit under the sign of the submissive wife, would appear in the history of the nation. Yet, it was not to be: what followed was the exact opposite, for the princess had disappeared, only to be replaced by a Tiger. In this version of the myth, Vijaya is cursed by Kuveneri; the curse is physically manifested in the form of a Tiger⁹. And the Tiger, a well known sign in dominant ideological practices, is kept at bay by a sacred thread (*pirith nule*). And so fi-

nally a massive contradiction in the iconography of the nation emerged: two histories were invoked, one speaking of commonalities, unity and peace, the other of curses and disruption. ■

Notes

- 1 I am influenced here by Marx's "On the Jewish Question" in Tucker, Robert ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*. New York: Norton, [1843] 1978 and *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1844] 1970.
2. *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, 1983.
3. Anderson, 1983: 39-40
- 4.. 'Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus' in Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, London: New Left Books, 1971
5. *Discipline and Punish*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979: 136, snf 135-169, passim.
6. 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture' In *Women, Culture and Society*, Michelle Rosaldo and Louis Lamphere (eds.), Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1974:67-87
7. For an insightful, ethnographically grounded argument which demonstrates the links between masculinity and military practices see Malathi de Alwis "The Manliness of War and the Abstraction of Death," in *Pravada* 1992: 1(2)
8. R.A.L.H. Gunawardena, "People of the Lion: Sinhala Consciousness in History and Historiography" in *Ethnicity and Social Change*, Colombo: SSA, 1984
9. Even though it was depicted as a spotted animal and referred to as a leopard, its symbolic significance as a Tiger could not be missed.

Vazurgd Framadar returned from his pilgrimage of penance to Mammon with the Sacred Bowl of sustenance filled with Manna.

'Yea,' he cried, 'my bowl runneth over.'

And Vayu chortled with glee. 'Look you,' he said unto the mortals, 'Vazurgd Framadar begged for only eight hundred shekels' worth of Manna but lo! Mammon has granted him eight hundred and five and a score shekels worth!' And he declared that this was a sacred signal of approval of Akhenaton by the Archangels Imf and Worldb.

And it looked as if Akhenaton was as secure in his position as before the conspiracy of the curse of the Persian Apple.

And the Mortalization of the Heavenly Spirits proceeded forthwith. And this Mortalization took place within the portals of the Hall of the Sacred Portions, within which mortals take part in the daily ritual of sharing of the pie. And it came to pass in those days that the denizens of Indraprasta did take part in a ritual tussle; and a son of a star did emerge victorious in this holy game. And he gave unto the celestial treasury a holy offering of more than one thousand thousand thousand silver Darics. And with the ritual sacrifice was the Mortalization of the Heavenly Spirits completed.

Meanwhile, Mardouk had sent the Host of Turya to harry the Immortal Host of Arya, and Shorab fell upon the outposts of the Immortal Host and slew them. And so, the Immortal Host was restive.

Thus, it came to pass that Rustam drew up the bravest of the Immortal Host and equipped them with the chariots given to Akhenaton by the Jade Emperor. And he led them out against Shorab, who was encamped in the wilderness. And he declared that his battle would be the third conquest of the wilderness.

And Rustam swept down like a lion in the wilderness, his cohorts gleaming in their olive green cloaks. His chariots shone like the stars in the night, the tread of his elephants shook the ground.

And for three days, did Rustam and his

mighty host advance through the wilderness.

And Vayu announced a great victory. 'Verily,' he cried, 'the Immortal Host has conquered the wilderness for the Third Time.'

But Rustam was vexed, for nowhere could he find Shorab. And so, at the end of three days, he led his host back from the wilderness.

'We cannot defeat Mardouk by force of arms alone,' he said, 'there must be a solution to the problem of Mardouk by means of polity.'

Even if Rustam had failed to quell Shorab, he had nevertheless, certainly quelled his foes within the Imperial Host, who had been whispering among themselves that the chariots of the Jade Emperor

PILGRIMS & PIRATES

by Corpus Delicti

were unusable, unlike the elephants which had been brought from Moravia.

Vazurgd Framadar, on the other hand, was not so fortunate; for, on the advice of the Archangel Imf, he declared that the two celestial treasure ships would no longer float. For it had come to pass that six thousand thousand thousand silver Darics had been removed from the treasure ships, thereby exposing them to the elements. And so, Vazurgd Framadar wished to mortalize them, to keep them afloat.

This caused a howl of outrage to break forth from the mariners of the Celestial Treasure ships. 'Lo,' they cried, 'Vazurgd Framadar is visiting unto us, not the sins of our forefathers, but the very sins of the Pantheon itself.'

And Lo! Vazurgd Framadar recanted.

'I said not,' said he, 'that the celestial

Treasure ships would sink, but merely that they would not float.' However, this dexterous verbiage did not reflect the anger of the mariners, nor the fury of the Immortals.

And, Pruthuvi set her seal upon a spell, a curse to be recited to fix a hex upon Vazurgd Framadar.

'Yea,' cried the heralds of Pruthuvi, 'Vazurgd Framadar is indeed a heavenly donkey, to pull the celestial treasure ships Through the mire.'

And, the Immortal of the King's Party declared that he would set out on a pilgrimage to Alexandria, to protest against the mortalization of the Treasure ships of heaven, as well as the perversion of Dharma. And Kubera rallied to his call and declared he would march a hundred

fourscore and sixteen Yojanas side by side with the Immortal of the King's Party, to protest against the doings of Akhenaton and of Tammuz and to defend Arya against Turya.

And the Holy Family declared itself with the Immortal of the King's Party in his pilgrimage. And, Thor came forth from Valhalla to plight his troth: 'Verily,' he cried, 'these are the Ides of March.'

However, the others of the Aesir did not agree. Loki and Tyr withdrew to Valhalla and looked on with displeasure. for they were deep in their incantations to lay a curse upon the Unafraid Quality Ruler Immortal, the chief of the Holy Family Once Removed. And their incantations caused pandemonium in the Western Paradise, and much wailing and gnashing of teeth.

And, it came to pass that the Magus of the Celestial Counting House, the Lucre Magus, thought to build a tower like unto nothing seen in *Aryanam Kshathra*. And this tower was to be like unto twice the height of the bamboo tower on the main treasure ship.

Akhenaton was so vexed by this. Indeed, he was so vexed with the Lucre Magus and wished to lower him a peg or



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two. Accordingly, he commanded Vayu to announce that the Lucre Magus was in disfavour with the all-highest. And, his bidding was done.

For Akhenaton had no more loyal and faithful servant than Vayu. Indeed, Vayu took the monotheistic heresy to extremes. 'There is no god, but Akhenaton,' he declared, 'and Vayu is his Prophet.'

Now, Akhenaton was unhappy at the state of things, for, the augurs had told him to beware of the Ides of March. Accordingly, he shaved off all the hair betwixt his chin and forehead and dedicated the shavings to Alexandria. For,

Alexandria was the terminus of the pilgrimage of the Immortal of the King's Party.

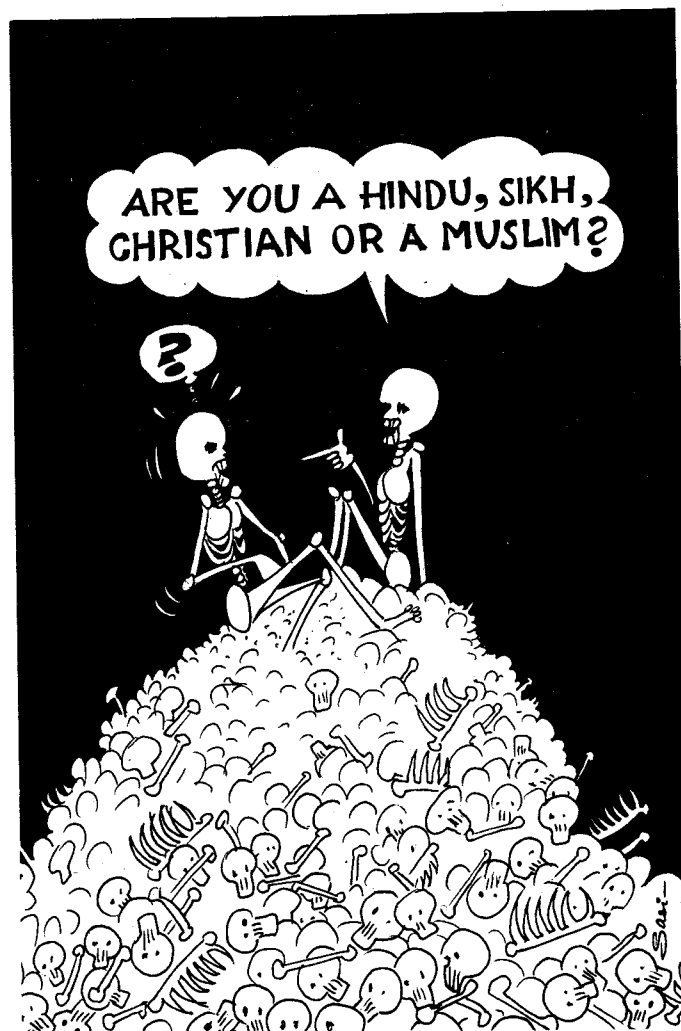
For it came to pass on the day following the ides that the Immortal of the King's Party arrived at the Victorious Gardens of Indraprasta, to find that Lo! and behold! the gates were closed. But, not disheartened, the immortal of the King's Party, accompanied by Soorya, Chandra, Kubera and Thor, together with a multitude of mortals and immortals, set out for Alexandria.

And, Vayu declared that this was a plot to aid Mardouk. And, he caused the celestial artist to draw likenesses of the

Immortal of the King's Party juxtaposed with public houses.

And, Akhenaton declared that he, too, would set out on a pilgrimage to Alexandria.

However, at this time, the Immortals and the denizens of Indraprasta were thinking more in terms of their annual pilgrimage to the climes of mount *Kailasa*. 'The climes are worth the climb,' they said, 'even if the gardens of Kailasa are devoted to the flowers of the Victorious Banner.'



We have the following report from Sunila Abeysekera, human rights activist, who represented some Sri Lankan human rights groups at the 48th session of the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION : GENEVA, FEBRUARY 1992

Sunila Abeysekera

The Commission on Human Rights is the principal human rights body of the United Nations. From 1992, it has consisted of 53 members, elected for 3 year periods by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN. The HRC meets once a year for a six week session in February/March. The Sessions held in 1992 was the 48th since its inception.

The chief subsidiary body of the UNHRC is the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, which meets every year in August; the Sub-Commission consists of 26 'experts' who are elected by the Commission to serve in an **individual** capacity. The Sub-Commission undertakes studies, drafts proposals for new instruments and submits recommendations to the Commission for further action in the field of human rights.

