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

A CITY AWAKENED!

An anthropologist once said that, in Sri Lanka's recent past, violent upheavals had always been preceded by periods of drought. This year too, we experienced a severe five-month long drought, but this ended in an upheaval of a different kind — a deluge that played havoc in metropolitan Colombo and in its outlying areas. Nearly 500 millimeters of rain fell in just nine hours; it was no doubt a downpour of historic proportions, one that experts say will occur once in 200 years. Yet its consequences, as those of the many minor floods that have been experienced in Colombo in recent times, exposed the vulnerability of what is euphemistically called 'urban development' to the unanticipated convulsions of nature.

Unplanned and haphazard urbanization is an unhealthy by-product of Third World development. Big cities like Manila, Bangkok, Mexico City and Calcutta are monstrosities of modernity where squatter colonies and begging babies exist side by side with Mercedes-Benzes and high-rise buildings. Unlike other big cities in Asia, Africa and Latin America, Colombo has hardly been a major industrial location and has thus managed to avoid their fate. It has not experienced the mass migration of villagers eager to escape from grinding rural poverty and isolation. And inside the city, the workings of the welfare state system for almost fifty years has maintained some kind of urban peace.

Nonetheless, Colombo has changed significantly during the past decade or so,

primarily due to a flood of another kind — rentier capital. Following the aftermath of economic liberalization in 1977, merchant capital realized the potential of real estate and moved swiftly not only to meet the rising demand for urban housing among the middle and upper strata of the *nouveau riche*, but also to create it. Private developers sought to hide the shoddy construction and architecture of their housing schemes, located in hastily filled swamps, with mock-Greek columns and names like Estoril, Windsor Castle or the Willow Terraces.

Thus the eighties saw urban development of the most unplanned kind — the filling up of water retention areas, the blocking of canals and waterways, housing projects in inappropriate and potentially hazardous locations and inadequate drainage facilities. Regulatory bodies like local authorities, the Urban Development Authority and the Low Land Reclamation Board, bowed meekly before the power of capital and allowed it to have its way. Not only that; they played another role in attempting to ensure urban peace by allocating tiny bits of land in prime areas — as for example along the Kirillapone canal bank — to shanty dwellers. All of these played their part in magnifying the consequences of this month's flood; droughts and floods, as we are only too well aware, do not have purely natural causes.

The state and public responses to such cataclysms are haphazard. The severity of a drought, for example, is usually



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recognized only when the water levels of hydro-power reservoirs begin to fall and urban consumers of electricity are forced to endure power cuts. Floods, meanwhile, have hitherto failed to elicit any kind of long term response; the state rarely goes beyond relief donations allocated by the Ministry of Social Services — probably because floods have been largely confined to rural districts well outside the bourgeois metropolis of Colombo. The June deluge in contrast appears to have shaken this pattern of official apathy to natural disasters. Unlike drought, this flood was no respecter of class privilege. It devoured the video-cassette living rooms of the upper-classes as effectively as it did the single rooms of urban shanty-dwellers. Coming as it did in a flash, it took not only its victims but the entirety of officialdom, both political and bureaucratic,

by surprise. This elite, whose activities have transformed Colombo and its suburbs into a post-modern nightmare, are only just now waking up to the consequences of their deeds.

The urban question is one of the most neglected, yet singularly relevant social problems in Sri Lanka. As is well known, one of the consequences of haphazard capitalist development is weak and vulnerable socio-spatial structures. Today, Colombo and its satellites are not cities but mere demographic entities — lacking the adequate provision of basic civic amenities like unpolluted pipe-borne water, public toilets, parks and recreation areas, efficient sewerage and waste disposal systems, clean and hygienic public markets and transport. As always, the poorer sections suffer the most: this is visually evident in the emergence of new symbols of urban affluence in middle and upper class residential locations, contrasting with the decaying infrastructures of traditional proletarian quarters of the city. Thus the multi-storeyed shopping malls and glossy dress boutiques of Colombo 3 and 4 stand in sharp contrast to the squalor and decadence of Dematagoda, Narahenpita and Kotahena.

The June floods dramatically exposed some of the major structural deficiencies of Sri Lanka's urbanization. The bureaucratic response to this may probably be the construction of new and better outlets for the angry flood waters that may visit us again, uninvited and unforeseen. What is urgently required, however, is a re-thinking about what Colombo is and ought to be, in terms of its needs as an expanding metropolis. This dictates planning, more planning and yet more planning; not the combination of corrupt speculators and contractors and the *basunnehe's* uninformed efficiency, which may erect buildings, roads and shopping malls in record time, but with little or no regard for their long-term socio-spatial consequences.

A similar time bomb is also ticking in the new suburbs of Colombo like Mattegoda, Ranpokunagama, Kaduwela, and Raddolugama. All these are large hous-

ing projects, each containing more than one thousand units catering to middle class needs, that have come up in the last few years. With real-estate sharks buying acres of property and selling them in tiny plots of 10 to 20 perches, vast middle class neighborhoods have been created in areas isolated from schools, hospitals, work places and other basic facilities needed by these households.

A vast majority of these housing-estate dwellers work in Colombo and send their children to schools in the city. But no sooner is the dream house bought and the family moved in, the realization dawns on the lucky house owner that people live not under a roof alone. Water, waste disposal and transport have now become the most acute problems in these icons of middle-class illusion. Imagine a colony of one thousand middle-class households without a good school despite the presence therein of hundreds of children, without a decent bus service to the city to which practically every soul travels every morning, without a properly-equipped hospital nearby, and without other civic amenities like public parks, markets and shopping centers. Thus the old *koriyawas* of Kirulapana and Narahenpita are being reproduced, but further outside Colombo. The deluge of June may have done us a good turn, even though it cost much in damage, loss and grief, if it succeeds in opening the eyes of the citizens of the capital to the dangers that are undoubtedly ahead. The play of market forces, however desirable or necessary in certain fields, cannot cope with the larger issues raised by urban development, the ultimate objective of which must be the creation of urban environments that satisfy the basic needs of all their inhabitants. The present combination of rentier capital, a corrupt and self-serving political elite and a subservient bureaucracy cannot ensure this. It needs to be pointed out finally that it is not only Colombo that faces these dangers; to judge from government pronouncements and the advertisements of property developers, equally haphazard developments are taking place in the other urban centers too.

Notes and Comments

Dilemmas of Privatization

The privatization of economic undertakings in the public sector is one of the main components of the structural adjustment programme now being implemented by the Premadasa administration. Even a partial dismantling of the state sector of the economy, as envisaged in the adjustment exercise, is no easy task, because economics is profoundly political. There is resistance to privatization from a variety of quarters; trade unions, Buddhist monks, nationalist intellectuals and opposition parties have now found common cause in opposing privatization. It has become one of the main planks in the opposition to the UNP regime, even though a clear alignment of anti-UNP political forces is yet to emerge.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund prescribe a sort of universal plan of action for almost all the developing countries that depend on international capital and are at varying stages of linking with the world market. The reforms encapsulated in this plan of action comprises the so-called structural adjustment programme. For the economic experts of international capital, policy prescription is probably a painless exercise; it is not so, however, for politicians in aid-recipient countries who are compelled to execute the Bank-Fund inspired economic shock-treatment which often generates wide-spread opposition and protest.

Take, for example, the predicament of Mr. Premadasa's administration in Sri Lanka. For a populist regime which has so far depended largely on policies of social benevolence to secure social legitimacy and support, dismantling the state sector of the economy, however necessary in economic terms, is a difficult step. The nature of any populist regime is that it uses the state and its economic resources not only to distribute spoils among loyal groups but also to project the state as the ultimate source of social good and well-being. The state control of the economy is therefore a necessary ingredient of populism. The structural adjustment programmes run counter to this; they are aimed at withdrawing the state from the economic sphere so that the path is cleared for the play of market forces.

Making the bureaucratic and administrative apparatus of the state smaller is also an objective of structural adjustment. This, too, runs counter to populist projects of job creation.

Populist perceptions of the state are incidentally not confined to the President of the Republic alone; they constitute the ideology of the state most prevalent and even dominant in Sri Lankan society. This social populism is in turn linked with the Sinhalese nationalist project of enhancing and strengthening the interventionist role of the state in the sphere of ethnic relations and using it as an

instrument of Sinhala domination. Hence the extreme nervousness among Sinhalese nationalist groups about the possibility of the state becoming less and less active and interventionist in the economic domain.

There are hardly any strong economic arguments advanced by nationalist statistes against privatization. All their arguments border on xenophobia and sometimes communalism and are based on cultural and ideological considerations. Take, for example, the opposition to the privatization of plantations. Its central point is that privatization would enable Indian companies to buy up the plantations and, in collaboration with Indian labour, further facilitate Mr. Thondaman's dream plan to conquer the entire upcountry.

"The Beacon of the Nation"—this is how a Bank employees' union, in its campaign against the privatization of the Bank of Ceylon and the People's Bank, has described these two state banks. Beacons or not, the political use of state banks has in recent years reached scandalous proportions. It is only recently that some massive loan scandals involving these two banks embarrassed even the otherwise thick-skinned government. The point still is that those who want the two Banks to remain in the hands of the state do not argue for freeing these financial institutions from political control, interference and abuse. They simply protest against privatization.

Will Mr. Premadasa be able to ignore these protests and carry on with privatization? He has to, given the paucity of economic policy options available to him. He, or any other person in his shoes, would not be able to disregard what the Indian opposition calls IMF-World Bank dictates. What he can do, as he appears to be doing, is merely to modify the modalities of economic reform and alter the time table a little bit.

Archaeology and Political Legitimation.

June 14, 1992 marked, according to Sri Lankan Buddhist historiography, the 2,300th anniversary of the introduction of Buddhism to the island by Arahath Mahinda. On this day, President Premadasa went to Anuradhapura, accompanied by a number of his ministerial colleagues to observe *ata sil* (the eight precepts) and to participate in many other Buddhist rituals. Among a series of state-sponsored ceremonies to commemorate this historical occasion was the ordination as monks of 2,300 boys, under the direct patronage of the President.

June 14 happened to be a Sunday. The *Sunday Observer* of that day carried a report entitled "Ashes of Arahath Mahinda Found."



The report also quoted the Director in charge of the excavation work to say that the ashes had been found in a golden casket and that it has been "proved beyond doubt by the scientific tests carried out" that the ashes were of Arahath Mahinda. An archaeological miracle with science at its service? Another article in the *Daily News* a few days later disclosed that the cremation grounds of Arahath Mahinda had been established using the latest methods of thermo-luminescent dating.

Archeological miracles are now commonplace in this country. A year or so ago, there was this sudden re-appearance at the Presidential Secretariat of the Vallipuram gold plate, which was long considered lost. Even the night before the Gold Plate was ceremonially presented to the President by its faithful safekeeper—in the full glare of television cameras—archeological officialdom had come on a special television program, appealing to the public to help recover this valuable historical treasure. A miracle of a sort, indeed.

Now comes the news flash of the discovery of Arahath Mahinda's ashes, 'accidentally' coinciding with the important anniversary of his historic first visit to Sri Lanka. This news, however, was not all that dazzling to those who knew the work done at the Cultural Triangle. In fact, the story of a particular political command sent out from Colombo to archeological field workers in Anuradhapura has been circulating for nearly a year; according to this story, the tomb of Mahinda had to be discovered before the Poson Poya (June Full Moon Day) of 1992. And for about six months, it has been known in Colombo that the tomb had actually been 'discovered' by archaeologists; yet the news of it had to be withheld until the appropriate time came.

What price archaeology and archaeologists in the service of politics?

The Sangha and the State

In the May issue of *Pravada*, we commented on the growing rift between the Dambulla Chapter of the Sangha and the Premadasa administration. Is this the tip of an iceberg?

Sangha-state relations today are not as smooth as they used to be. A great deal of political unrest appears to prevail among Buddhist monks and they have been expressing it in public. They have been criticising Mr. Premadasa's policies and his style of governance as well.

Not all these criticisms emanate from a politically positive direction. For example, many leading Buddhist monks are quite displeased with Mr. Premadasa because he once negotiated with the LTTE leadership and still keeps on talking about a negotiated political settlement to the ethnic question. It seems that some priestly leaders have given up their hopes of Mr. Premadasa becoming a Dutugemunu incarnate.

Another source of discomfiture among monks is Mr. Premadasa's rather liberal and tolerant attitude to other religions. He not only goes and takes part in religious rituals at churches, mosques and Hindu *kovils*, but also gives much publicity to his own multi-religious

beliefs and practices. Obviously, many Buddhist intellectuals do not feel at ease with a Sri Lankan Head of State who appears ready to consider all religions on par.

Mr. Premadasa is a ruler who uses religion for political purposes. He also depends on religious as well as animistic rituals and practices to ensure personal and political protection. Nonetheless what appears to have angered some prelates is his indiscreet use of *Bodhi Poojas* (worship of the Bodhi tree) for overtly political ends. The Bodhi Poojas, which are organized by political supporters-cum-charlatans and given wide publicity in the press and television, are no doubt the cause of much derision and legitimate outrage.

One aspect of Mr. Premadasa's religiosity that has offended some Sangha leaders is the parading of *dasa sil mathas* in the *bodhi pooja* processions. Rev. Professor Walpola Rahula once condemned, in front of the President himself, these 'nuns.' His point was that these *mathas* were not properly ordained nuns, but mere lay women who had misappropriated the saffron robe of the monk. A large number of Buddhist monks who are dissatisfied with the Premadasa regime have publicly denounced the parading of these nuns by Mr. Premadasa's political enthusiasts in religious ceremonies organized to 'invoke blessings on the President and the country.'

The latest evidence of this apparently tumultuous relationship between the Sangha and the Premadasa regime is centered on the tourist hotel project in Kandalama, Dambulla.

The anti-regime members of the Sangha are being supported by the opposition press, notably by *Divaina*. Mr. Premadasa's political survival is not likely to be immediately threatened by this development; yet it is a matter which he cannot easily disregard. The Sangha has always been a major source of political support for any ruler, and their patronage and loyalty is crucial for political legitimation. If they are angered, their wrath can have serious political consequences as was demonstrated by Prime Minister John Kotelawala's fall in the mid fifties. Mr. Premadasa's task, then, is to restore the strained relationships with the Sangha. Given the enormous resources available to the State and Mr. Premadasa's particular ability to create new equilibria in situations of turmoil, it would be extremely interesting to watch how the Sangha-Premadasa conflict will unfold in the future.

In Mr. Premadasa's favour, meanwhile, is the fact that the Sangha society today is a thoroughly fragmented entity without a corporate coherence. There are groups of ecclesiastical capitalists who need state patronage. There are also Sangha communities of subordinate caste groups who view with favour Mr. Premadasa's ascendancy to the Executive Presidency. Therefore, the Kandyan Saṅgha aristocracy and its regional chapters may not receive committed political support from these subordinate Sangha groups to mount an effective campaign parallel to that in the early fifties. The absence of the Malwatta and Asgiriya chapters at the all-religions ceremonies at the Gam Udawa in Buttala may foreshadow such developments.

YET ANOTHER UNP FILIBUSTER

Qadri Ismail

From Ward Place to Sucharita Mawatha— it was always a politically logical succession. Sirimavo Bandaranaike and her United Front colleagues began the move away from a parliamentary system by centralizing power in the office of the prime minister. Junius Richard Jayewardene legitimized this move by giving it constitutional sanction, creating an executive presidency largely immune from parliament and the law of the land. Ranasinghe Premadasa was his logical successor — for Premadasa, today, *-is-* the law of the land. If from 1970 the Sri Lankan political system has been moving more and more towards domination by one individual, then in Ranasinghe Premadasa it has found that perfect individual: one who governs by himself, with perhaps a little help from a bureaucrat/advisor or two.

It is in this context, as well as that of rampant Sinhala racism, that the failure of successive UNP regimes to solve the Tamil question must be understood. (Racism, rather than the more commonly used chauvinism, is I believe the better term to describe this phenomenon because the “Aryan” Sinhalese perceive and present themselves as being —racially— distinct and superior to the “Dravidian” Tamils.) In Jayewardene’s case, as we know very well, Indian threats of force were necessary for him to concede — as he saw it— a third of the country to the Tamils. In other words, he didn’t even contemplate diluting his executive powers until compelled to do so by the Indian state. Premadasa is even more of a centralist than Jayewardene and today faces no compulsions to reduce his grip over the island: India is no longer an actor in Sri Lankan politics; the Tigers are no more than a military nuisance; and there isn’t an effective domestic peace movement. Under these circumstances, why should the president give up any part of his quite awesome power ?

So, the next time someone asks you whether His Excellency is serious about solving the ethnic problem, just say no. (And ignore his clamour about consultation, consensus and compromise.)

If the president was serious he would by now have tabled his proposals before the Select Committee — and challenged the Tigers, other parties and the Tamil people to consider them. But then if the president was serious, he would have given the LTTE a substantial set of ideas way back in 1990. He did not

because, being almost a congenital centralist, he cannot conceive of devolving away any of his power. And he knows that the only way to maintain his power is by continuing a low-intensity war against the Tamils. For, as long as he keeps on killing Tamils, not only will ethnic politics dominate the mind of the Sinhala voter, but Premadasa cannot be accused of selling them out; thus depriving the SLFP of the ability to sound more Sinhala than him. More importantly, this will also result in the relegation of pressing democratic and socio-economic issues, on which Premadasa is vulnerable the most, to the back-burner, which means, in turn, that as long as the war goes on, the SLFP will remain on the back-burner of Sri Lankan politics too.

Premadasa must realize, consciously or otherwise, that Sri Lankan politics were fundamentally altered in 1977. In that year, Tamil politics left the margin and entered the mainstream in the sense that the “national” opposition to the ruling party, in this case the UNP, was no longer its “traditional” rival, in this case the SLFP, but the entirety of the Tamil people, represented then by the TULF. In other words — and this is stating the obvious — Sri Lankan politics after 1977 was polarized between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. And it is precisely because Jayewardene’s UNP represented all, or almost all, strands of Sinhala thinking that it managed to rule the country continuously since then. Otherwise, Jayewardene’s many moves to stifle democracy and economic policies that unabashedly favored the upper classes would have sealed his fate amongst an electorate that, in the past, never hesitated to throw the rascals out.

For what Jayewardene very successfully accomplished was to accommodate all strands of Sinhala racism under the UNP umbrella from the urbane racism of Lalith Athulathmudali, through the militant kind of Cyril Mathew, to the lumpen type of Premadasa. This left the SLFP, and parties to the right of it like the MEP, unable to effectively distinguish their anti-Tamilness from that of the UNP; unable, because there was no distinction. The only brand of Sinhala racism the UNP could not represent, being a bourgeois party in the final analysis, was the violent variety of the JVP. Which is why in the period after the Indo-Lanka accord, while SLFP members fled their demonstrations at the first sniff of tear gas, the JVP emerged as the only effective opposition to the UNP. (A fact recognized by the SLFP too, thus its many efforts to woo the JVP in the run-up to the ’88 presidential election.)

Qadri Ismail calls himself a post-journalist.

The JVP, at least as an organized group, is now history. Thus the president can face no serious threat to his power base from Sinhala racist forces if he makes a genuine attempt at solving the ethnic problem. But, as I have argued above, he will not; since he will face a serious threat to his re-election efforts only if he does so. Given the absence of international pressure, whether from India or the United Nations, and the inadequacy of Tiger military pressure to force him to the negotiating table, only a powerful domestic (meaning largely Sinhala) peace movement can do the job.

If the SLFP has any political sense, it would move immediately along these lines. (I say the SLFP because none of the other Sinhala parties, of the left or the right and this includes the DUNF, would be able to successfully mobilize a peace constituency.) But, unimaginatively led by the Bandaranaike family, it has chosen instead to play right into the hands of Premadasa and keep the war alive. Indeed, their thinking on the ethnic question these days is controlled by the openly anti-Tamil Hela Urumaya group. More rational members of the party hint in private that it actually favors a solution to the ethnic problem along the lines of the DPA manifesto of 1988. If this is the case it would be excellent, but why not say so in public? Or at least table these proposals before the Select Committee?

Unfortunately, however, the SLFP has chosen to view the Select Committee as yet another Premadasa trap. The Committee should be comprehended, I think, in the light of similar exercises in UNP filibustering—like Thimpu, the APC, PPC and so on. But with one significant difference: it was originally the suggestion of an SLFP MP. The SLFP should make use of this, plus the fact that one of its members is the chair, in order to push through a set of proposals that the Tamil people would find reasonable. This way, they would immediately establish credibility among the minorities—a crucial vote bank at the next presidential poll—and put pressure on Premadasa to act. It is only by taking the initiative themselves, not by waiting for the President's proposals—which will probably never arrive—that they can avoid his trap. For Premadasa has a vested interest in not solving the ethnic problem.