The UN Human Rights Commission has also set up a range of other mechanisms, by which it can undertake investigations into allegations of human rights abuses, such as the Working Groups and Special Rapporteurs. Over 139 Non-governmental organisations are accredited to the UN HR Commission and submit oral and written statements on different aspects of the Commission's work during the sessions.

One of the most sensitive items, on the agenda of the UN HR Commission, each year is, Item 12, which deals with the question of the violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in any part of the world; under this agenda item there is also a special procedure - 1503 - which allows for the confidential discussion of

situations, in which a consistent pattern of gross violations of human rights exists among the member countries. Under this procedure, the Commission can - and has - appointed a number of Rapporteurs to investigate abuses in individual countries over which there is a special concern.

Once it has been substantively established that consistent violations of human rights abuses are taking place in any country, the HR Commission can consider passing a Resolution on this particular country; the Resolution has to be tabled by a country that is a member of the Commission and the matter then comes up for public debate; countries that are members of the Commission and other countries that are member states of ECOSOC but are not members of the HR Commission may participate in the debate. If there is a major difference of opinion, a vote may decide the outcome of the Resolution.

In recent years, the mechanism of a Chairman's statement has been resorted to, as a means of expressing the consensus opinion of the Commission with regard to the situation in a particular country without going as far as passing a Resolution against the country concerned. This means that there is no public debate or discussion regarding the issue; behind-the-scene negotiations between the country which is being subject to censure and members of the Commission, result in a statement being read out by the Chairman of the session.

Over the years, there has been growing criticism of the role played by the UN HR Commission in determining which

countries should be censured for committing violations of human rights, and which should not. Some observers have pointed out that geo-political considerations, at times, seem to outweigh human rights needs, and say that countries singled out for censure are most often those with few allies in the world arena.

In 1992, the oral intervention of the International Commission of Jurists, under Agenda Item 12, focused strongly on this problem: 'Each year, political considerations seem to play as great a role in the Commission's decision-making as the human suffering, which action by the international community might help to alleviate. Last year, the ICJ drew attention to the Commission's repeated failure to denounce widespread abuses in Iraq, until Iraq's invasion of Kuwait made it expedient to do so. The trend towards political expedience continues, however. Last year, a compromise was reached on Iran which would terminate the mandate of the Special Representative, 'if there is further progress achieved' regarding the human rights situation. But, has Iran's human rights performance progressed or merely its political standing? Does placing Cuba, but not Guatemala under the Agenda Item reflect on the dignity with which citizens of these countries live, or on their government's relative positions in the 'new world order'? Why are African countries, other than South Africa exempt from public criticism? What is the difference between Indonesia's brutal occupation of East Timor and Iraq's destruction of Kuwait - other than Kuwaiti oil? →

THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS...

The expanded HR Commission, which sat for the first time in February this year, consists of 53 members; the so-called developed nations are represented by 11 countries - Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Portugal, the U.K. and the U.S.A. - while Asian, African and Latin American countries make up the rest. Thus, the balance of power within the Commission is now heavily weighted in favour of the so-called developing world.

This leads to a very ironic situation in terms of political manoeuvring and lobbying work within the UN HR Commission. Since most states in the developing world are authoritarian ones, which are involved in the suppression of the democratic rights and fundamental freedoms of their citizens, they form a unified bloc in resisting attempts by other 'Western' countries to criticise their regimes or impose sanctions on them; they freely use the terms 'neo-colonialism' or 'imperialist domination' to denounce their critics. Those from the developing countries who oppose their states' practices and who fight for human rights within those countries are, on the other hand, forced to forge alliances with their erstwhile colonial 'masters' in order to get the situation in their countries discussed.

Another debate, which is taking place within the UN HR Commission, particularly within the human rights NGO community, is that of how to censure militant or armed movements that are seen to violate fundamental freedoms. While, for many years, the practice had been to lay the blame for human rights

violations firmly at the door of the state/s concerned, in the past two years, one has increasingly noted that there is criticism also of the actions and activities of armed and militant groups. For example, in the Sri Lankan case, in the past two years both national and international NGOs have denounced human rights abuses committed by the LTTE and the JVP, at the same time as they condemn the state as being primarily responsible for the situation.

The Latin American NGOs strongly feel that one should take care not to give equal weight to the violations committed by the state vis-a-vis violations committed by armed groups; the argument is that the state is primarily responsible for human rights abuses and for creating and perpetuating a situation within a country which permits such human rights violations by whom-so-ever committed.

The Philippine groups also argued that since only states are signatories to the International Covenants regarding Human Rights, only states can be held responsible for violations of the articles of these Covenants; they state that other armed groups can be held responsible for violations of **humanitarian law**.

There is general concern, also expressed about the political implications of such censure, in that they implicitly acknowledge the existence and power of such groups, including their control over certain parts of a state's territories.

At the beginning of the 48th session of the UN HR Commission in February 1992, there was a strong possibility that there would be a Resolution on Sri Lanka. The fact that, the UN Working Group, on

Disappearances presented its report on its visit to Sri Lanka on October 1991 and that, in the report there was an acknowledgement that the situation in Sri Lanka was the 'worst ever' in the records of the Working Group was a key factor. There were also reports from Amnesty International, Asia Watch and the ICJ that pointed to the grave deterioration of the human rights situation in the island. However, on the other side, were factors such as the openness of the Sri Lankan government to visits by the Working Group as well as by non-governmental teams from Amnesty International, Asia Watch and a Canadian Fact Finding Mission which had visited Sri Lanka in January 1992. There were also various positive reports from the Sri Lankan government regarding a number of mechanisms such as the Human Rights Task Force and the Commission of Inquiry into the Involuntary Removal of Persons which had been set up in the past year. The Sri Lankan government delegation was therefore able to show, with some degree of success, that it had every intention of working towards improving the human rights situation in the country.

In this context, a consensus was reached, following which a Chairman's statement on the situation in Sri Lanka was read out at the sessions of 27th February. It is, now, the responsibility of the Sri Lankan government to honour the commitments made to the international community at the 48th session of the UN HR Commission, and of NGOs concerned about human rights in Sri Lanka to maintain a continuous vigil with regard to the situation in Sri Lanka.

Chairman's Statement on the Human Rights Situation in Sri Lanka

I have been requested to make the following statement on behalf of the Commission.

The Commission acknowledges the measures taken by the government of Sri Lanka to address the human rights situation throughout the country, particularly the establishment of institutions and other mechanisms to monitor and inquire into reports of disappearances and other human rights violations, and that these measures have led to an improved human rights situation for the civilian population.

The Commission welcomes the full and valuable co-operation accorded by the government of Sri Lanka to the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.

The Commission is, however, seriously concerned over the human rights situation in Sri Lanka indicated, *inter alia*, in the report of the Working Group (E/

CN.4/1992/18/Add.1), particularly the large number of disappearances recorded by the Working Group, and concerned that, whilst there has been an overall decline, incidents of disappearances continue to be reported.

The Commission calls upon the government of Sri Lanka to further intensify its efforts to ensure the full protection of human rights and further calls upon all parties to respect fully the universally accepted rules of humanitarian law.

The Commission urges the government of Sri Lanka to continue to pursue a negotiated political solution with all parties, based on principles of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, leading to a durable peace in the north and east of the country.

The Commission urges the government of Sri Lanka to implement the recommendations of the Working Group, and

expresses its satisfaction at the willingness of the government of Sri Lanka to take the necessary steps to implement the recommendations of the Working Group.

The Commission welcomes the decision of the government of Sri Lanka to invite the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances to again visit Sri Lanka for the purpose, *inter alia*, of evaluating the progress of the implementation of its recommendations during the course of 1992.

The Commission looks forward to considering the Working Group's report of its follow-up visit to Sri Lanka at the 49th session of the Commission of Human Rights.

It is the wish of the Commission that this statement appears verbatim in the Report of the 48th session of the Commission of Human Rights. ■

'Life is a battle' is a proposition which must at first have expressed melancholy and resignation. But our century of optimism and massacres has succeeded in making this terrible sentence sound like a joyous refrain. You will say that to fight against somebody may be terrible, but to fight for something is noble and beautiful. Yes, it is beautiful to strive for happiness (or love, or justice, and so on), but if you are in the habit of designating your striving with the word 'fight', it means that your noble striving conceals the longing to knock someone to the ground. The fight *for* is always connected with the fight *against* and the preposition 'for' is always forgotten in the course of the fight in favour of the preposition 'against'.

Milan Kundera
Immortality

THE BRIDE WEARS WHITE

Some Christian Contributions to Buddhist Lay Life in Sri Lanka

by G.P.V. Somaratna

Christianity in Sri Lanka has recently come under heavy fire from Buddhist nationalists as a force destructive of Sinhalese Buddhist culture. This tendency has always been present in the Buddhist revivalist movement; the report of the Buddhist Committee of Inquiry entitled *Betrayal of Buddhism* published in 1956 had presented the era after the arrival of the Portuguese as a period of decline in Sinhala Buddhist culture.¹ However, even a superficial look at the history of Sri Lanka during the colonial period would show that our society had been enriched in many respects during that period.

The Christian impact on Buddhist lay life initially resulted from the activities of the large number of Roman Catholic priests working in various villages and cities of Sri Lanka during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when Portuguese influence was strong. Later, Dutch rule extended Christian influence over a wider scale in the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka.

Deliberate attempts were made by Buddhists to imitate Christian practices in many ways. An important step in that direction was taken with the arrival of the Theosophists in 1880. Even before that, however, Buddhist monks like Revs. Mohottiwatte Gunananda, Koratota Sobita and Dodanduwe Piyaratna Tissa had successfully utilised Christian missionary institutions for Buddhist purposes.²

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The second stage was a conscious and deliberate attempt by American and English Theosophists to help Sinhalese Buddhists to adopt Christian missionary methods and practices for their benefit. With the arrival of the first Theosophists, Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky at Galle in 1880, they became and continued to be a source of inspiration and help to Buddhists for a considerable period of time. There are many Christian practices adopted then, which are accepted today as part of the heritage of Buddhist society in Sri Lanka³.

The Christian Church in Sri Lanka

The presence of Christians in the Anuradhapura period is indicated by archaeological and literary evidence. We are, however, unable to ascertain the nature of their contribution to the culture of Sri Lanka. The assertion made by Prof. Senerat Paranavitana in *The Story of Sigiri* connecting the Sigiriya fortress with Christianity, is not popular among historians. The arrival of Franciscan missionaries from Portugal in 1543 in Kotte, at the invitation of *Bhuvanekabahu VII* (A.D. 1521 - 1551) marks more clearly the beginning of Christian influence on the life of Sinhalese Buddhists. Apart from those who embraced the Roman Catholic faith during this period, the Sinhalese Buddhist population also came under this influence. Thereafter, under the Dutch administration of the Maritime Provinces of the island the process of Christian cultural contacts with Sinhalese Buddhist society continued. The expansion of missionary activities in the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries under Protestant missionary organisations resulted in further cultural influences to Sinhalese Buddhist society.