The President's strategy should be obvious by now. He will pursue the military option for a while, purely for domestic Sinhala consumption. It doesn't matter that some of the more intelligent of his generals have told him that a military victory against a guerilla enemy is a contradiction in terms. Because all Premadasa desires is some means of keeping the Tigers alive so he can remind the Sinhala voter, without actually

saying so, that he intends to exterminate them. Of course Premadasa knows that the most effective way to destroy the LTTE is by drawing them into the political process (And if he didn't know this, Dayan Jayetilleke must have told him by now.) That way, the Tigers would have to face the wrath of the Tamil people. But the moment Premadasa does so, he would have to face the wrath of the Sinhala people, so he would rather have the war. But too much war would make foreign aid donors anxious, so after a while he will stop the military and send Thondaman, or Hameed, or some other lackey to Jaffna. If this doesn't satiate the donors, he will sacrifice the odd Udugampola. (The internationally infamous Ronnie Gunasinghe, the man identified by Manorani Saravanamuttu as the one who abducted her murdered son Richard de Zoysa, will probably be the next person to be so dumped.) Once the donors cool down, he will resume the military option in order to make the Sinhalese cool down. And so on...

This is a strategy that the Tigers, too will be very pleased with. Velupillai Prabhakaran needs the war in order to maintain his grip over the Tamil people. For only as long as the war goes

on can he convince the Jaffna public that the Sinhala state is racist and cannot be relied upon. This way, he can be certain of their support, however shaky, since in peacetime the Tamils are likely to complain about his rule of terror. Thus we find that Premadasa and Prabhakaran are involved in a crazy (and some-

In order to convince the Sinhala voter that he is intent on killing Tamils, the president cannot wish that the war in the north is ever concluded. He must keep it going at a slow pace.

what murderous) dance in which neither can let go. For if one falls, so will the other.

By such means, plus a certain amount of intimidation and impersonation at the polls, Premadasa hopes to continue ruling the country. With its current strategy, the SLFP only makes his task easier. There was a time the Sri Lankan voter routinely sent the ruling party packing at every election. But that was before the Tamil question over-determined all others in Sri Lankan politics. Before 1977, the SLFP represented a distinct alternative to the UNP. Today it does not, especially with regard to the most important question of the day, the ethnic problem. The only way it could become a serious alternative is if it takes the lead in solving the ethnic problem. But there is very little the SLFP has said or done since 1983 that would give us reason to believe that it has evolved away from the Sinhala racist politics within which it was born. Today's SLFP, it appears, is incapable of outgrowing its roots. Thus one can expect it to remain permanently in the opposition.

So, somewhere in Sucharita Mawatha, someone must be laughing.

The Weva, the Dagaba, and the Hotel: History as Commodity

Pradeep Jeganathan

An alliance of the landlords of the Dambulla Temple, populist sections of the Sinhala press, and a racist faction of a “social-democratic” political party have voiced their opposition to the proposed building of a government approved luxury hotel overlooking the Kandalama Tank near Dambulla by a publicly quoted company. One of the main arguments against the new hotel is one which has been advanced in recent years against other proposed hotels and international tourism in general: tourism corrupts our indigenous culture, claimed to have a history of over two thousand five hundred years. Hotels for international tourists, especially in the vicinity of the ‘ancient’ sites of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Sigiriya and Dambulla, this argument goes, are nothing but parts of a market that sell our pristine culture to foreigners. Culture here is equated with ‘history’, and ‘history’ has become a commodity: the horror, the horror of it all!

Such opposition to the commodification of culture and history is simple-minded. I argue that ‘ancient’ sites/sights of the ‘*raja rata*’ are really quite new. Anuradhapura and other sites which are now considered to be the material repositories of our ‘history’ emerge, in the forms and with the content we know, only in this age of capital, specifically after the 1830’s. And as these signs of ‘history’ — tanks and dagabas — are products of capital, we should not be surprised to find that the value of these commodities can only be realized after exchange and consumption. In other words, a hotel on the banks of a tank and a tour bus that leaves daily for the ruins are not ‘corrupting foreign influences.’ Rather, they are a necessary moment in the circulation of a commodified ‘history’, which is produced well within the logic of capital. What follows is an abbreviated defence of this argument, where I will take Anuradhapura, the symbolic core of ‘*raja rata*’ as my example.

To grasp the massive rise of the importance of Anuradhapura during the past 150 years, we must realize that this site was not very important to the indigenous kings of the early nineteenth century. For example Prince Muttusami, a British sponsored pretender to the throne of Kandy, agreed to cede a Kandyan province in exchange for British support of his ascension to the throne. The British wanted Sabaragamuwa, which Muttusami refused because it brought substantial revenues and would have led to the loss of Sri Pada, “the sacrilegious cessation of which would bring down on him ‘the wrath of heaven and the curses of mankind’”. The prince, however, was willing to cede the province of Nuwarakalaviya instead.¹ This is, roughly, what is now called

the NCP, and it didn’t worry the prince that he would have lost control of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, and Dambulla.

Turning to colonial representations of the area surrounding Anuradhapura, we find that even after 1815, when British colonial rule extended to the entire island, Emerson Tennant for instance refers to the area as an “unexplored district” or an “unknown mountainous region.” In this period (1815-1830), it is primarily military officers, in the pursuit of ‘rebels’ or ‘game’, who reach this area. Reports of ‘ruins’ in the interior are duly noted, but don’t warrant more than a footnote or passing reference in many written accounts. This region became important for the colonial project only after the setting up of large coffee plantations in the central hills in the mid 1830’s: large groups of wage labourers needed to be transported from South India to the central hills to work on these plantations. The swiftest route of migration was through this hitherto unordered region to the north of the central hills. The project of ordering land, which had been confined to the areas of 1817-18 rebellion, moved to the Nuwara-Kalawiyi, which later became the ‘North-Central Province.’

This project is simultaneous with the discovery and translation of the textual *Mahavamsa* in the 1830s, which until this point was known only as fluid oral narratives, constituted by a shifting field of social debate.² Even though other texts paralleling the *Mahavamsa* were available, none of them were thought to be ‘historical’ by the colonial Orientalists. In fact, until then the colonial claim was that the pre-colonial texts of all South Asia were, as James Mill put it, “a maze of unnatural fictions.” But after Georges Turnour’s translation, the specific sections of the *Mahavamsa* which do not speak of fantastic miracles, and incalculable time, are read as “rich in authentic facts...presenting a connected history of the island.”³ The crucial point here is that links between the newly translated textual *Mahavamsa* and the Sri Lankan landscape strengthened enormously after this point; since the 1850’s it is as if the text of the *Mahavamsa* were written on the ground.

There are a myriad ways to demonstrate this claim: I will present one example relating to the re-construction of a proper name. The site that we refer to as Anuradhapura is written in different transliterated forms in various colonial accounts. While part of this variation is attributable to the problems inherent in translating an unfamiliar word, I suggest that there is more to it: the two semantic poles that emerged throughout the early nineteenth century accounts were ‘Anurajapura’ and ‘Anuradhapura’. One can see the increasing use of the second term with the growing authority of the *Mahavamsa*. Now in Sinhala, Anurajapura could mean *Anu[wa]*-ninety, *raja*-king, *pura*-city: the city of ninety kings. In the seventeenth century Robert Knox referred to the city

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as a place where ninety kings ruled. The Portuguese historian, Fernao de Queyroz, also writing in the seventeenth century, was even more explicit: he referred to the palace as *Anu Rajapure*, which he translated as the "Mansion of Ninety Kings." By the nineteenth century, however, the authority of the Mahavamsa began to override this semantic construction: we can read this hierarchization in Jonathan Forbes: "It is the general belief of the *uneducated* natives that the name of the city is derived from Anuraja (ninety kings)" This semantic construction was displaced by the operation of the *Mahavamsa*, which refers to the city as Anuradhapura, giving two versions of its founding: by a person named Anuradha, or under the constellation Anuradha. By the middle of the nineteenth century the semantic construction became fixed as Anuradhapura. Note that Anuradha is a proper name linked to founding; it has no connotation of ninety. This transformation is not merely semantic finger-pointing to the recent origins of a reinvented proper name, it provides us with a brief glimmer of a massive shift caused by the inscription of the *Mahavamsa*, a particular version of 'history', on the landscape.⁴

After the translation of the *Mahavamsa*, then, Anuradhapura was reconstructed anew. When excavation of ruined sites began in the late 1870s, after the report of the Archaeological Commission of Inquiry appointed in 1868, the reconstruction commenced. Measurements and reconstruction enabled classification and the "site" to become a "sight", framed by aesthetic categories. Here, "correct" proportions, "elegance," and "fine" details produced the category of "beauty" (Thuparamaya); breathtaking size produced "sublimity" (Jethavanarama); and, crucially, the availability of a sanitized, ordered "state of nature", marked by the clear expanses of clean water in the new tanks, (as opposed to a smelly, malarial jungle and stagnant pools) produces the "picturesque": a place suitable for painting and picnics. The category of the picturesque, relevant in current debates, is actually a product of the excavations at Anuradhapura, intimately tied to the reconstruction of artificial reservoirs.

'Discovered' by European exploration, and then unjungled, measured, marked, sanitized and made 'beautiful', Anuradhapura was now ready for Tourism: this marked the realization of the commodity value of Anuradhapura. By the end of the nineteenth century several guide books appeared, notable among them, Caves' *Ancient Cities of Ceylon* and Burrows' *Buried Cities*. The Fergusons, newspaper and book publishers, would, at regular intervals give "accounts of the progress made [in 'Ceylon'] since 1803," so that the "resources awaiting development by capitalists, and the unequalled attractions offered to visitors" would be widely known in the metropolis. In these late nineteenth century accounts, Anuradhapura was listed under "Attractions for the Traveller and Visitor."

These accounts, I must stress, were not only produced for and by Europeans. Take for example the much celebrated Sinhala-Buddhist revivalist and close associate of the Anagarika Dharmapala, the Brahmachari Walisinha Harischandra, who was active in Anuradhapura after 1899. Harischandra was involved in a series of disputes with colonial officials, and was arrested (and later tried and acquitted) after a riot in the city in June, 1903. In 1908, he

published a book that dealt with, among other things, the uprising, the circumstances surrounding it and his arrest: *The Sacred City of Anuradhapura*. Much of the text reproduces existing colonial knowledge about the "authentic history" of the ruined city. But the commodification of this 'history' that is produced by the larger structures of international capitalism sit lightly with Harischandra: the last section of his text, is a straightforward tourist guide. He notes that the extension of the railway to Anuradhapura in 1904, makes travel much easier, and then presents, in lovely detail, the "best way to see the shrines and ruins... within easy access... within a limited time, without the interference of unqualified guides, who relate absurd stories...". It is an account for wealthy tourists, not pilgrims; much like Fergusons' accounts, referred to earlier. Not only does Harischandra point to rest houses that the tourist can use, but he repeatedly notes the picturesque quality of the tanks: "the visitor may go to the bund of the Abaya Wewa," Harischandra writes, "[where] the cooling breeze that wafts from this tank will no doubt refresh the tourist." And finally comments that after the day's sightseeing, the tourist will find "a drive over that grand bund of the Nuwara Wewa," refreshing.