In this article, we shall examine briefly two important areas in which this influence was marked - the rituals connected with the Sinhala Buddhist marriage and funeral ceremonies. These institutions are an integral part of the life of the people and have undergone vast changes as a result of Christian influence during the last four centuries. We shall attempt to identify here, some of the elements which have been adopted by Sinhala Buddhists through contact with parallel Christian institutions.

In Buddhism, priests are regarded as renouncers of lay life. Hence, they are not expected to play any role in important areas of lay life such as birth, marriage and death. There are no Buddhist rituals specified for these important areas of lay life, except for general guidelines found in the Buddhist canonical work known as *Sigalovada sutta*. These guidelines are not adequate to provide institutions like marriage with ceremonies which can be regarded as religiously prescribed. Such affairs of lay life do not appear to have been dealt with in canonical writings as matters of importance. When this vacuum, as compared with Christian practice, was realised, Buddhists made an attempt to appropriate institutions from Christianity.

Let us first consider the Buddhist institution of marriage as it stands today. The legally and socially accepted form →

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of marriage, among Sinhalese today, is monogamy and monoandry. However, a study of the literature pertaining to the period prior to Christian influence, shows that the institution of marriage functioned very differently in Sinhala society; there was a laxity in attitudes to this intimate personal relationship.

The Sinhalese chronicle *Rajavaliya* records King *Vira Parakumbahu VIII* (1476-1489), the King of Kotte, had two sisters as his chief wives (*randoliya*). That was an example of polygamy. Some time later, *Vijayabahu VI* (1513-1521) and his brother *Sri Rajasingha* had one wife, and from her they had four sons and one daughter. Three sons of this family got together to kill their father, *Vijayabahu VI*, in 1521, in the episode known as *Vijayaba kollaya*. This is an example of polyandry. Nor were these practices confined to royalty alone.

The early Christian writers had noticed this feature of Sinhalese society. De Queyroz, the Portuguese Chronicler of the seventeenth century, writing on the marriage practices of the Sinhalese in the sixteenth century says⁴:

“They [Sinhalese] also have taken from the *Malavares* the most barbarous custom that exists among those nations: for it is a common practice for four or five brothers or more, to marry one single woman, and on the contrary one single man can marry many sisters, and the youngest ever holds the first place in authority and power in the house and even in love. But in order to separate, each one's wish is sufficient, who taking what was brought to the household, may go back to marry at pleasure; and if they had children, the males are entrusted to the father and the females to the mother; and if they males or females, them they divide, each one taking what falls to him by lot. And Benito de Silva related that when he was *ouvidor* (magistrate) of Ceylon, there appeared before him a woman married to seven brothers to com-

plain of the ill treatment she received from so many, and begged in good earnest to be relieved of some of them. And as they were still subject to their laws and customs, the *ouvidor* asked her whether two would be enough for her, and she replied that she would take four; and choosing those she liked, the case was settled.”

The following quotations from Robert Knox, the English captive in the Kandyan kingdom during the period 1660-79, give us a picture of the situation in that kingdom, which did not come under Christian influence till 1815.⁵

“Their marriages are but of little force or validity. For if they disagree and dislike one the other; they part without disgrace. Yet it stands firmer for the men rather than for the women howbeit they do leave one the other at their pleasure...”

“Both men and women do commonly wed four or five times, before they can settle themselves to their contention. And if they have children when they part, the common law is, the males for the man, and the females for the woman. But many of the women are free from this controversie, being childless.”

“In this country each man, even the greatest, hath but one wife: but a woman often has two husbands; for, it is lawful and common with them, for two brothers to keep house together with one wife, and the children do acknowledge and call both fathers.”

Bentara Atthadassi Thera, writing in 1848 in reply to Gogerley's *Kristiani Pragnapti*, criticised the introduction of the institution of monogamous marriage from the point of view of Sinhala society. According to him, the law of the land had forced men and women to life-long unions without the possibility of separation even if incompatibilities were to surface later.⁶ Rev. Atthadassi further argued that monogamous marriage forcibly created individual families, cutting them off from

other family members who could be sources of support.

Rev. S. Langdon, in his visits to mission stations in the Kandyan districts, found polyandry being practised as late as 1890, even though such practices were discouraged by the government.⁷

“In one village he found that every woman in it, except one, had a plurality of husbands, usually three or four, but in one instance five. The reason ordinarily given for it is that, where the brothers of a family have one wife, there is no necessity for a division of the family inheritance. The custom was rendered illegal in 1858 because of the great crimes to which it frequently gave rise.”

The institution of sacramentalised lifelong monogamous marriage, was a Christian concept, first introduced to Sri Lanka by the Portuguese missionaries. Marriage in Christianity is an exclusive relationship. The total unity of persons - physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually - is comprehended by the concept 'one flesh' and is encapsulated in the concept of Holy Matrimony. This eliminates polygamy and polyandry as options. The indissolubility of marriage has been the biblical principle guiding this lifelong union.

The registration of marriage, which this concept necessarily entails, was done in Sri Lanka in the *Tombo* registration books under the supervision of Roman Catholic clergy. Therefore, marriage has been referred to as *kasada* in Sinhalese, the word being a derivation from the Portuguese word *casado* meaning marriage. Marriage, thus, became a sacrament to those who embraced Christianity, unlike to the Buddhist to whom marriage, at which no religious dignitary is present, was not a sacrament. The marriage ceremonies described by Robert Knox (1681), Alexander Johnston (1813), John Davy (1821) and several other European writers, show that the elaborateness of the marriage ceremony varied according to the social class of the families of the couple.⁸ →

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In the nineteenth century, Buddhist leaders made a conscious attempt to imitate several Christian institutions. The Christian sacrament of Holy Matrimony was one of them. The ritual, associated with Christian marriage, was one of the attractions which drew Buddhists to Christian churches in the first half of the nineteenth century. This was something that Buddhist leaders viewed with great alarm. The Buddhist newspaper *Lakmini Pahana* proposed the *Poruwa* ceremony, as an alternative to the sacrament of Christian marriage for Buddhists.⁹ In 1869, the members of the *Lokarthasadhaka Samagama* who met at the *Sailabimbaramaya*, Dodanduwa resolved to advise Buddhist laymen to introduce the practice of a *Poruwa* ceremony as a Buddhist innovation, in order to prevent Buddhists from being attracted to Christian churches for the solemnization of the weddings.¹⁰

The *Buddhist Catechism* published by Colonel S. Olcott, in 1881, includes some Christian and European concepts in the Buddhist system of values.¹¹ Question No. 205 of this catechism is:

“What does Buddhism teach about marriage?”

The answer is:

“Absolute chastity, being a condition of full spiritual development, is most highly recommended; but a marriage to one wife and fidelity to her, is recognized as a kind of chastity. Polygamy was censured by the Buddha as involving ignorance and promoting lust.”

These are not, in fact, the teachings of the Buddha, but are based on Olcott's own expectations regarding the correct nature of the institution of marriage. Obeyesekere and Gombrich have indicated that there is no Buddhist text referring to the preferability of monogamous marriage; the Buddha did not teach the validity of monogamous marriage over other forms of marriage, known in North India at that time.¹²

Poruwa Ceremony

Early records of Sinhala marriages do not refer to an elaborate ritual or the widespread practice of a *poruwa* ceremony. D'Oyly and Johnston refer to a very simple *poruwa* ceremony, performed by the upper caste nobility, somewhat different from the present ceremonies. It had no religious significance. There was no religious officer to perform the ceremony; neither was a religious text chanted. The common people did not practice such a ceremony.

The elaborate rituals connected with modern *poruwa* ceremonies are a new phenomenon. They were acquired by Buddhists to counterbalance the sacramental nature of the Christian wedding. The early practice of using only a plank for the couple to ascend to the *poruwa*, has now become elaborated into a ritual, reminiscent of the consecration of royalty.

The rituals connected with the *poruwa* ceremony are based on auspicious times calculated to the minute; this, of course has been made possible only by the introduction of clocks in the present century. The *kapurala* has become the officiating priest who dresses and acts like a royal *purohita*. The chanting of *astaka* by a *kapurala* and the singing of *Jayamangala gatha* by maidens were introduced in the 1880's. These innovations were motivated by the desire to emulate various aspects of the ritual of the Christian wedding, which proved attractive to many Buddhists of the time.¹³

Today, the bride is accompanied by her father to an assembly of friends and relatives in front of a decorated *poruwa*. When the father leads the bride to the hall, the assembly rises, imitating the pattern of a church service. This practice shows how far the Buddhist mind was attracted by the Christian sacrament of Holy Matrimony and its rituals.

Among other Christian practices connected with the wedding ceremony, adopted by Sinhalese Buddhists is the

wearing of a veil and face veil by the bride. The habit of wearing white is another important feature. The traditional Sinhalese Buddhist belief is that white is connected with sorrow. The practice of brides in Hindu weddings is to wear elaborate colours and not white. Thus, the present custom of wearing white is also Christian.¹⁴

During the recent past, Buddhist monks have taken an active part in some Buddhist weddings by chanting *pirit* to bless the newly married couple and by tying *pirith* thread on their hands. This indicates that the Buddhist priesthood, having realised the drawbacks in their traditional roles, are now assuming new roles, comparable with those of Christian clergy.¹⁵

The practice known as betrothal, was a legally binding contract between the parents of the bride and the groom from the times of the *Old Testament*. Today, we have a similar practice known as the “engagement” where the two parties come to an agreement about the marriage. There remained a distinction between betrothal and marriage because the two partners did not enter into a sexual relationship.

Sexual Morals

The monogamous marriage and the sexual morality associated with it as accepted by the Sri Lankan Buddhist today, are in contrast with the practices that prevailed in the pre-Christian era in Sri Lanka. A closer study of these ideas shows that they have been derived from the Christian morals of Victorian England, introduced during this period by Protestant missionaries. The school system run by the latter, propagated these views among the local population through moral instruction. The *Buddhist Catechism* of Henry Olcott shows Christian morals being attributed to Buddhists in the following statement.

Q. What of husband to wife?

A. To cherish her; treat her with respect and kindness; be faithful to

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her; cause her to be honoured by others; provide her with suitable ornaments and clothes.

Q. What of the wife to her husband?

A. To show affection to him; order her household all right, be hospitable to guests; be chaste; be thrifty; show skill and diligence in all things.¹⁶

The morals connected with married life presented by Anagarika Dharmapala as appropriate to Sinhalese Buddhists, are what he learnt in Christian schools in his childhood. All mission schools gave moral instruction including sexual morals. They outlawed plural marriages. Divorce, which was easy in pre-Christian Sinhalese society, was rendered difficult by the English law, the monogamous marriage being legally registered and regarded as a life-long affair. It is, however, interesting to note that the view current among many Sri Lankans today, is that western society is lax in morals; it is not realised that their ideals of sexual morals have been based on western norms of the nineteenth century.

Lay morals are not clearly depicted in the Buddhist canon. The *Singalovada sutta* gives some moral guidelines for laymen, but they are merely a broad outline for living. With a view to filling this gap, Anagarika Dharmapala published in 1898, a book entitled '*Daily Code for the Laity*' giving guidelines for living for the Sinhala Buddhist. A close examination of this document shows that it is heavily influenced by Protestant norms. The qualities that Dharmapala advocated - truthfulness, faithfulness in marriage, honesty and hard work in business life - are those of Victorian Protestant ethics. The vocabulary and tone in the writings and teachings of Anagarika Dharmapala have a resemblance to those of the Protestants. Unrighteousness, abomination, perverse generation, holiness, defeating evil, are notable among the terms he uses. His homeless *anagarika* life is regarded by some scholars as an imitation of the Calvinist concept of a homeless life while living in the world.

Funeral Ceremonies

Knox gives the following account regarding burial practices in the Kandyan kingdom in the seventeenth century.¹⁸

"As for persons of inferior quality, they are interred in some convenient places in the woods, there being no set places for burial, carried thither by two or three of their friends, and buried without any more ado. They lay them on their backs, with their heads to the west and their feet to the east, as we do. Then, those people go and wash; for they are unclean by handling the dead.

The persons of greater quality are burnt, and that with ceremony. When they are dead, they lay them out, and put a cloth over their privy parts, and then wash the body by taking half a dozen pitchers of water and pouring upon it. Then, they cover him with a linen cloth, and so carry him forth to burning."

The reports left by the early Protestant missionaries show that the normal practice among the Sinhalese in the Low Country area was to take the corpse to the *amu sohona* and lay it there for carrion birds to consume. References to burial are rare in the pre Christian era. The Buddhist clergy and nobility were burnt on funeral pyres. Death was feared and a dead body was considered as something (*kili*) desecrating. Cemeteries were considered as places where demons took up their abode. *Kattadiyas* (exorcists) made visits to the *amu sohona* to contact devils or to obtain *mini tel* (oil from the dead bodies) for ceremonies connected with devil worship.

The practice of burial, which is common today among Buddhists in Sri Lanka, is a result of Christian influence. The Christian concept of death is not shrouded in fear, as are traditional Sri Lankan beliefs on the subject. The dead were treated with respect; the Christian concept of resurrection of the dead did not permit a fear that dead bodies would be

possessed by demons. The common Sinhala word for burial ground is *karakoppuwa* which is a derivation from the Dutch word *Kerkehoef*. The burial of departed relatives in a church yard was introduced for the first time to Sri Lanka, by Portuguese missionaries.¹⁹

The other Christian practice connected with burial was the traditional method of disposing of the dead. The early Christians adopted the custom of putting the feet toward the east, so that at the resurrection the reborn might hurry toward the sunrise. The Buddhist practice was to put the head of the corpse to the north with the face upward as the Buddha was laid at his death. The Christian practice was adopted by the Sinhalese Buddhists, who imitated the Roman Catholic rituals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²⁰

Tombstones are also common today, among Sinhalese Buddhists. The addition of a symbol of grace to the tomb, is also a nineteenth century Christian practice borrowed by the Buddhists. The ashes of kings and Buddhist priests were deposited in small caskets and placed in buildings like *stupas* in the past. But the tombstone is a new phenomenon.

From the evidence available in writings, referring to the pre-Christian era, we find no reference to a Buddhist religious funeral service conducted at the site of the grave or in the *amu sohona*. Today, the presence of a Buddhist priest and a "transfer of merit" to the deceased has become obligatory at the burial of a Buddhist. This too, is a result of the influence of the Christian funeral service, where a priest is present.

The funeral procession with drummers and horane players is a common sight today, at Buddhist funerals. It is a practice unknown to pre-Christian Sinhalese society and derives from the fact that from very early on, in their work in Sri Lanka, Roman Catholics conducted funeral processions from the residence to the churchyard.²¹

Buddhists in the coastal areas chant the *Vessantara Jataka Kavya* at funeral

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houses. This became popular in this area in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Roman Catholics used the *Pasan Pota or Dukprapti Sangrahaya* (a work by Jocomo Goncalves) at funeral houses in order to keep awake in the nights. The Buddhist began chanting the *Malapota or Wessantara Jataka Kavyaya*. This shows that low country Buddhists imitated Roman Catholic usage. The use of coffins, throwing of sand on the coffin after it is laid in the grave, are again practices learnt from Christians.

The *Lakminipahana* in June 1862, suggested that Sinhalese Buddhists should adopt the occasion of the first rice eating by an infant to take the place of the day of Baptism. That day was proposed by them as the most suitable day to name a baby.⁴² This practice, however, did not catch on. Therefore, it is not mentioned in the early writings:

The above discussion shows that we have taken for granted much of the Christian contribution to Sinhalese social life. The very practices thrown at Christians as Buddhist heritage are the result of Christian influence. Christianity, meanwhile, has been represented as a foreign element in Sri Lankan culture and the Christian minority is accused of being the representatives of an alien culture.

Notes

1 *Buddha Toraturu Pariksayaya Sabhave Vartava*, Ambalangoda; Dharma Vijaya Press, 1956, pp. 29 - 35. An abridged version entitled *The Betrayal of Buddhism*,

was also published in the same year. (Ambalangoda, 1956).

- 2 George D. Bond, *The Buddhist Revival of Sri Lanka*, University of South Carolina Press, 1988, pp. 48 - 60.
- 3 Gananath Obeyesekere, *Colonel Olcott's Reforms of the 19th Century and Their Cultural Significance*, Colombo 1992.
- 4 Fernao de Queyroz, *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, tr. by S.G. Perera, Colombo, 1930, Vol. i, p.91. Similar information is found in another Portuguese account, Robeiro's account of Ceylon. *History of Ceylon with a Summary of de Barros and do Couto*, Antonio Bacarro and the *Documentos Remettidos with Parangi Hatana and Kutantinu Hatana*, ed. by P.E. Pieris, Colombo, 1090, p. 143. It is recorded:
"A girl makes a contract to marry a man of her caste for they cannot marry outside it, and if the relatives are agreeable they give a banquet and unite the betrothed couple. The next day the brother of the husband takes his place, and if there are seven brothers she is the wife of all of them, distributing the nights by turns, without the first husband having a greater right than any of the others."
See also the accounts of two other visitors, Jacob Saar (1647-1657) in JRAS (CB) No. 39, p. 248 and Philippus Baldeus (1672) in *Description of Ceylon* by Philip Baldeus tr. by Pieter Brohier, Tisara Prakasakayo, 1960, p.384.
- 5 Robert Knox, *An Historical Relation of Ceylon*, Dehiwela; Tisara Prakasakayo, 1966, pp. 175-177.
- 6 Bentara Atthadassi, *Kristiyani Pragnaptiyata Pilituru*, ola manuscript available at Sri Mahabodhi Vihara, Dehiwela.
- 7 *Ceylon Friend*, Vol. 10, 1890, p 115.
- 8 Robert Knox, op.cit.p.117; John Davy, *An Account of the Interior of Ceylon and its Inhabitants*, London, 1821, p. 214;

Alexander Johnstone, *Important Public Documents from Ceylon*, no date

John D'Oyly, *Diary of John D'Oyly, 1810 - 1815*, ed. by H.W. Codrington, Colombo, 1917; *Sketch of the Kandyan Kingdom*, Dehiwela, Tisara Prakasakayo, 1982, pp. 82-83.

- 9 *Lakmini Pahana*, June, 1982.
- 10 Sri Lanka National Archives, Document No. 5/63/1/45/68.
- 11 H.S. Olcott, *The Buddhist Catechism*, Colombo; Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 1968, p.47.
- 12 Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsida, 1988, pp 255 - 273
- 13 Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988, p.267
- 14 Gombrich and Obeyesekere, op. cit. p. 263.
- 15 The emphasis on the new idea of the parish role of Buddhist priests is seen in the current concept of Temple, School and Police adopted by the government of Sri Lanka.
- 16 H.S. Olcott. *Buddhist Catechism*, pp. 47 - 48
- 17 *Gihivinaya in Dharmapala Lipi*, ed. by Ananda Guruge, Colombo: Government Press, 1963, pp. 31-64.
- 18 Robert Knox, op. cit. pp. 218-219.
- 19 Tikiri Abeyasinghe, *Prutugusin ha Lankava* (1597-1658), Colombo; Lakehouse, 1969, pp. 101-106; S.G. Perera, *History of Ceylon for Schools*
- 20 Michael Roberts, *Noise as Cultural Struggle: Tom Tom Beating, the British, and Communal Disturbances in Sri Lanka, 1880-1930s in Communities, Riots and Survivors*, pp. 241-283.
- 21 Sunil Ariyaratne, *Karol Pasam Kantaru*, Colombo; Samayavardhana, 1987, pp. 193.

Dark Road

The road is dark, and home is far.
Sleep now, in the poor state you are.
Tonight be dreamless, and tomorrow
Wake free from fear, half-free of sorrow.

Vikram Seth

Women in the Plantations: Limits of Progress

Valli Kanapathipillai

In the past decade, Sri Lanka's national policy planners became increasingly responsive to the need of formulating measures to change the backward conditions of plantation labour. Concerted efforts were made in the 80's to improve the living and working conditions of the estate workers. Although these policy decisions and consequent improvements in the welfare of the workers were not always targeted specifically at women, some 'trickle-down effect' seems to have worked, improving the quality of life among plantation women.

Changes

These improvements have, nonetheless, been mainly welfare oriented. The most significant change is the equalizing of wages of male and female labour in 1984, followed by increases in the basic daily wage and living allowances. Health services have also been improved with the active participation of and funding from international and bilateral donor agencies, the overall result of which has been the decline in mortality among the plantation workers. During this period, the urgent need to provide adequate housing for this largely resident work force was finally recognised and, efforts were made under the Medium Term Investment Programme to upgrade existing houses or build new ones in some selected estates. Improvements in education in the estate sector was initiated by the government, following the take-over of estate schools in 1977 and 1980. Attempts were also made to upgrade

existing schools, initially under the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and later through a programme implemented by the Ministry of Education with the support of European donors such as SIDA and NORAD. The availability of education for the estate sector has shown progress, while more women are seen to avail themselves of educational opportunities.

These policy changes and improvements have indeed been made possible by agitation of the workers themselves. Loss of citizenship and voting rights under the Citizenship Acts of 1948 and Parliamentary Elections Amendment Act of 1949, marginalised the Tamil plantation workers from the parliamentary process, leaving the trade unions as the main platform for agitating towards welfare and civil rights. For instance, the equalizing of pay and increase in wages was made possible by the massive strike undertaken by the unions in 1984. However, the success of these unions in the past decade, has to be seen in relation to the enhanced political strength that the plantation workers gained during this period.