In the logic of Harischandra's text, then, tourism intersects easily with Anuradhapura. Why? The production of the commodities of 'history' and the 'picturesque' in the north central province, necessitates these very commodities of 'history' and the 'picturesque' to be consumed as well. And this means tourism, both local and international: hotels over looking tanks and guided tours to ruined cities. And, of course, profits to the share holders.

What then, is the space for a critical political project, given this reality? I wouldn't say this project is to be forgotten. Rather, that if we are to question the profits of these hotels, as part of a larger socialist project that opposes the alienation and surplus appropriation that is central to the logic of capital, then we must also, as part of the same project, question the signs of the reconstructed, commodified 'history' that dot the face of the country.

Notes

1. Colvin R. de Silva, *Ceylon under British Occupation*, vol.1, 1953:100.
2. For evidence of such social debate, even to this day, see Gananath Obeyesekere's "The Myth of Human Sacrifice: History, Story and Debate in a Buddhist Chronicle" in *Social Analysis* vol 25, 1989:78-93.
3. Tennent, *Ceylon 1859/1975*: 266. The incorrect leap of faith here is to assume that the *Mahavamsa* is locatable in a modern historiographic convention, neglecting notions such as incalculable time that are crucial to the text. If such notions are taken seriously, as they should be our reading changes dramatically: the period of the composition of the text can shift forward some 600 years. For such a brilliant reading of the *Mahavamsa* and associated commentarial texts see Jonathan Walters, "Positivist Paradise Lost: On the History of the Pali Chronicles of Sri Lanka" in *Post-Orientalist Strategies*, Ronald Inden (ed.) Delhi: 1992.
4. 'Anurajapura' could be thought of as a corruption/oral form of 'Anuradhapura': dha->da->ja. My point, however, concerns the meaning given to the earlier form (ja), by native speakers of the area, and the subsequent shift, in literate speech, with new meaning to the later form (dha).

THE SWAMI AND THE SUB-TEXT

Radhika Coomaraswamy

When a well-respected civil servant came and requested that I give the first memorial Swami Gangadharaanandhaji lecture, I hesitated, but later agreed. What seemed in the beginning to be a simple gesture toward a very kind gentlemen was to end in an important process of critical self-evaluation.

The response to the lecture, as edited and reproduced in the *Sunday Times*, was overwhelming. I received praise and also stern condemnation. The response itself forced me to ponder many questions, which in the final analysis reflect the complex state of our national and ethnic ideologies and the intensity with which we take up positions and counter positions.

In preparing the lecture, I had two simple aims. Realizing that the audience would be primarily orthodox, Tamil Hindus, I thought I would confront religious fundamentalism and 'ethnic exclusivism' by using the language and discourse of Gandhi, Tagore as well as Swami Gangadharaanandhaji. I would use the heterodox, humanistic arguments of the Hindu faith against its own intolerant manifestations. I essentially saw the project as progressive and humanist, to attack attitudes towards other ethnic groups, sexual stereotypes and caste oppression by using the discourse of Hinduism itself; to fight Hindu intolerance with Hindu traditions of pluralism.

The second aim was to discuss philosophy through the art of story-telling and anecdotes rather than by positivist analysis of principles. This would show that many of the debates are produced and reproduced in the daily lives of every individual whether we live in Sri Lanka or New York. Some friends felt that the anecdotal style had a touch of narcissistic self-aggrandisement. But then so does every biographical moment. Positivist scholarship always attempts to erase the author from the text searching for detached universal principles. But in the area of ideology and religion, the author's experience and beliefs are as important as the text. The subject is always present even in objective analysis. To accept that subjectivity and to see that your life experience conditions your political analysis is an important part of recognising the limits and contours of self-perception. For religious people

who believe in secular ideals this self-examination is even more important.

The most interesting responses in support of the article's message came from two quarters. The first was from what I would call 'the independence generation', those who were old enough to remember the Indian nationalist movement. The quotations from Gandhi and Tagore evoked a political era when everything seemed possible; when South Asia was having her "tryst with destiny", when Hindus and Tamils were not the 'other' but actually brothers and sisters fighting the British. The extent of their praise and the emotion with which it was expressed conveyed their sense of historical betrayal.

Though drawn from the English educated elite, this elite for a short period in our history had a South Asian vision and identification. By 1956, that commonality was superseded by difference; South Asian unity by ethnic demarcation, and India would move from spiritual guru to regional power. The use of Gandhian rhetoric to overcome difference was a welcome nostalgic return to an era which can never really return to a strife-torn, class besieged, post-colonial Sri Lanka. Since my childhood was filled with images, speeches and ideals drawn from this pre-independence era, their emotions had a resonance in my own thoughts. I have to realize, that I too, was deeply influenced by this period. While my leftist colleagues see 1917 and the Bolshevik victory as an important turning point, while others see 1956 and Bandaranaike as the beginning of modern Sri Lankan politics and while others see Periyar and the Justice Movement in Tamil Nadu as the significant date, for me the victory of the Indian nationalist movement was the decisive post-colonial moment and the beginning of post-colonial history.

These dates are important, because their shadows continue to haunt their disciples. The perception of what is the important historical moment conditions not only the nostalgic response but also the emotional contours of our political ideologies. Many of us have 'knee-jerk' reactions to certain political statements. Perceptions of historical moments are very important indicators as to what discourse will produce which reaction.

The second group of people who made a special attempt to call and give positive comments came from other religions; Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, i.e. those who are fighting funda-

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mentalism within their own faith, using the discourse of religious humanity against the discourse of religious intolerance. They saw this as part of the common struggle against religious fundamentalism of any sort. In some sense it is this group which best understood my motives and had sympathy for my attempts.

And yet, neither of these two supportive groupings could pacify those who saw my article as a terrible betrayal to the cause of democracy and pluralism. *How could I betray secularism with such ease? How could I be so comfortable with religious language, religious imagery and religious inspiration?* One friend actually wrote to me "From today you are a stranger. I have read your articles on law and politics, but here you have betrayed your essence...you are not a secularist, not emotionally and not in the real sense of the word. You are in fact, a part of the problem."

The critique was delivered in angry, harsh tones. But it was the truth. Religious impulse has always been second nature to me as it is to most South Asians. I never thought it was in necessary contradiction with secularism. And yet, the moment one uses the discourse of religion, even for humanistic purposes, one is ultimately compromising with secularism. Gandhi was so profoundly Hindu that despite his rhetoric of oneness, at some point, his mere being, his emotive language, must have alienated Muslims. The principles behind the Sarvodaya movement are beautiful but in the end they are so very Buddhist that other religions cannot feel completely at ease. In the case of Jatika Chintanaya, there is not even an attempt to make the other groups feel at home. Liberation theology may be progressive, but at some point the non-Christian feels the difference, the separation, the 'otherness'.

And so the Catch 22 of South Asian society. We are profoundly religious, whether we are Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim or Christian; that religiosity transforms itself into becoming part of our culture, our discourse, our imagery without even our recognition or awareness. When we fight intolerance using religious language, we strengthen religious importance and lessen secular values. And so we have a society of concentric circles; Buddhists speaking to Buddhists; Hindus speaking to Hindus; Muslims to Muslims and Christians to Christians. The only language and political institutions that cross this frontier are the post-enlightenment Western traditions of secularism, rooted in liberal and Marxist theory. It is the 'colonial' which finally offers us the bridges. But the mere illegitimacy of the 'colonial' makes this an unappetising enterprise. And so we

revert back to our concentric circles, searching for humanism within but at the same time strengthening the boundaries without, those which separate Buddhist from Hindu, Hindu from Christian, Christian from Muslim.

As Romila Thapar said at a recent seminar, South Asians are truly trapped. If we speak the language of secularism, we become marginalised, a cosmopolitan elite incapable of communicating with the vast majority of our people on an emotional, cultural level. If we speak the language of religion, we fragment our continent, create divisions, and separate worlds. We become unwilling accessories of the fundamentalist project.

Having said that I think back at my audience. If I had spoken to them in secular terms, if I had quoted Locke on democracy, Sadaavi on feminism and Fanon on caste, "if I had spoken of Michelangelo", they would have absorbed my speech as an "Intellectual exercise. But because I used the words of Gandhi, of a beloved Swami, of Tagore, I knew I have reached them

emotionally. Since our most chauvinist nationalist movements rest on emotion, the alternative emotional language of religious humanism is a very powerful antidote.

This cannot be underscored in these troubled times. For Sri Lankan Tamils this is especially true. The triumph of a military-nationalist culture in recent years requires or even mandates that intellectuals de-

liberately rediscover, nurture and develop the humanistic aspects of our religious and cultural tradition. It is central to the exercise of defeating ethnic intolerance and the rule of the gun.

For Tamils, there is of course another option, the secularism of linguistic nationalism of the early DMK as opposed to religious nationalism. Periyar did say "God is dead". But we cannot forget that linguistic nationalism is the direct precursor to present-day militant Tamil nationalism and their so-called "Tamil Speaking World of Goodness" has led to strident forms of ethnic chauvinism.

A call to religious humanism is therefore **not only one important antidote against Hindu fundamentalism of the BJP variety but also a voice against the narrow ethnic chauvinism coming out of Tamil linguistic nationalism.** But while appealing to this religious humanity to help us at this moment, we will perhaps see the shadows of Goethe and Dr Faustus hovering nearby, reminding us of the price we may still have to pay.

I intended to use the heterodox, humanistic arguments of the Hindu faith against its own intolerant manifestations. Members of the 'independence generation' and those who are fighting fundamentalism within their own faiths best understood my motives. But others accused me of betraying the cause of secularism and humanism.

SEXUALITY IN AND OUT OF PUBLIC DOMAIN

Vasuki Nesiah

Over the past year, three highly publicized incidents involving violence against women have provoked debate and controversy in the United States. All three cases involved women speaking out against men who are very powerful public figures. It started with the nationally televised senate confirmation hearings of Clarence Thomas on allegations of sexual harassment in the work place; Anita Hill, a law professor at University of Oklahoma pressed charges against her former boss, Thomas, then nominee for (and now appointed to) the American Supreme Court. The trial on Patricia Bowman's date rape charges against William Kennedy Smith (of Kennedy family fame) followed; again, the verdict came in favour of the man. Closely following on its heels, the ongoing Mike Tyson /Desiree Williams rape trial once again brought up the issue of date rape. Tyson (American boxing hero) lost in the trial court, but is widely expected to win on appeal. We should note that one crucial effect of there being three very public cases within a matter of months (together with the long history of feminist struggle over the years) is that they helped counter the insistent impulse towards reducing the broad social implications of sexual violence to the narrow evaluation of the truth or falsity of individual charges.