The strategic position which the plantation workers have acquired in recent Sri Lankan politics is the main factor which compelled the state into paying more attention to the demands and needs of the workers. After decades in the political wilderness, they acquired a significant bargaining capacity in the 80's, due to three parallel developments.

The first was the increased electoral strength of the Tamil plantation workers, following the implementation of the Sirima-Shastri Pact of 1964 and later the Agreement of 1974. Those who have received citizenship under these Agreements, up to now, are concentrated within

a specific electoral region in the Central highlands, which has made them an important electoral constituency, particularly under the Proportional Representation System.

Secondly, the civil war situation in the North and East of the Island has compelled the government to be more considerate of the needs of the workers of Indian Tamil origin. Preventing Tamil nationalist forces in the North and East from spreading their influence among people in this sector was, indeed, a tactical necessity of the State.

Thirdly, the political role and leadership of Mr. Thondaman, the head of the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC), has been as significant as the first two factors. He has been the leading representative of Indian Tamils in most post-independence parliaments. Mr. Thondaman initially witnessed disenfranchisement of his constituents and later their actual expulsion from the country, or repatriation to India, under the two agreements of 1964 and 1974. By his presence in parliament, Thondaman has been able to tone down the most extreme aspects of these Acts of Parliament. From 1977, when Thondaman was appointed a Cabinet Minister, he was able to mobilize the forces of the CWC to win political and welfare concessions for the workers as well as to become an influential figure in national politics.

The entry of the state has also been significant in terms of social development in the plantation sector. State take-over brought the Indian Tamil worker within the framework of the wider political process, giving them the political capacity to agitate for better working conditions. The state also opened the

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doors for welfare work within plantations by establishing social development divisions in the two plantation corporations, the JEDB and the SLSPC. In certain instances, the plantation welfare services were integrated with that of the state.

Under the World Bank/IMF policy strategy for Sri Lanka in the post 1977 period, the importance of improving productivity in the plantation sector was stressed, given that it was still a major contributor to foreign exchange earnings in the country. In the new policy climate, the improvement of plantation productivity was viewed in conjunction with the need to accelerate social development of the plantation workers.

Women Workers

Meanwhile, European donors too extended the policy debate on plantations, when a strategy for plantation re-structuring was being formulated and later implemented. Thus, the donors, too, came to play a role in welfare development among workers. The donors were involved in setting up projects towards improving the living and working conditions in the estates.

The donor agencies, in keeping with the global trend towards recognition of women's oppression and their right to liberation, built into their programmes, the necessity of creating support schemes that would specifically benefit women. The women's movement in Sri Lanka, by incorporating and actively highlighting the oppression of estate women, has also contributed towards initiating awareness among trade unions, policy makers and among the workers themselves.

Despite these changes, women plantation workers continue to hold secondary status as wage workers, their position compounded by the double burden of domestic work, low literacy, poor health and the constraints of an ideology that keeps them subordinate to men. These changes, actually, fall far short of an overall progress. It is hardly possible to rectify in a decade what is almost a century of neglect.

Wages are still perceived as family income, which explains the management's unquestioning practice of handing over women's wages to their husbands. Even the unions have failed to stop this unfortunate practice which has continued from the 19th century. Studies show that this practice takes away women's control over their own incomes, which indirectly has a bearing on poor nutrition and health among women and children.

In spite of integrating the estate schools with the national education system, and the concerted efforts at upgrading schools with the assistance of various donors, education levels of plantation workers in general, and women workers in particular, still fall far short of accepted standards. In the opinion of officials involved in the upgrading schemes, it could take another 20 years to bring the education system in estates to a standard equivalent to that of the national level. And, even among those who have received education up to O'Levels or higher, gaining employment is a real problem. In 1985/86, of the women who had passed O'levels/N.C.G.E, 40.3% in the 15-19 age group were unemployed. Another 41.5% of women in the 25-29 age group were also still unemployed (*Labour Force & Socio-Economic Survey, 1985/86*).

Statistics show substantial improvements in health among workers in the plantation sector. Yet, as a recent study notes, "health conditions on estates still have some way to go to reach levels comparable with the rest of the country:" (Report by the Technical Assistance Team, 1992). Health conditions among women in this sector, has to improve far more than at present. Maternal mortality is still higher among women in the estate sector. Both the donors and the state do not appear to have paid adequate attention to the poor working conditions of women, and occupation related diseases prevalent among them. A study on health status of women workers by the Congress labor Foundation, addressed this particular issue. According to this study, infections of the respiratory tract or air passages were common among the women in the sample. Exposure to adverse climatic conditions, coupled with low nutritional standards, ac-

counts for their poor health. Even though maternity benefits are available, they rarely meet the acutely felt health and welfare needs of the plantation worker mothers.

Lack of women's organisations to initiate changes is particularly felt in the plantation sector. In other sectors of the economy, however, it is not an uncommon practice among women, to organise *around* issues that affect them. Trade unions have 'women's wings' but these have been mere appendages of male led union bodies, existing in name alone. Very recently, these 'women's wings' have begun to assert some degree of autonomy. Of late, some NGO's too, have started separate 'women's sections', the impact of which is yet to be felt. Women comprise almost 50% of the plantation labor force. Yet, they sometimes remain unorganised as women. The explanation fundamentally lies with the ideological and social construction of gender, which ascribes certain subordinate positions for women within society. The constraints placed on them by the very structural features of the plantation system and by ethnic segregation, have exacerbated these conditions.

Prospects

As the privatization of estates is debated and discussed, certain features of the emerging form of management have arisen, which could make a positive contribution towards improving existing conditions of workers in general, and women in particular. It is envisaged that welfare and social development among workers will not be left in the control of individual private management companies, but is to come within the purview of a central body, in which unions have a voice and a role. This arrangement is supposed to ensure the continuation of social development started in the 1980's.

Plans are afoot, to give workers the ownership of houses and land. This is hopefully, a welcome move since divorcing the workers' residence from the plantation management is likely to break up the 'enclave' type system that has been partly responsible for the conditions of semi-slavery, in which the work-

Women in the Plantations...

ers have been kept for more than a century. This is likely to widen the workers' opportunities for gaining social and economic mobility, while easing the surplus labour problem on estates. The possession of land and housing, may give a worker-family a sense of security, identity and perhaps independence. It may also break the links between the estate and

the household, which partly account for the subordinate position of women in this sector.

However, be it their right to own a house and land, or their labour-mobility, or the emergence of a new 'open' system of labor relations, all these possibilities will depend to a large extent on the ethnic issue, and the acceptance of these progressive measures by the majority Sinhalese community. ■

Three Days in Paradise

by Vinod Moonesinghe

I first met Singapore in 1986. It appeared to me then, as the dream of Sri Lanka's 1940's nationalists: a modern city built on tropical swamps, a St. Petersburg of the South. I visited the island again in February this year. Six years on, the place didn't seem quite such a utopia.

Singapore, like Hong Kong, is one of the Four Tigers; unlike Korea and Taiwan, the two Megalopolitan Tigers have developed on the basis of free trade, an important consideration in view of the IMF/World Bank-imposed conditions on Sri Lanka. How does one prosper on non-protective free trade? The answer probably lies in viewing Colombo, in isolation, from the hinterland: take the Metropolis out of the rest of the island and you have a Singapore in the making. The population of Greater Colombo (Negombo to Panadura, Bambalapitiya to Oruwela), is about that of Singapore; the area provides Sri Lanka's answer to the South-East Asian city state, with Port, Airport, Industry and Commerce.

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All the ingredients are available in Colombo, save one: the political will. One of the major similarities lies in the persons of Lee and Premadasa. Both might be said to have come from the insurgent constituency, in a situation where the insurgencies were crushed. However, there is a crucial difference in that Singapore detached itself from its hinterland, while Colombo has not (except in a social and cultural sense). Indeed, given the conditions imposed on Colombo from outside, one should be surprised at the lack of a Colombo-centred separatist movement: an independent Colombo could continue to exercise economic imperialism on the hinterland, while having none of the responsibilities of feedback to the rural areas. Such, after all, was the fate of Singapore after its break with Malaysia.

My first impression of Singapore, was of awe. Here was Birmingham (Edgbaston) recreated in the tropics. Here was what Colombo should be: a city rising out of the marsh in European splendour. The difference is that Singapore is greener than any European city, greener than the Colombo Municipality. It was also very clean, comparing even with Zurich, that cleanest

of European cities. It did lack some of the chic of Europe, no central plazas preserved over hundreds of years. The Raffles Hotel is a preserved monument, a distinction never granted to the Galle Face Hotel, or even to the Dutch building that stood on the site of the present Hotel Oberoi. Colombo has a far greater preservable archaeology than Singapore but, with the exception of a few buildings (The VOC office in Pettah, the Wolvendahl Church, etc.), makes few attempts to preserve its history. Our historiography always harks back to the 'Golden Age' of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa. The state of the Ambalama at Pitakotte junction, or even the Rampart at Etul Kotte, attest to the lack of interest in artifacts of less than seven hundred years ago; the Mission House at Christian College (the Bangalawa of the Bangala Junction) was unceremoniously pulled down in 1978, even though it served as Alma Mater to Don David Hewavitharana (aka Dharmapala).

What struck me most about Singapore was not the Tower Blocks for housing the proletariat (an utter abomination for anyone who has lived in one, →

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Corbusier or no Corbusier), nor the grand shopping complexes, nor even the fantastic roads. It was the niggling little things that pointed to a great deal of forethought. It was the fibreglass seats in the bus shelters, the clearly labelled public toilets, the extensive drain systems with the ubiquitous holes (to provide for soil drainage) in the concrete slabs lining the storm drains. The omnipresent aura was one of caring for the population: a desire to fulfil the basic human necessities of shelter, of nourishment and of relieving the bladder.

Hong Kong is considered by many, in advance of Singapore. But, just imagine trying to relieve a bursting bladder in Hong Kong : one longs for the comfortably sign-posted lavatories of Singapore. I found myself in a terrible predicament awaiting the island ferry hovercraft in Hong Kong and had to retreat to a McDonald's eatery to save myself: there was not a public lavatory in sight.

The disposal of bodily waste is considered of high priority in civilised society. Indeed, I would posit that the degree of civilisation of a given society could be measured, by the access, provided to the public, to lavatories. On this index, Sri Lanka would be rated very low indeed: we hide our lavatories away, public toilets being well nigh extinct.

Perhaps the fact that Singapore is ruled by Chinese has something to do with it (Hong Kong being administered by English civil servants, in their ivory towers, who require no public toilets). The Chinese revere their urine and their faeces. Piss and shit provide the nutrition to the soil that is so necessary after thousands of years of cultivation. Sri Lankans seem to prefer the Urea, the Phosphates and the NPK from abroad (imported anaesthetic being better than local anaesthetic), so our bodily wastes are just that, wastes.

In Singapore, domestic waste ('garbage') goes to a central incinerator which provides a significant proportion of the City's energy needs. In Greater Colombo, the wastes are just burnt or used as landfill.

Another significant aspect of Singapore was the universal use of four national languages, English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. In Sri Lanka, we have three national languages, spoken by more than 10% of the population proficient in that tongue. The ubiquitous four-language street name boards are even more refreshing than the name boards in Switzerland, lacking the latter's universal use of the Roman script.

Go out to Jurang (claimed from the marshlands) and you see a dedication to popular education, unheard of in the rest of Asia. You see Jurang Bird Park and the Science Centre (paltry by European standards, but gigantic by South Asia's). The Colombo Museum and Zoo, are nothing in comparison.

The buzz-word in Singapore was 'people'. A capitalist state, a police state, a corporate state, looking after its people. The Vision is irresistible.

An interesting article was published in the *Daily News* of March 26. This was based on an interview with Dr. Toh Chin Chye, formerly Singapore's deputy premier. According to him, the ruling party strove to assure all citizens of a job and a home:

"We realised that a 'socialist' line would be more appealing to achieving this objective. The state becomes 'provider', assuring everyone of an education and giving everyone the opportunity to be upwardly mobile."

This ideology was the key to Singapore's development (as opposed to economic growth). It should be noted that the role of the state outlined by Dr. Toh, is not at all the prescription of the World Bank, but more akin to the bi-

partisan policy of Sri Lankan Governments in 1956-77.

The overwhelming impression I received of Singapore in 1986 was of a state that cared for its people; this impression was not echoed by Hong Kong or Taiwan, certainly not by Sri Lanka.

So, why was I disappointed in 1992? Perhaps, it was a difference of viewpoint: in 1986, I stayed in the posh Holland Village area, but in 1992 in the less plush Al Junied district. Perhaps, but

The differences were not in the macro projects. The Mass Rapid Transit (MRT), still a building in 1986, is a complete system rivalling the Zurich F-bahn. The sea-land reclamation projects I had seen from the air six years ago, were now flourishing communities. The streets were just as wide and impressive. What was the difference?

My first impression in 1992 was of Television. The quality of TV was obviously down. The good (mainly British) TV programmes I had seen in 1986 were missing. Instead, there were those horrible American game shows ('You have just won US \$ 50,000'). The Chinese - language soaps were dreadful: young people in offices falling in love with one another, over and over again (apparently an official propaganda campaign, of which more later). The young people were all Chinese.

The lesson of my second visit to Singapore, was of the ethnic tensions existing there. The ethnic discrimination is not as obvious as in Sri Lanka (our TV commercials are as lacking in subtlety as our ethnic discrimination: bang the viewer on the head with a huge hammer), but it is there.

In the MRT stations, I saw wall posters advertising the virtues of having children. The 'average family' depicted →

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was Chinese, with three children. The background is that fewer and fewer professional women are marrying, those marrying having fewer children. It is not widely known that Singapore has an official Eugenic policy: the state wants (Chinese) professional level people to get married and have large numbers of children, to increase the average IQ of the population. Hence the 'office' soaps.

Consider, why is it necessary to have Mandarin as an official language? The majority of the Chinese speak Cantonese (the Guangzhon dialect). I first came across the phenomenon of Mandarinisation while a student in England. A fellow student, a Singaporean Chinese, informed me that she had been told by the Singapore authorities that she was pronouncing her name wrong (the Chinese ideographs are pronounced differently in Cantonese and Mandarin), and she was ordered to spell it differently in Roman script (imagine someone called *Pratapasinha* being forced to spell his name *Pratapasiha* in Roman script).

Modernization aimed at converting the Chinese population to their 'traditional' (Confucian) values: discipline, veneration for ancestors, and acceptance of laid down moral values.

The most dramatic let-down was, in the atmosphere of decline. The pavements had many open manholes, covered with plywood sheets. Many of the excellent storm water drains were blocked with refuse. In fact, the atmosphere was similar to that I experienced in England in the mid-70's, of a country past its prime.

I found the key to the new situation in Government propaganda: these trumpeted new prestige building projects which were to commence. Earlier, the Singaporeans just got on with it. How similar to Sri Lanka, this 'will be' propaganda!

These projects symbolised a distancing from the masses on the part of the state: they were not for common use, but for attracting foreign capital. So why announce such projects on the propaganda machine? Is it because Singapore finds it difficult to attract

capital?

According to Dr. Toh:

"... once you open up the market forces via socialism (or with a pale pink version of it), the concept of the state as sole provider, no longer works; time now to let the free-market ideology of supply and demand take over - the success story of Singapore."

The role of the state in bringing about the rapid development of Singapore has been very little talked about. It now appears that there has been a change in that role, as described by Dr. Toh above.

The Singapore 'miracle' was based on a compromise between the needs of the masses and the needs of capital, with the state as arbiter. It seems that this compromise is now crumbling in favour of capital, so that the less beautiful aspects of the Singaporean state emerge much more openly, with the fetters off.

Night Watch

Awake for hours and staring at the ceiling
Through the unsettled stillness of the night
He grows possessed of the obsessive feeling
That dawn has come and gone and brought no light.

Vikram Seth

The Clergy Goes to Jaffna

A new debate has sprung up in Colombo where both hope and despair about ethnic peace are intermingled: should the members of the Buddhist clergy visit Jaffna to meet the LTTE leaders? While Rev. Balapitiye Siddhartha, the leader of an eleven member peace team of Buddhist monks, is making preparations to go on the long trek to the war-torn peninsula, some others in the South have been saying 'don't go.' "If you go to Jaffna at this moment, you are only helping the Tigers," is the essence of the anti-visit-to-Jaffna argument.

Priestly visits to Jaffna are not new. In recent months, a number of Christian clergy of various denominations have visited the peninsula on pastoral as well as peace missions. Some of them have issued impassioned appeals for peace, ethnic reconciliation and an early end to the war. Illustrative of this sentiment is the peace plea made by the Catholic group that visited Jaffna in March under the leadership of the Bishop of Chilaw. The Bishop's press release said: "Time is running out. The senseless war in the North and East must stop. Peace with dignity and honour is what the people there yearn for."

What is still new in the unfolding controversy is that a team of Buddhist monks is planning to go to the land of the 'enemy'. "Message-couriers of LTTE leaders" is the term which Nalin de Silva, a leading spokesperson of the Sinhalese war lobby, recently used to describe the Jaffna-bound Buddhist monks. His evocative phrase encapsulates the extremist Sinhalese opposition to what is seen as an act of treachery.

In the nationalist mind, both Sinhala and Tamil, Sri Lanka is a land sharply divided, and that is precisely what de Silva's

phrase is all about. The entire mode of reckoning is persuasively simple, albeit naive and menacing, because it comes in an atmosphere of war mongering. Buddhist monks, so goes the argument, should not carry peace messages to the enemy, because it only hinders the war effort; Tamils in Jaffna are Tigers, and talking to Tamils is talking to murderous Tigers. The Sinhalese nationalist mind is so obsessed with the Tiger that a Northern society sans the LTTE is beyond the pale of even demographic imagination.

On an earlier occasion, in December last year, a delegation of Buddhist monks did go to Jaffna, but for a different purpose and in a different company. The *Mahanayaka Thera* (the High Priest) of the Malwatte Chapter of the *Siyam Nikaya* led this particular delegation which was helicoptered to the battle zone by the Sri Lankan army. They visited the army camp at Palalai and chanted *seth pirith* to bless the soldiers. The state-controlled *Daily News* published a photograph, in half-jest perhaps, of the Maha Thera inside an army bunker surveying the battle field through a pair of binoculars. The timing of this particular visit to Jaffna in the company of the army's ground commanders was not entirely accidental. It was the high point of the controversy about the Thondaman proposals to initiate peace talks with the LTTE.

Christian Visits

The visits made by the Christian clergy have, meanwhile, been less spectacular and more oriented towards the peace process. In recent times, they have made it a point to meet the Tiger leaders as well. Rev. Soma Perera, the former President of the Methodist Conference, was in Jaffna in early December and held talks with Anton Balasingham

and Yogarathnam Yogi, two senior leaders of the LTTE. The message he brought to Colombo was that the Tiger leaders were prepared for an alternative political model as a settlement to the war in the North.

Is the LTTE ready to accept a model short of a separate state? Rev. Soma Perera and other Christian peace groups appear to think so. Even more important is that, as observed by these peace missions, people in Jaffna are now talking about 'peace with dignity and honour which does not necessarily reject the idea of a unitary state.'

In the last week of March, the Bishop of Chilaw, Rt. Revd. Frank Marcus Fernando, led a Catholic peace mission to Jaffna. In a statement issued in Colombo on its return, this mission claimed to have met and held discussions with "a fair cross section of the people in the North such as ordinary citizens, members of the Citizens' Committee, humanitarian groups, university dons, students, religious leaders as well as high ranking officials of the LTTE."

The Bishop's delegation stated that "the core message" conveyed to them by these "various groups" was that an opportune moment for peace had come and that it should not be missed. The Jaffna people, according to the Bishop's press statement, expressed "genuine and innermost desire to live in unity and harmony with the people in the South" whom they considered as their fellow citizens.

A Buddhist Mission

The eleven member delegation of Buddhist monks is scheduled to be in Jaffna on April 18. According to Rev. Siddhartha, the head of the mission, this

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visit will be made in response to a request made by the LTTE. The request, in fact, was made in early February by Mahathaya, a top LTTE leader. At a meeting with some Colombo-based journalists, he is reported to have said: "Tell the government to send Buddhist monks, and not the soldiers, to the North." Mahathaya's request was probably a rhetorical one, because at this time many leading Buddhist monks were in the forefront of a pro-war campaign. The Tiger leader is said to have told the journalists: "If the Buddhist monks came to the North and saw the situation for themselves, they would be in a better position to advise their political leaders."

Divaina of March 31 published an interview with Rev. Siddhartha on the proposed peace mission. The questions put to the monk by the paper are symptomatic of the Southern ultra-nationalist wish that the war effort should not be jeopardised by talking peace. Some excerpts:

Q: Reverend Sir, there are reports that you have decided to lead a delegation of Buddhist monks to Jaffna. Can you tell us what made you to take this decision?

A: Newspapers had reported a request made by the LTTE that Buddhist monks should come to the North. I decided to respond to that request.

Q: Do you think that the other demands of the LTTE, which are being put forward by means of a war, should also be met in the same way you have decided to meet this particular request of the LTTE?

A: No, not at all. I am totally against an Eelam.

Q: If that is so, what do you really expect from your visit to Jaffna?

A: Our main purpose is to explain to the LTTE the consequences of the war. The other objective is to hold talks with them regarding the release of members of the army and the police who

are being kept prisoners by the LTTE.