Sexual violence is a pervasive feature of women's lives - not just from strangers in dark alleys, but, and in fact more commonly, from family members, husbands, boyfriends, employers ... people who are able to gain access to women's bodies by reason of the power relations entrenched and legitimated in such institutions as family, marriage, employment. We should note that these cases do not simply reflect external social relations - the incidents help constitute social relations even as they are constituted by them. We should also note that the three cases simultaneously intervened in tense struggles involving not just gender relations but also the fault-lines of the discourse on sex and sexuality, race relations and of hierarchical relationships in the work place. In repeatedly implicating multiple points of intersection along a number of axes, these cases underscored the impossibility of any generalized theory of sexual violence.

The issue of race provides an interesting take-off point to explore some of the points of intersection. Race and racism intervened and were repeatedly deployed in efforts to invent and inscribe the problem to privilege particular meanings, particular frames of reference. Thomas and Tyson (and their respective supporters on the Bush administration and legal defense team) both invoked the history of the lynching of Black men on charges of sexual violence to claim that they were the victims, not the victimizers.¹ Here we see the shrewd exploitation of the history of Black suffering under racial violence invoked to devalue and deflect critical questions regarding violence in the field of gender. While acknowledging the cynicism of the Thomas/ Tyson invocation of racism, we also see the history of the lynching of black men as an undeniable part of the text against which we read race and sexuality in contemporary America. It is noteworthy that some of the negative responses to the Thomas/Tyson invocations did the reverse twist in asserting sexual violence without acknowledging the history of racial lynching. Thus in some sense race and gender were each invoked to overdetermine the other.

Certainly one sees quite telling contrasts (with regard to the stereotypes deployed, the credibility attached to different actors etc.) in terms of how the mainstream media (and the public at large) handled these two cases as opposed to the Kennedy/Bowman case. One of the factors that to me underscored the racially charged assumptions behind the handling of these cases was the extensive discussion (on the part of both defenders and detractors) in the context of the Thomas/Hill and Tyson/Williams cases, on the mores and values surrounding gender relations and sexuality in the Black community, the norms of Black masculinity etc. In contrast, there was no equivalent discussion in the Kennedy/Bowman case of the mores of the white community, the norms of white masculinity etc. Thus Kennedy and Bowman were magnificently de-racialized while Thomas and Tyson (and to some extent Hill and Williams) were 'naturally' racialized. The import of these racial oppositions are necessarily involved in the meanings attached to sexual harassment in different contexts. We thus need to be sensitive to the multiple structures complicit in the production/reproduction of sexual violence and to be aware that it is difficult to theorize about, or act against sexual harassment without contextualizing it in terms of the interaction of a number of struggles. →

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Moreover, even when looking at particular contexts, we will be faced with many and even contradictory narratives of race, gender, sexuality, class etc. For instance, these cases offer contradictory twists to the public/private dichotomy - a frame that would function to render sexual violence unseen and unheard. The fact that these three incidents involved men who are public figures served to send conflicting signals that simultaneously stressed and undermined the pervasive nature of sexual (private) violence. On the one hand, this 'public-ness' may have emphasized that, rather than being the aberration, violence against women is the norm. Perpetrators were not limited to those whom society would normally brand as psychopaths or socially deviant. The possibility that even society's success stories could be culpable demonstrates that sexual violence is not just tolerated, but perhaps even encouraged. On the other hand the media sensationalism that accompanied the very 'public-ness' of the men charged also contributed to the notion that these incidents were the exception. Allegations of sexual violence (by implication, spoken of here as mere sexual promiscuity) were dismissed as problems that beset the lifestyles of 'the rich and famous'; the Other, not us. In this story, then, sexual violence is regarded not as an every day feature that systematically threatens women's security and control over their bodies in all walks of life and in all contexts of social interaction.

There is an even more provocative sense in which these cases were fraught with the contradictions and tensions surrounding the public/private dichotomy. The fact that sexual violence, traditionally among the most private of matters, was here aired in the most public arenas, must pull at the seams of an ideological frame based on the public/private dichotomy. It is a little difficult to maintain the public/private opposition when national television airs extended discussion on public hair on coke cans, Clarence Thomas' boast about the length of his penis etc. We may see the overt phallo-centrism of the latter example as being the most explicit indicator of the tension that inheres in the demarcation of social space as public and private. In this precarious negotiation of sexual violence, one could also see that the reverse pull of the traditional frame was seen in (not necessarily conspiratorial) attempts to preserve the public/private dichotomy. It is noteworthy, for instance in the Thomas/Hill hearings, that the senators would invariably refer to Thomas by using his professional title, Judge Thomas, while they addressed Hill as Ms. Hill, not Professor Hill. Each was relegated to their 'rightful' gendered home - he to the public, she to the private!

In the Thomas/Hill hearings, Thomas was invariably addressed as Judge Thomas, while Hill was called Ms rather than Professor Hill. Thus each was delegated to their 'rightful' gendered home — he to the public, she the private.

An important factor that characterized the handling of, and response to, all three cases, was the deep moralism that accompanied much condemnation of sexual violence. Although there were important debates in feminist circles at the time of these cases, the mainstream press carried very little of this ... and even when it did give us the token feminist, we often got a distorted picture of the spectrum of feminist critique.² Clearly the dominant voice in the criticism of sexual violence (including the strand of feminism that received the most attention) carried a moralist flavor. Again and again the effort was to portray sexual violence as a vulgar offence to moral sensibilities, rather than a misogynist assertion of power that has far reaching material and ideological consequences in framing the terrain for gender relations. Moralism was quite insidious in deflecting attention from the structural importance of sexual violence in maintaining and reproducing gendered power relations across the board.

Moreover, in attacking male sexual violence, the moralist strand often invoked, and worked through, a model of sexuality that not only assumed a primarily heterosocial space for sexual relations but also produced essentialist images of sexual agency dichotomized along gender lines. A good deal of discussion of male sexuality (where the violent assertion of power was often read as the 'natural' expression of an almost primordial sexual drive), was accompanied by little, or very tempered discussion of female sexuality (such that even women's continued resistance to sexual violence

was read as mere expression of 'natural' female diffidence in matters sexual). In addition to legitimating the double standard (and/or a depoliticizing of this issue as innocent misunderstanding between the sexes), the denial of this disruptive resistance is intimately tied to a model of passive femininity). By and large, on both sides of the line, these women were only objects, not subjects, of sexual agency. It is absolutely crucial to keep in mind that this model of asexual/passively sexual femininity is the same model that attempts to control and deny women's sexual agency in other contexts. In fact even the critique of sexual violence is often contingent on women fitting this model (to the exclusion of prostitutes and others labelled 'promiscuous'). Thus we cannot draw any easy link between opposition to particular incidents of sexual violence and opposition to gendered power relations.

In evaluating any long term impact of the three cases, we come up with mixed messages. There seems to have been some positive impact in electoral politics. Over the last few months,

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more women have been voted into political office in important constituencies across the country; the impact is most noticeable in cases where women offered (unexpected) strong opposition running against incumbent senators who voted for Clarence Thomas. The question of electoral politics also brings in the question of party rivalry. To some extent the senate hearings served to emphasize that absorption in the intricacies of party politics can mask the underlying consensus between the parties by conjuring up the image of debate. At the end of gruelling senate hearings (where Hill was essentially persecuted for having broken ranks by making public her charges) the nomination of Thomas (despite what for many was quite convincing evidence) at least temporarily highlighted the fundamental ideological agreement between the Democrats and the Republicans, an agreement that was virtually hidden by the pretense of political debate. The silent (im)potence of the Democrats (best personified by the very loud silence of Senator Kennedy, representative of the most liberal wing - silenced by the fact that over the years, both he and his family had been themselves beset by charges of sexual violence), the Democrats' complicity in the nomination of Thomas (and the political climate that made Thomas possible), the extended debate on tensions surrounding the Democratic party's female and Black electoral base, etc. etc. ... all this came together in demystifying party politics - at least for a single unstable moment. Perhaps the electoral victories of women may be indication of a limited, but at least somewhat positive, echo of that moment. In a more pessimistic reading, we may see these victories as (or also as) the system's co-optation of women in a crisis management effort to stabilize itself and return to its usual course.

These cases have also provided a critical rallying point for mobilizing feminist activism in grass roots campaigns across the country, and (at least temporarily) bringing the question of sexual violence to the forefront of public debate at a national level. While the mobilizing of feminist activism is likely to have a positive impact in the long term, the impact of the broader public debate is more complex and ambiguous. As mentioned earlier, the moral sensationalism of much of the attack on sexual violence makes it unclear if the tenor of public consciousness leans towards attacking male violence primarily in terms of political packages that also include the further regulation of women's sexuality.

Moreover, in many ways these cases reproduced and entrenched all the familiar sexist stereotypes that come with the issue of sexual violence. Be it the image of the "she was asking for it" inviting female (Tyson virtually argued that the fact that the woman agreed to the date, also meant surrendering her

rights to consensual sex), the loose woman (the Kennedy team asserted that the woman's, supposedly "skimpy," panty was 'relevant character evidence'), or the vengeance of the 'scorned female' (a recurrent metaphor in the Thomas/Hill hearings) all three cases invoked deeply sexist images. As instances in the ideological frame, these cases emphasised the continuum of objectification - from a sexist pass at the bus stand to the concrete material thrust of rape.

While the outcome, (like the Rodney King case), may have had some positive effect in exposing and de-legitimizing the claims of the institutional (legislative and legal) mechanisms to render 'justice', we remain disheartened by the fact that Thomas and Kennedy were both exonerated, and that Tyson is likely to win the appeal. Although we must problematize any discussion that reduces cases to the formal verdicts alone, we do echo the frequently expressed concern that the verdicts (and the social and psychological sanctions on the women who spoke out) may have a chilling effect on women who may contemplate pressing charges in the future (and perhaps an emboldening effect on men who continue to inflict sexual violence).

On both sides of the line, the women in these cases were seen as objects, not subjects of sexual agency. This model of passively sexual femininity is the same that attempts to control and deny women's agency in other contexts.

Finally, it is important to reiterate how well these cases demonstrated the material power relations underlying the ideological force of sexist structures. In all these cases, there were enormous disparities between the men charged and the women pressing charges, in regard to financial resources, political power, access to (and friendliness of) institutions such as the legislature, legal system, media etc. The em-

ployment context of the Thomas/Hill controversy provides particularly telling insights into the deeply interlinked and mutually reinforcing effect of women's economic dependence and incidents of sexual harassment in the workplace. We have further testimony to the institutionalised power relations that continue to structure and sustain sexual violence.