Let us quote a few more 'questions' from this interview. The questions are actually nationalist statements:

- i. Whatever may be your intentions, as some critics have already pointed out, your visit to Jaffna at a moment like this will amount to accepting Eelam in an indirect way. Don't you think that you, a member of the *Maha Sangha* who represent the vast majority of the people in this country, will merely affirm the Eelam demand by visiting Jaffna?
- ii. Do you really have anything to propose as a solution to an organisation which believes in the gun?
- iii. Several senior monks have already made statements against any visits to Jaffna by Buddhist monks. Do you have any particular reason to disregard these warnings?
- iv. Some political commentators are of the view that the LTTE's ultimate objective is not only to establish an Eelam, but also to destroy Buddhism. Do you, Reverend Sir, accept that?

The Sinhala-Buddhist Critique

Peace missions by the Christian clergy have run into criticism by both Sinhalese and Tamil ideological groups. Representing the Sinhala nationalist point of view, the *Divaina* political correspondent wrote on March 31:

Once again, a group of Catholic priests have gone to Jaffna to meet the LTTE leaders. The purpose of their visit is said to initiate peace talks. What did all those who have met the LTTE earlier achieve? They only forced the Sinhalese people to accept the LTTE demands. Is there any sense in meeting with an organi-

zation which is committed to nothing short of an Eelam?

Rev. Balaptiye Siddhartha's determination to visit Jaffna as a Buddhist peace missionary is obviously an act that goes against the grain of the dominant ideology of the Buddhist church. It has created a great deal of uneasiness among the *Sangha* intelligentsia. So far, only one leading Buddhist monk, Rev. Wellawatte Gnanabhiwamsa, has expressed support to the idea that Buddhist monks too should visit the land of the Tamil people. Others appear to see a diabolical conspiracy behind the planned visit of Rev. Siddhartha. For example, the *Divaina* of April 13 carried a statement attributed to Rev. Arankattiye Kavindhaja, a leading monk from the North-Central province, with the headline, 'A Conspiratorial Objective in Jaffna Visit.' "It is not a peace mission; only an underhand conspiracy" is the essence of the *Divaina* report of Rev. Kavindhaja's view.

Conspiracy or not, the nationalist *Sangha* intelligentsia is in a real fix. Earlier, they managed to stop Mr. Thondaman's planned visit to Jaffna. They could easily cry foul at Thondaman, because he happened to be a Tamil. This time, the 'traitors' are from among their own ranks. And traitors they are, because "going to Jaffna in search of peace at a time when the LTTE is losing the war amounts to an attempt to save the Tiger organization from inevitable defeat." This, incidentally, is a part of a resolution passed by an assembly of monks held at Vidyodaya Pirivena in Colombo on April 11. The full text of the resolution appeared in *Divaina* on April 13.

Tamil Reactions

The critical response of Tamil political groups is equally interesting. Both the EPRLF and PLOTE have expressed grave reservations about the usefulness of these peace missions. Their main point is that the Christian peace groups basically echo political interests of the LTTE, and not of the Tamil masses. 'The peace missions meet, essentially, →

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the LTTE leaders; they rarely go out and seek the views of those who are critical of the LTTE. They do not condemn the LTTE brutalities on their own people; ultimately the good-hearted peace missionaries allow themselves to be used by the LTTE' is the gist of the EPRLF-PLOTE critique.

So, an almost obsessive hatred of the LTTE is universally present in the war and peace debate in Sri Lanka. Even some Tamil human rights groups are disturbed about what they consider to be the endorsement by peace missions of the LTTE's political agenda in which peace now happens to be included for manipulative objectives. Take, for example, the critique presented by the University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR) of the Jaffna University:

The other peace makers involved in these types of approaches to bring the two parties to the negotiating table also do not understand [the fact] that if these two parties

do not have any concern for the ordinary people and are only concerned in preserving their own power, then the natural outcome will again be a continuing tragedy for the people. Their inability to grasp this fact has allowed them to concentrate only on asking the LTTE what they want and then reporting back to the other side, and releasing empty statements which repeat the LTTE pronouncements, such as the one they are prepared to talk without any preconditions (UTHR: *The Trapped People Among Peace Makers and War Mongers*, February 1992, P.6).

In an almost evangelical spirit, the UTHR has castigated all 'peace makers' for "their lack of grasp of the reality" in the North.

We all are trapped in the reality of a multi-layered war, aren't we?

Perfection of a kind, was what he was after,
And the poetry he invented was easy to understand;
He knew human folly like the back of his hand,
And was greatly interested in armies and fleets;
When he laughed, respectable senators burst with laughter,
And when he cried the little children died in the streets.

W.H. Auden: *Epigraph on a Tyrant*

The Fall and Rise of Udugampola

Tough cops do not retire; they embarrass their masters.

Premadasa Udugampola and 'Keerthi Wijebahu'; these were the two names that sent shivers down our spines in 1987-89, the years of Southern insurgency. Wijebahu, the JVP's military-wing leader who sent out orders of execution, signed personally, is no longer around. Captured in November 1989, he was probably summarily executed, thereby sharing the fate of thousands of his own victims. Udugampola, the Deputy Inspector General of Police who played a leading role in the counter-insurgency efforts of the state, made a name for himself, by matching the ruthlessness of 'Wijebahu' and his killer comrades. On his own admission, Mr. Udugampola came down really hard on the JVP. Those who lived in Sri Lanka and survived those three years of living dangerously would know what the word 'hard' actually meant.

Udugampola, the tough top cop, is again in the news, now pointing an accusing finger at his own political mentors for 'human rights violations.' His 'revelations' were published in the *Sunday Times*, *The Island* and *Aththa*, a left-wing Sinhala bi-weekly. Udugampola has made pointed observations about the involvement of some unnamed leading politicians of the ruling UNP in the counter-JVP terror campaign.

Politically more damaging for the UNP is Udugampola's story about the 'Black Cats', that killer squad about which there was so much public fear. Udugampola has alleged, according to newspaper reports, that this killer squad was directed personally by some influential UNP politicians. He has also provided a list of over ninety names of people whom he claimed to have been killed by 'Black Cats' in January-March, 1989. *Aththa* published these names with a still more

damaging story: these victims were supporters of the opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party in the North-Central province and the killings were carried out during election time behind the veil of JVP terror.

Of course, when DIG Udugampola made these 'secrets' public, he was already *persona non grata* with the Government. He also had his grievances: his service in the police had not been extended and an inquiry into his alleged involvement in the death of lawyer Wijedasa Liyanarachchi in 1988, had already begun. The government had also given wide publicity at home and abroad to the inquiry against Udugampola as evidence of its intentions to punish those being accused of human rights violations. In fact, when Udugampola was denied an extension of his service in early February, the Sri Lanka Aid Group was to meet in Paris on February 7. The UN Human Rights Commission too was to meet in March. Meanwhile, diplomatic and donor pressure on the government had been increasing to make Udugampola accountable for very serious allegations of human rights violations.

The seriousness with which the government reacted to Udugampola's 'revelations' became evident when Prime Minister Wijetunga came on prime-time television to present the government's version of the 'Black Cats' and other stories. The Prime Minister's statement did not deny the 'Black Cat' killings, but suggested that Udugampola himself may have been involved in the killer squad. The gist of Mr. Wijetunga's rebuttal is that a disgruntled police officer, against whom a murder inquiry was under way, had become a willing pawn of anti-government elements.

The opposition, meanwhile, seized the opportunity to make political mileage

out of the government's discomfiture. Udugampola's allegations of para-state death squads operating against SLFP personnel during election time had come in the wake of the Election Commissioner's strictures regarding malpractices at parliamentary polls. At a joint opposition press conference held on April 9, Mrs. Bandaranaike, the Leader of the Opposition, demanded the resignation of the government and the appointment of an international commission of inquiry to investigate Udugampola's allegations.

For the non-state press, which has of late been asserting a considerable degree of independence vis a vis the Premadasa regime, Udugampola's disclosures could have been rich material for 'exposure' journalism. It was rumored in Colombo that Udugampola had circulated a number of affidavits, giving more details. It appears that the government strategists immediately decided on a political damage-control exercise. On April 9, the day after *Aththa* carried the news story about Black Cat killings, the Attorney-General filed two indictments in the High Court of Colombo, one against Udugampola and the other against the editor and publisher of *Aththa*. The charges, framed under Emergency Regulations, are for causing hostility, ill-will, hatred and contempt of the government of Sri Lanka and between different groups of citizens of the country.

Ironically, Udugampola was the *bete noire* of the Opposition and opposition-aligned press, until perhaps early last year. He was portrayed in the press as the epitome of brutality. The story of his meteoric rise during the Jayewardene administration was attributed by his ex-critics to his blind loyalty to the state and to his willingness to disregard norms of human



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rights. Still more ironically, his demonic image began to change when he was brought from Kandy to Colombo in 1990 to head a newly formed anti-vice police unit called the Bureau of Special Operations. He then led a series of raids on under-world business ventures in Colombo. His reported contempt for political patronage of vice won accolades in the press.

Framing charges against *Aththa* by the A-G is being viewed by the independent press in Colombo as a blatant attempt to intimidate the non-state controlled press. Both the *Sunday Times* and the *Island* have strongly denounced the government's move. The *Sunday Times* political correspondent pointed out on April 12 that by filing indictments against Udugampola and *Aththa*, the government has also sought to invoke the principle

of *sub judice* on the entire episode.

Meanwhile, the opposition parties in parliament have been making preparations for a no-confidence motion on the government. They have pointed out that issues raised by this senior police officer warranted a full parliamentary debate.

A public discussion in the press on Udugampola's disclosures may have legal implications as there are already two indictments pending at the Colombo High Court. Some more are likely to be filed against other newspapers which published the Udugampola story. Nevertheless, the whole episode should not be swept under the carpet. Nor should it fall victim to political bickering between the government and the Opposition. Indeed, the truth or otherwise of Udugampola's disclosures should be found out, not merely because the good names of many a politician and an official in the present ad-

ministration have to be cleared, but essentially because they raise some profoundly disturbing questions about the nature of the Sri Lankan state, and even of politics, today.

DIG Udugampola is not an ordinary cop; he has been, for many years, a major figure in the state apparatus. Judging by what is already public knowledge of his own activities in the entire decade of the eighties, he can be seen as one personification of the horrendously violent state apparatus evolved in response to violent political conflicts in Sri Lanka. His disclosures which appeared in the press are not just incriminatory stories about his ex-friends and patrons, but alarming accounts of subterranean or secret structures of the state about which very little 'authentic' information is as yet available.

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The World Cup fever has died in Sri Lanka. We are reproducing this article, first published in the SRI LANKAN of August 1990, as we think it appropriate to remind our readers of a subterranean discourse within international cricket. This 'unease' between 'Asian' and 'Western' cricketing nations was manifested in the 1992 World Cup, in Sri Lankans and Indians delighting in the fact that at least one of 'us' won the World Cup.

THE BAT, THE BALL AND THE FOUL MOUTH

by Michael Roberts

The Sri Lankan cricket tour of Australia in 1989-90 has highlighted the degree to which Australian cricketers go into important matches against cricketers from the Asian world with one distinct advantage: in addition to the Bat and Ball, their armoury includes the foul mouth.