Notes

1. The invocation of racism by Thomas and the Bush administration carries a double irony because in addition to the stark cynicism displayed in the context of hearings on sexual violence, we should also note that both Bush and Thomas are notorious for their concerted effort, in the courts and the legislature, to uphold the institutional arrangements that sustain a racially stratified society (for example, their opposition to affirmative action).
2. In saying that critical feminist inquiry was marginalized in much mainstream press, it should be added nevertheless that even the mainstream does evidence some of the cumulative impact of years of feminist critique.

TO BE BUDDHIST AND EQUAL

Elizabeth Harris

The distinction between the person who renounces lay life for a path of intensified religious effort and the one who persists with lay responsibilities has always been an important one within Buddhism. The original call of the Buddha was a simple one. "Come, O monk, live the life of brahmacariya in order that you may put an end to suffering".¹ In the Buddha's lifetime, this call was eventually offered to both men and women, although it increasingly meant adhering also to a weighty body of disciplinary rules as the Sangha became institutionalised. The Pali texts give examples of respected and gifted nuns;² the *Therigatha* shows the Buddha urging nuns to achieve the highest in Buddhist religious terms:

Come, O Dhira, reach up and touch the goal
Where all distractions cease, where sense is stilled
Where dwelleth bliss; win thou Nibbana, win
That sure Salvation (yogakkhema), which hath no beyond.³

How does the Buddhist woman renounce lay life today? If she lived in Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan or China she would receive full ordination. If she were a western woman, there would be several options, but most include training in a Buddhist country of her chosen tradition and then being ordained in one of the above countries, often Taiwan, although in recent years, ordination has also become possible in the United States. Several, for instance, have trained as *Sil Maniyos* in Sri Lanka and then travelled to Taiwan for ordination. Even more have chosen the Tibetan tradition, where women can be ordained as novices but not as bhikkhunis and have made the same journey to Taiwan at the appropriate time. A woman born in a Theravada country such as Sri Lanka rarely has such freedom. Not only is higher ordination denied her but even ordination as a novice. She could take the robes of a *Sil Maniyo* or *dasa sil mata*, the more usual name, but would be recognised as following only ten disciplinary rules rather than the entire *Bhikkhuni Vinaya* of 311. As such, she could find herself accused of having no right to wear orange, although she had renounced home, family, property and the right to earn her own income.⁴ In addition she would no doubt be aware that the Pali Canon also contained words of a deeply misogynist nature reflecting the popular tradition that to be born a woman was a proof in itself of bad karma. In the following, the woman is declared a wife of the devil, in words attributed to the Buddha:

Monks, a woman, even when going along, will stop to ensnare the heart of a man; whether standing, sitting or lying down, laughing, talking or singing, weeping, stricken or dying, a woman will stop to ensnare the heart of a man.
Monks, if ever one would rightly say: it is wholly a snare of

Mara - verily, speaking rightly, one may say of womanhood: it is wholly a snare of Mara.⁵

Many have accepted these limitations and become *Sil Maniyos*. Among these have been those who have believed in an unbridgeable gulf between bhikkhu and *sil maniyo* and have considered this natural given woman's inferior karmic status. Others have denied any such inferiority but, placing emphasis on inner holiness, have felt that the religious life can be lived with earnestness in spite of societal restrictions and lack of public esteem. A limited number sincerely yearn for the privilege of following the entire bhikkhuni discipline, as the Buddha first designed it.

In the early centuries of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, the Bhikkhuni Order was active and prestigious. The Venerable Sanghamitta not only brought from India a sapling from the Bodhgaya Bo Tree but also ordination for women. In 429 AD and 433 AD, according to the Chinese work *Pi-chu-ni-chuan* (The Biography of Bhikkhunis), groups of nuns travelled to China from Sri Lanka and gave ordination to several hundred Chinese women, thus revitalising and restoring the Order in that country. Although the *Mahavamsa* gives scant recognition to the ongoing existence of bhikkhunis, the *Dipavamsa* accepts nuns as part of the Buddhist hierarchical structure and shows them in positions of responsibility.⁶ It has even been argued that the *Dipavamsa*, of the 4th century AD and predating the *Mahavamsa*, was the work of bhikkhunis.

Historical records do not mention active bhikkhunis after the eleventh century. It is probable that socio-economic and political pressures made it impossible or dangerous for women to renounce. The Order, therefore, lost its capacity to provide the obligatory number of nuns to ordain new recruits.⁷ No attempt was made to gain help from another Buddhist country. China, as far as we know, was never approached. It would appear that the now male-dominated Buddhist hierarchy was content to accept the dying of a female monastic presence. In times of political instability and economic hardship, the role model imposed on women was more likely to be that of home-preserver and mother of sons than that of religious leader. In addition, it is not impossible that friction between the Mahavihara and the Abhayagiri Nikaya and the eventual ascendancy of the former could have also contributed. Although there were nuns in both sections, those who went to China were from the Abhayagiri Nikaya, deemed heretical by the Mahavihara because of their openness to non-Theravada thought. It is a subject which merits more research.

Until the twentieth century therefore there is no mention of Buddhist nuns in the writing of Sri Lankans or European imperialists. William Knighton, British planter and later journalist, writes in 1854:

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In Ceylon and India, the order of priestesses does not appear ever to have been numerous, and in both countries they are now extinct, but they exist, although not very numerous, in Burmah, Siam and China, (1854: Volume II 32/33)

Bishop Reginald Copleston, Anglican Bishop in Sri Lanka from 1875-1902, also implies the Order was never strong and claims:

There are, so far as I know, no places named after nuns; no stories about famous nuns; none of their dwellings or halls, so far as we know, remain. (1892: 249 f)

Yet, later, in the context of words concerning the Revival, he refers to devotees of "Ten Obligations" or *dasa sil upasikas* who shaved their heads and wore a special dress. He further writes:

There are very few men of this profession; but a considerable number of such women, generally old, are to be seen about the temples, especially in Kandy, or on the way to Adam's Peak. They usually carry bowls as if for begging, and their shaven heads and dirty white dresses give them a pathetic aspect; and one who had read the books would naturally suppose them to be nuns. Female mendicants they are; but they have not been admitted to a Community, and therefore are not called 'bhikkhunis' but only 'upasikas'. (1892: 471-472)

It was these *upasikas* who formed the seed of the present *Sil Maniyos*. Their status has been raised since Copleston's time.⁸ Yet, they are still perched between lay and ordained life. Having renounced as much or may be more than the monk in terms of physical comfort and public respect, they are faced with difficulties of security, education, accommodation and financial resources. The Ministry of Buddha Sasana does provide means for many to attend dhamma studies and to take the same examinations as monks. Voluntary teachers involved report that enthusiasm is often higher among nuns than monks, who often prefer a university education. For the nun to be respected in Sri Lanka, however, more than education is needed. A revolution in how the feminine is viewed within religion is needed.

In November 1988, 200 bhikkhunis were ordained at Hsi Lai Temple in Los Angeles. Among them were Koreans, Japanese, Nepalese, Sri Lankans, Thais, Tibetans, Vietnamese and West Germans. In other words women from both Theravada and Mahayana traditions were present and the combination of traditions was also mirrored in the members of the bhikkhu Sangha participating. Of eleven *Sil Maniyos* from Sri Lanka who travelled to Los Angeles, five persisted with the rigorous preparatory training and received full ordination. Their presence was made possible by Buddhist lay women with international contacts. Back in Sri Lanka, however, they are not recognised and do not even possess a copy of the *Bhikkhuni Vinaya* in Sinhala.

One argument which can be brought against these Sinhala bhikkhunis is that the ordination ceremony was based on the Chinese tradition, a Mahayana one, although Theravada bhikkhus took part. The cleavage between Theravada and Mahayana is usually cited when the question is asked: Why can't bhikkhuni ordination be restored through China or Taiwan? In the eyes of some members of the bhikkhu Sangha, the Mahayana tradition supports married priests, lax social practices and unnecessary ritual! However, in the last decade, several women have argued that the *Bhikkhuni Patimokkha*

(rules of discipline) is very similar in the two traditions and that, since ordination is primarily an entry into living this discipline, there would be no loss of Theravada identity if Mahayana nuns were asked to renew the Order.⁹

Two international Conferences have recently been held drawing Buddhist women from Asia and the West: the International Conference on Buddhist Nuns held at Bodhgaya in February 1987 and the First International Conference on Buddhist Women held in Bangkok in October 1991. Both highlighted the possibility of solidarity among Buddhist women and nuns worldwide, the need for research into issues of common concern and the question of how the religious life is to be lived by nuns in societies where their dignity is not recognised and where men are the main mediators of Buddhist teaching to the people. Western nuns have joined with Asian women to challenge the present situation.

Venerable Karma Lekshe Tsomo, an American Bhikkhuni trained in the Tibetan tradition, was one of the organisers of the Bodhgaya Conference and became Secretary of *Sakyadhita*, the International Association of Buddhist Women which emerged from the Conference. At the Bangkok Conference, in an interview with the Press, she voiced her position thus:

It is not that we want to compete with the *Sangha*. But we want to improve the status of women and give them more opportunity to study Buddhism.

If monks were not willing to afford women equal status, she realised women would have to wait until attitudes have changed. Yet, she emphasised that the issue of women in Buddhism was:

an issue of social justice. There exists a situation of grave inequality between the rights and opportunities of male and female Buddhists. Whereas the teachings of Buddha are universal and equally applicable to all human beings, the practical reality is that conditions for men and women in Buddhism, especially the conditions of monks and nuns are very different.

It is not a case of different but equal, it is a case of different and very unequal. Until women are accorded equal opportunities that reflect their capabilities and commitment, Buddhism will not progress and the world will be poorer.¹⁰

Buddhist women worldwide are therefore presenting the challenge that, for its own health, Buddhism needs to recognise the spiritual potential of its women as nuns, teachers and counsellors. They assert that any religion is poorer if mediated solely through a masculine hierarchy, affirming that the perspective of women is essential for a religion's well-being. And in saying this, they would insist that they are not calling for anything new but only for a recognition of the original affirmation given to women by the Buddha.

The challenge for Sri Lanka is how it responds to this crucial issue. Buddhism is now a world religion and no Buddhist country can isolate itself from the voices of the worldwide Buddhist community. Will the true message of the Sanghamitta mission be re-discovered? Will the dilemmas of the Buddhist woman who wishes to renounce continue?



Notes

1. See, for instance, *Vinaya*.1:12.
2. Reference can be made to Dhammadinna, who becomes the spiritual director of her former husband (*Majjima Nikaya*, I:304-305) and Khema, who advised King Pasenadi (*Samyutta Nikaya*, IV X I).
3. *Therigatha*, Verse 6.
4. Ven. Walpola Rahula at the BMICH in July 1991, during a ceremony in his honour, claimed that *dasa sil matas* were not qualified to wear a yellow robe, since they were, in fact, still lay people. *The Island*, 25 July 1991.
5. *Anuguttara Nikaya*, V VI 55.
6. Nuns are particularly prominent in *Dipavamsa*, chs. 17 & 18.
7. The Buddhist rules of discipline state that a *bhikkhuni* must be ordained by both *bhikkhunis* and *bhikkhus*.
8. At the beginning of the 20th century, an educated Sri Lankan woman, Catherine de Alwis travelled to Burma, received training and ordination there, and returned to promote renunciation among women.
9. Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh's translation of the different *Patimokkhas* (1991) shows that there is a striking uniformity between Theravada and those schools which formed the source of Mahayana develop-

ment. Differences between Theravada and the Mahasanghika occur mainly in the *Pacittiya* & *Sekhiya* sections, in each case the latter having more rules than the former.

10. To be Buddhist and Equal' - a report of the Conference by Suwana Asavaroengchai in *Focus*, 28 October 1991.

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The Printer, the Police and the Penalty.

The sealing of the *Navamaga* Press and the destruction of its machinery and equipment by the Police, the fundamental rights application filed by the owner of the press and the judgement of the Supreme Court thereon are events relevant to the freedom of expression in Sri Lanka; they have, nevertheless received scant attention so far.

Since these events have not been adequately publicised in the English press, let us begin with a chronological narration of the events.

The *Navamaga* Press, located at 334, Galle Road, Ratmalana, a suburb south of Colombo, was first searched by the Police on September 18, 1991. Two press workers were taken into custody by the police who made one of them take the police to the residence of the owner of the press, Kelly Senanayake. Two policemen were stationed there till nightfall; the two workers were taken to the police station at Dehiwala. Mr. Senanayake reported to the police next morning, where he was asked to make a statement on work undertaken by him as a printer. The workers were later released.

The *Navamaga* Press is a commercial printing establishment undertaking work of a varied nature; it was also, at this time, the registered printer of *Yukthiya*, a fortnightly newspaper published by the Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality.

This was probably the main concern of the police as a good part of the questioning centered round it; the lay-out artist who prepared the pages of *Yukthiya* for the press was also questioned by the police at the same time.

Police officers attached to the Mount Lavinia police searched the press again on October 4, 1991; it is alleged by the owner and some workers that they took away material, including work that was on the machines at the time and placed seals on both the front and back doors. Two armed policemen were placed on guard at the front entrance on Galle road.

Mr. Senanayake filed a fundamental rights application before the Supreme Court on October 8, 1991. The petition alleged that the police action was unlawful and illegal; since it was done in the purported discharge of their duties and as agents of the Republic of Sri Lanka, their conduct amounted to executive or administrative action in terms of article 126 (2) of the Constitution. The petition claimed that in these circumstances the petitioner's fundamental rights to

- (a) the freedom of speech and expression including publication, guaranteed by article 14 (1) (a) of the Constitution and

(b) the freedom to engage by himself or in association with others in any lawful occupation, profession, trade, business or enterprise, guaranteed by article 14 (1) (g) of the Constitution

had been infringed by executive or administrative action.

The petitioner asked for the removal of all restraints on his work, the return of all material taken away and for compensation in a sum of Rs. 50000.

On October 9, the day after the filing of the fundamental rights application, Mr. Senanayake received information that some police officers had allegedly broken the seals placed on the press, had entered the premises and damaged the machines. He wrote to the Inspector General of Police on October 10, drawing attention to the police action.

The fundamental rights application came up before the Supreme Court on October 17, 1991 and hearing was fixed for February 1992.

On the same day, Mr. Senanayake received a letter asking him to appear before the Mount Lavinia Police for an inquiry into the matters mentioned in his letter to the IGP of October 10th. This inquiry was held on 29 and 30 October when a lengthy statement was recorded.

On November 11, 1991, Mr. Senanayake received a letter dated November 9th from the Officer-in-Charge, Security Coordinating Unit, Mount Lavinia Division asking him to meet the police on November 12th for the purpose of taking charge of the press.

Mr. Senanayake went to the press at the appointed time with his lawyer. A police officer officially handed over the press to him. On entering the press, all the equipment was found to be damaged. The offset printing machine had been dismantled into three parts and had been toppled on their sides; the other equipment too had been damaged and the parts strewn all over. A technician brought to the site declared that the equipment had been damaged beyond repair.

Mr. Senanayake brought all these matters to the notice of the Supreme Court by way of amendments to his original application. He also asked the Court to order an officer of the court to examine the press and to report on the condition of the equipment. This request was disallowed by the Court. It however entertained the amendments to the original application including a new claim for damages in a sum of Rs. 750,000.

The fundamental rights application was heard before three judges of the Supreme Court on February 3, 1992 and judgement was delivered on April 3, 1992. The respondents, i.e. the police, were represented by the Additional Solicitor General.

At the hearing, the police took up the following positions:

(a) the searches of the press had been authorized as they had reason to believe, on the basis of information received, that subversive literature was being printed at the *Navamaga* press and that an offence under the Emergency Regulations was likely to be committed. During the search on 16.9.1991, the police had taken away two copies of the Sinhala newspaper *Yukthiya* that were at the press; a police officer stated in his affidavit that its contents "are likely to bring or attempt to bring the President or the government into hatred or contempt or excite or incite feelings of disaffection or hatred or contempt of the President or the government."

(b) when they went to the press in the furtherance of the same inquiries on 4. 10 1991, they found the place untenanted with the back door closed but not locked; on entering the premises they found the printing machines dismantled and on the floor; the only material they found and removed were some copies of *Yukthiya*; two police officers were placed on guard since no one connected with the press was present.

The judgement summarises the implications of the police position as follows:

It is suggested therefore that

(a) (i) either the petitioner's employees got wind of the order to search the premises and because they were printing stuff not permitted by law they decided to flee and therefore quickly dismantled the printing machine, took printed materials and left the premises;

(ii) in the process of dismantling the machine in a hurry they caused damage to their own machine.

OR

(b) the petitioners had decided to move from the premises and so had dismantled their machine carelessly thereby causing damage to it.

It will be noted that the police by implication deny any sealing of the press under emergency regulations and any culpability for the destruction of the equipment. However, they did try to maintain that the press was engaged in subversive activity in printing *Yukthiya*.

The defence took up the position that the searches of the press, the destruction of the equipment and the harassment of the proprietor were politically motivated. At the time the press was sealed, he had been printing not only *Yukthiya*, but also a pamphlet about Joe Sim, a casino operator who had been deported by the government for his alleged involvement in gambling, drug trafficking and prostitution. This pamphlet alleged that Joe Sim had received state patronage in his activities and also contained photographs of Joe Sim with politically prominent persons on numerous public and private

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occasions. Copies of this pamphlet printed at the press with its imprint were produced in evidence.

The three judges, in a unanimous judgement, found that the petitioner's fundamental rights guaranteed by article 14(1)(g) of the constitution had been infringed and awarded him damages in a sum of Rs. 25,000.

With regard to the position taken up by the police on damage to the equipment, the judgement is quite forthright :

The progress of this application warrants a view adverse to the respondents' claims. The petitioner first only complained of the deprivation of the use of his printing press....If as the petitioner says he learnt of damage caused to his machine by the police, then the steps he has taken (viz) to complain immediately to the IGP and to inform this court and to invite it to inspect the premises appear to be steps that any person with a just complaint would bona fide take.... No questions whatsoever have been asked of the petitioner as to why he dismantled the machine and damaged it. This fact suggests that the position now taken by the police is palpably false.

It also disposes of the police argument that the owner had dismantled his machine because he was printing illegal material:

If, as is urged, the publication was lawfully printed at this press and the newspaper *Yukthiya*, which had never been banned had also been lawfully printed at this press and these are the only publications averred in these proceedings by the parties and the respondents have not challenged any aspect of the printing or publication of the newspaper *Yukthiya* then there would be no reason at all for the owners to damage their valuable printing machine.

The judgement accordingly concludes :

I accordingly reject the respondents' version that they found the printing press already damaged upon entry to the premises. We have outgrown the age of believing fairy tales but can recognise them for what they are. I am satisfied that wanton damage has been caused to the printing press by the Police who were in control of it between 4.10. 91 and 11.12. 91 and that the police have made a false entry in their notes that they found the printing machine dismantled.

Having come to this judgement, the Court directed the petitioner to seek his remedy for damages elsewhere, that is, by means of a civil action in the District courts.

This whole incident raises serious issues concerning the conduct of the police, the apparent readiness of the regime to stifle the publication of material adverse to its own interests and the use of the police for such purposes.

Two publications are at the heart of the incident. The pamphlet about Joe Sim was meant to strike at the very heart of a government morality campaign. Joe Sim had been operating in Sri Lanka for quite some time and was reputed to control several casinos and gambling operations in Colombo. He was very prominent in political and social circles and had contributed munificently to various charities, including state sponsored funds. He was also an honoured guest at the 100th anniversary celebrations of the Colombo Municipal Council. However, relations between him and the government soured; local casino operators were involved in a campaign against what they called foreign infiltration. He was ultimately deported; the state tried to take credit for this action on moral grounds. The pamphlet in question described, with photographic evidence, the close relations between Joe Sim and various members of the government and senior bureaucrats and called into question the moral bona fides of the government.

Yukthiya, the other publication, is a newspaper critical of Sinhala chauvinism and of the government's military operations against the Tamil groups, and campaigns for a political solution based on federalism as the only viable solution to the ethnic problem. It had increased its circulation through some investigative reporting during the impeachment crisis. When the *Navamaga* press was destroyed, it had to seek alternative printers; one was found with some difficulty and he too then became subject to threats.

Both publications in question are thus very critical of the government. And it was obviously to attack these two publications that the operation against the *Navamaga* press was launched.

This is indicative of the subservience of the whole police apparatus towards the perceived political interests of the regime.

Wilful damage to a printing press by the police is all the more heinous at a time when there is no overt censorship and the government, at various international fora, use this very absence of legal censorship to prove its democratic credentials.

The police in this case have been found guilty of giving false evidence, of falsifying their documents and wantonly damaging articles that were in their custody. Such highhandedness, particularly at a time when a fundamental rights case was pending before the Supreme Court, only implies that they were totally certain of the protection of their superiors and of their political masters. In any case, the IGP has now to be asked what action he proposes to take regarding his subordinates who have lied to court, who have falsified their evidence and who have deliberately infringed the fundamental rights and property of a citizen, the safeguarding of which should have been their prime responsibility.

Charles Abeysekera

In previous issues, *PRAVADA* has carried articles on the linkages between human rights, national sovereignty and foreign aid. We continue the discussion below by reproducing, from the *Review of the International Commission of Jurists*, a recent speech by former U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar. He talks of the way in which international obligations regarding human rights and international law affects current concepts of national sovereignty.