The manifest inequality and Machiavellian instrumentalism which such abuse introduces into the game of cricket has been successfully obscured by Border and others. Those, such as Arjuna Ranatunga, who protest against such behaviour on grounds of sporting ethic and gentlemanliness are represented as wimps and/or dandies from a world that is now past.

The weaponry of abuse is wrapped up in clothes of tough professionalism. Australian instrumentalism (and its inequalities) masquerades as the sturdy Australian male, a male who insists that the (little) foreigner should show the world that he can be another Australian male who can give (bat, bowl, abuse) as much as he takes. Inequality and domination are thereby legitimated.

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The fact remains that the majority of Indian, Sri Lankan and Pakistani cricketers are no match for the Australian (or Briton or West Indian) in the game of verbal abuse the more so when the latter is complemented by physical obstruction (clothed as accident) by big fast bowlers.

A few Asian cricketers can cope with it all the time. Most can cope with it some of the time. But somewhere, sometime, an Asian batsman will lose his cool.

The result, not always but sometimes, is the loss of his wicket (there is *prima facie* evidence that there were at least two such cases on the Sri Lankan tour; and that is from my limited viewing experience). This, of course, encourages the Australians to reproduce these calculated tactics whenever a stand begins to obstruct this progress.

One cannot review the incidents that develop out of such tactics in isolation, as the media personnel are wont to do (witness their handling of the Aravinda-Tucker incident).¹

From the touring team's point of view, these incidents are part of their lived experience, part of their regular or intermittent victimisation by a range of Australians at both test and other levels.

From the perceptive observer's point of view, each incident is part of a pattern.

An investigative reporter would be able to discern when precisely such abuse (and obstruction) is called into play. It is when a batsman is getting on top of the bowling or when an adventurous or streaky shot has been played.

This pattern is revealing. It shows up the Machiavellian character of these acts of abuse. They are as slimy as they are cunning. They are out of the drawer of gamesmanship devised by Cardew the Cad. The honest and sturdy Australian man from the bush has, now on the cricket field, degenerated into a scheming being. The macho cult and bristling moustaches should not be allowed to cover up this fact.

Much attention has been focused on racial abuse. That is a misplaced emphasis. Some taunts are obviously racial. But black British cricketers also wield the Abusive Mouth! The racial side of the abuse has the same Machiavellian intent as the other abuse.

Indeed, it is arguable that the most effective abuse is not the racial taunt, but that which brings the Asian batsman's mother's genitalia, quite earthily, into the

→

THE BAT...

picture. The mother is a central figure in Asian culture. Such taunts have the capacity, at times, to penetrate the soul of the victim. The victimised batsman can lose his cool.

The popular Australian expectation (and defense) is that "these guys" must become tough, learn how to keep their cool. A simple solution? This simplicity is misleading. Behind this simplicity is a massive imperialism and a searing demand. It is a demand for Arjuna and his lads to totally transform themselves, to de-Ceylonise themselves.

It asks the Asians to give up their cultural values. It asks them to give up their identity. This is form of imperialist bigotry, no less powerful because it is parochial and seemingly simple.

It is for this reason that the Sri Lankan and other Asians should not meet abuse with abuse.² Apart from the fact that such retaliatory abuse is contrary to the sportsperson's ethic, the point is that it renders one into an Australian (or British) clone.

One is being turned into yet another western male, losing one's being as a Sri Lankan, Indian, Pakistani. That being is far more important than cricket. To resist such pressure towards standardisation is a greater act of resistance than scoring a century in the face of abuse. Stand as Self, Stand as Batsman.

Yet other solutions have been suggested. Ian Chappel on Channel Nine publicly

suggested that a batsman who is obstructed by a bowler should tap him on the ankle with his bat: bat against ankle rather than bat against ball. This is to answer one Machiavellian act with another. But, then, where does it stop? Somewhere in the past someone unilaterally introduced sledging (the Bradmans, Harvey, Benauds did not, after all, resort to it). That innovation became generalised into standard practice. But what is there to prevent an unilateral escalation of the contest? With T-56 or Kalashnikov as a "higher" stage of weaponry (and here the Sri Lankans and Pathans would have the advantage)?

It is time for intervention emanating from the highest levels. For some time, Imran Khan and others have been bravely pressing the ICC to introduce neutral umpires - an expensive but absolutely essential requirement.

Another item must be placed on the ICC calendar, and placed there pronto: the banishment (for a period) of players and captains who indulge in or condone sledging.

This will not be an easy step to take, inexpensive though it is. It calls for great resolve. Such resolve is essential if one is to preserve both the egalitarian principles and sporting ethic on which the game of cricket is constructed.

If the higher authorities do not intervene, there is a case for a symbolic act of liberation from a brave Asian cricketer: an emulation of a Tilak, a Dharmapala or a Ned Kelly on the cricket field in a manner which will make the authorities

wake up to the injustices that are being perpetrated and condoned by the cricketing world and its media (Jeff Wells being a notable exception).

The possibilities for symbolic violence as act of Eureka are not difficult to envisage. A wicket or a bat can be a lethal weapon. An Asia batsman could easily maim an offending cricketer permanently if he puts his mind to it. This memorandum is not presented in order to encourage such extreme steps. It is an attempt to prevent such a possibility in the future by requesting judicious intervention by the ICC so as to restore the scales of justice in cricket. It is an anti-colonial protest with the pen rather than the sword. The sword must always be a last resort.

Notes

1. Rod Tucker, medium pace bowler, was knocked for a couple of fours in one over by Aravinda de Silva. This led to his abusing de Silva who then deliberately ran into Tucker while taking a run.

2. One of the notorious stories in the cricket grapevine in Sri Lanka is about the abuse heaped on Hashan Tillekeratne by David Lawrence of the England B team when Hashan compiled a century at Galle in one of his first international games. During the game, Hashan approached Duleep Mendis, addressing him as *aiyya* (elder brother) and in a puzzled manner inquired why Lawrence et al were pouring humiliation on him. I introduce this story here to underline the different cultural idiom in which the Sri Lankans operate and to emphasise the fact that it is not solely a black/white divide.

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April is the Carnival Month ... Fake Primordial Rites of Spring in a Changing Society

For 350 days in the year, Sri Lankans follow the Lunar calendar (January - December) in conformity with the rest of the world (and we think of January 1st as the beginning of the New Year), but in mid-April Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindus of Sri Lanka (pretend to) revert to a primordial New Year ritual, based on the solar calendar, which is an occasion for revelry, eating, drinking, gambling and exchanging gifts. The conflict between modernity and tradition and the desire to have the best of both worlds continue. We want to modernise, to develop, to generate employment, to export our goods and to give our people a better standard of living. But we also want the Carnival. We continue to be the country with the highest number of public holidays in the world, where all work ceases in the month of April, which this year has given us opportunities not only for an endless binge during the New Year, but has also given us splendid excuses to disrupt work for Ramazan, Bak Poya and Easter.

Year in and year out, it is the media that sustains, invents and reinvents so-called tradition - tells us what to do, wear and eat, and advises us on lucky times and scolds the modern woman for not making (the labour intensive) kavun. Encouraged by the State, it whips up national fervour, with appeals to tradition and religion, making believe that the 'New Year' has a Buddhist connotation, when actually it is a simply a spring festival - common in mid-April to Southern India and Sri Lanka but not to other parts of India.

Rites of the Spring Equinox have always been observed by agricultural communities to whom the changing seasons were important. But in today's context, how meaningful are the traditions?

To the urban population the extended New Year holidays means closed shops, high

prices and many inconveniences. Not even a loaf of bread was available for nearly 10 days. Urban dwellers cannot light a real fire if they live in conditions which make a mockery (not to mention a fire hazard) of such a ritual. Only Rosy Senanayake can still pretend (in the adverts) that she makes kavun and bibikkan instead of buying a cake like the rest of us. The opening of banks on April 14th for *ganudenu* (give and take) is a joke; after which they revert back to the regular January to December procedures. This year, some columnists in the national newspapers have critically commented on and satirised the extended carnival in April. We reproduce below 'A Point of View' from the Business Page of the *Island*. (16.4.1992).

Despite slogans, rituals go on

Festivities are good and nice. Culturally and socially. They also help to keep the human camaraderie going.

Of course we are a great nation noted for festivals, rituals, carousals come what may. As the Leader writer in the *Island* aptly remarked the other day "Neva Gilunath Baan Choon..."

We do not, as a rule, miss a single festival in the calendar. And only the Guinness Book has failed to record the highest number of holidays we enjoy to celebrate this, that or the other.

When festivities begin, especially the traditional Sinhala and Hindu New Year, shops, bakeries that produce our daily bread and every other establishment, remain closed for more than a week. That has been a traditional ritual too.

The open market syndrome, competitive trade and our own concern to increase commercial activity, the government's ear-bashing slogans to export or perish, all

trade, come to a standstill during the festive season.

One wonders to what extent this modern concept of commerce and trade is consistent with the old traditional festivities that drag on for more than a week.

The dictum is, to develop, the wheels of industry must move. And they must move all the time. There can be no respite just because old tradition and custom demand a rest to celebrate - rather a long rest. Some wheels turn rusty when they return to the machines after an absurdly extended holiday.

Gone are the days when trade was a monopoly of the southern Matara man. He had his roots and family in the South but did lucrative business in the metropolis, because, as the saying went, the Matara businessman was born with native cunning and shrewd business acumen and knew all the games in the trade.

So all the Matara Kades remained closed until they daubed the holy oil on their enterprising heads at the auspicious hour, set out to resume business at the auspicious time, and until then, the urban consumer twiddled his thumbs with an empty larder.

But the scenario has changed. The Matara entrepreneur no longer controls the economy and the business. Yet, the age-old traditions, customs and rituals, continue. Good, the nationalist and the chauvinist would say. Pretty bad, the consumer would lament. Bad for business but good for culture, you could almost hear the man in between utter.

So, let us have more festivities, close shops as long as we want and to hell with business and economy!

Captive, Are You Awake?

Between dark heaven and earth, a cry heaves
Through silent night:
“Captive, are you awake?”
Can he sleep or is wakefulness his prison?
Something burns in his head.
Every moment, in each instant of his life’s term
He hears the ring of shackles, his solitude.
Into the blind hold
 Of his cell
 The sun like a dream
Comes to assert his presence. What cruelty it is
 To ask the eternally sleepless,
“Captive, are you awake!”

Wakeful through time, his fierce hard face
Through the bars directs its gaze.
Below his brows
Burn two arrows of questions.
Removed entirely from Nature, his eyes scorch the dark.
At private arts of love, of commerce, thirst, greed,
 And at the deep somnolence of humanity’s playhouse
He flings his echoing question:
“Are *you* free? Free?”

Sunil Gangopadhyay
from *CITY OF MEMORIES*

translated from the Bengali by
Kalyan Ray and Bonnie MacDougall