SOVEREIGNTY AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Throughout my term as Secretary-General of the United Nations I have sought to promote a partnership between the Secretariat and the intellectual community, for it has been my conviction that the United Nations should have access to the best thinking and the best ideas if it is to succeed in its global mission on behalf of peace based on justice, social progress, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. You will therefore understand my pleasure at being here with you today in this great university and for the opportunity to join you in a process of reflection on a topic that is of great importance to the future evolution of the international community: the relationship between sovereignty and international responsibility.

What I wish to say to you today about sovereignty and international responsibility is quite simple, namely that sovereignty and international responsibility are different sides of the same coin. They are intricately connected and one goes with the other. Let me explain what I have in mind.

In the Declaration on principles of international law concerning friendly relations and co-operation among States, which it adopted in 1970, the General Assembly interpreted the Charter's principle of the sovereign equality of States to mean that all States have equal rights and duties and are equal members of the international community, notwithstanding differences of an economic, social, political or other nature. In particular, sovereign equality includes the following elements:

- States are juridically equal.
- Each State enjoys the rights inherent in full sovereignty.
- Each State has the duty to respect the personality of other States.
- The territorial integrity and political independence of the State are inviolable.
- Each State has the right freely to choose and develop its political, social economic and cultural systems.
- Each State has the duty to comply fully and in good faith with its international obligations and to live in peace with other States.

Sovereignty has as its fundamental objective to enable each people to chart its own course and to realize its full potential. However, the world has reached a stage where the full potential

of any people can only be realized through international co-operation for mutual benefit and the common welfare. International co-operation requires rules of conduct and standards of behavior which are the essence of international responsibility.

The very core of the concept of sovereignty is regulated by international standards. Let us recall in this connection the stirring words of Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaims:

The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Let us recall further that Member States of the United Nations have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The international standards thus prescribe that sovereignty shall reside in the people and that governments shall pursue strategies of governance aiming for the realization of human rights - strategies of governance that should never involve departures from fundamental rights. What this requires is that the constitutional, legislative, judicial and administrative orders of Member States shall be inspired in their conception and guided in their implementation by the international standards of human rights; that a culture of human rights should be striven for in each country through education and the dissemination of information on human rights; and the special arrangements shall be instituted to protect vulnerable parts of the population whose rights may be in danger. The enhancement of human rights thus contributes to the enrichment of popular sovereignty.

If the character, aims and standards of internal sovereignty are thus internationally defined, the external manifestations of sovereignty are similarly regulated. The first proposition that we may make about the external manifestations of sovereignty is that it should seek to promote the goals and principles of the United Nations Charter. This is an inescapable consequence



of the solemn commitment which each of the Member States of the United Nations has undertaken by virtue of their acceptance of the Charter. From this follows another essential proposition, namely that each government is open to scrutiny by the United Nations and is internationally accountable for its efforts to live up to the precepts of the Charter. An international responsibility to the United Nations is thus an inherent adjunct to the sovereignty of every Member State.

The General Assembly codified this principle in the Declaration on friendly relations which I referred to earlier. It affirmed that every State has the duty to fulfil in good faith the obligations assumed by it in accordance with the United Nations Charter; to fulfil in good faith its obligations under the generally recognized principles and rules of international law; to fulfil in good faith its obligations under international agreements valid under the generally recognized principles and rules of international law. In particular, the General Assembly underlined the principle that states shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, or in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations. The General Assembly elaborated this principle as follows:

Every State has the duty to refrain in its international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations. Such a threat or use of force constitutes a violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations and shall never be employed as a means of settling international issues.

The General Assembly insisted, further, on the duty of States to co-operate with one another for the advancement of the common welfare. It declared that States have the duty to co-operate with one another, generally; to co-operate with other States in the maintenance of international peace and security; and to work together for the promotion of universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. It is interesting to note the General Assembly's pronouncement that Member States of the United Nations have the duty to take joint and separate action in co-operation with the United Nations in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter. States, the General Assembly specified, should co-operate in the economic, social and cultural fields as well as in the field of science and technology and for the promotion of international cultural and educational progress. States should co-operate in the promotion of economic growth throughout the world, especially that of the developing countries.

Each sovereign government also has an international responsibility to participate in and contribute to the maintenance of a global watch over the common welfare. The threats which humanity faces are many, including environmental, political,

economic, social and humanitarian. Weapons of mass destruction can annihilate life on the planet; environmental deterioration affects all of our lives; international and internal conflicts, natural and man-made disasters all have the potential to exact high human and material costs. States can no longer be permitted to contribute to or ignore such dangers. All are responsible for the maintenance of an effective global watch. This is an international responsibility shared by every government, every people and every organ of society. The sovereignty that resides in the people can neither be used against the people, nor for the destruction of the patrimony of humanity.

The sovereignty that resides in the people and seeks to promote the welfare of the people cannot ignore the sufferings of people, whether inside or outside its borders. Sovereignty and solidarity are thus parallel concepts. One dimension of international responsibility that impacts upon sovereignty flows from our shared humanity and by our natural desire to come to the aid of people in need wherever they are. Sovereignty and humanitarianism thus also have a close nexus.

In this regard, it is now increasingly clear, as I stated in my last Annual Report, that "the protection of human rights is one of the keystones of peace. I am convinced that this is now more an exercise in harmonious international influence and pressure - through appeals, reprimands, admonitions or condemnations and, as a last resort, an appropriate United Nations presence - than what was regarded as permissible under traditional international law. It is now increasingly felt that the principle of non-interference with the essential domestic jurisdiction of States cannot be regarded as a protective barrier behind which human rights could be massively or systematically violated with impunity."

The nexus between sovereignty and humanitarianism introduces us to the notions of the international rule of law, the peaceful settlement of disputes and the role of the International Court of Justice. A sovereignty that resides in the people and wishes to advance the welfare of the people, a sovereignty that is guided by humanitarian values should lead us away from violent methods for the resolution of disputes. Rather they should lead us to the promotion of confidence-building measures, of arrangements to detect and to avert problems, of the observance of the norms of international law and of respect for the decisions of the International Court of Justice. Sovereignty and international responsibility thus lead us back to the international rule of law.

Sovereignty, international responsibility and the international rule of law direct us, next, to the role of international institutions such as the United Nations. By promoting the rule of law, by fostering the peaceful settlement of disputes, by facilitating international co-operation for the enhancement of mutual welfare, international institutions, such as the United Nations, emerge into focus for what they really are: instruments to enrich the patrimony of each people, instruments to maximize



the yields from the exercise of popular sovereignty. International responsibility thus entails that sovereignty be exercised in such a manner as to facilitate the role of the United Nations and that, still more, everything possible be done to strengthen the role of the United Nations.

For when the United Nations is strong, each of its Member States is strong. When the United Nations is strong, each

people is strong. When the United Nations is strong, small and weak States can be protected. When the United Nations is strong, the sovereignty of the people is reinforced. Sovereignty and international responsibility thus require support for the United Nations and its sister institutions.

THE SRI LANKAN CONFLICT AND STANDARDS OF HUMANITARIAN LAW

The following extracts are from an appeal made by Asia Watch, an international human rights organization based in New York, to the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE leadership. It appeared in Asia Watch Newsletter, April 23, 1992.

Since the end of January 1992, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has engaged in a series of ambushes and larger offensives against the military in the northeast, some near areas housing newly returning refugees. The army has responded in kind, with raids described as "test" operations throughout the northeast. Despite news that the government and military may be divided on the desirability of a large-scale offensive, many people familiar with the situation in Sri Lanka have expressed concern that political pressures are building on the Sri Lankan government to undertake such an offensive against remaining strongholds of the LTTE in the north, mainly the Jaffna peninsula. *Asia Watch* is deeply concerned for the safety of noncombatants as military operations proceed and possibly escalate. During past offensives, combatants on both sides have committed gross abuses against civilians and engaged in indiscriminate attacks on residential areas.

In the interests of protecting noncombatants, *Asia Watch* appeals to the armed forces in the current conflict — both the central government and its armed opposition, especially the LTTE — to respect international standards on the conduct of warfare, particularly those designed to protect people who are not or are no longer taking an active part in the conflict.

Since the conflict in Sri Lanka is no longer an international one, the armed forces must adhere to the standards governing non-international, or internal, conflicts. These standards are found principally in common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 ("common Article 3") as well as in the Second Additional Protocol of 1977 ("Protocol II") to the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Sri Lanka has ratified the Geneva Conventions, and Article 3 by its terms applies to all parties to the conflict, that is, both government and rebel forces. Although Sri Lanka has not ratified Protocol II, many of its provisions are binding

as a matter of customary international law. This appeal draws on both sets of standards.

Common Article 3 makes clear that its application to rebel groups is not an endorsement of their legitimacy. As the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) states in its authoritative *Commentary*, "the fact of applying Article 3 does not in itself constitute any recognition by the *de jure* Government that the adverse Party has authority of any kind."

The duty to uphold the standards of Article 3 is "absolute for each of the Parties, and independent of the obligations on the other Party." (ICRC *Commentary*). That is, one side's violations do not excuse violations by the other. Article 3 applies both to regular forces and to less formal units operating under their direction or control.

Article 3 protects all "persons taking no active part in the hostilities." That includes the entire civilian population and individual civilians. (Those who assume the role of combatant forfeit this protection while they are actively involved in hostilities). Article 3 also protects members of the armed forces of either side to the conflict who have surrendered or laid down their arms or are no longer able to engage in combat by reason of injury, illness, capture or any other cause. Article 3 expressly provides that all such people should be treated humanely, without adverse distinction based on race, color, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or "any other similar criteria."

II. Application to the Sri Lankan Conflict

The following acts that have characterized the Sri Lankan conflict are prohibited by the laws of war:



a) Massacres and Widespread Torture of Civilians

Credible reports reveal that killings of groups of civilians have been undertaken by both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. Such killings include LTTE massacres of Muslim and Sinhalese villagers and reprisal attacks by government-controlled forces upon Tamil communities. These acts have resulted in hundreds of civilian deaths. Because the victims of these massacres were not or were no longer taking an active part in hostilities, their killing was in direct violation of common Article 3 as well as the customary-law principle codified in Articles 4(2) and 13(2) of Protocol II. As such, these are acts of murder.

Violence short of the infliction of death upon noncombatants is also prohibited by the categorical prohibition of mutilation, cruel treatment, and torture under common Article 3 and the customary-law prohibition codified in Article 4(2) of Protocol II, as well as by the customary-law duty set forth in Article 13(1) of Protocol II to protect the civilian population against "the dangers arising from military operations."

b) Reprisals

Because the provisions of common Article 3 (and customary law) are "absolute", reprisals against noncombatants are prohibited. Reprisals are also barred as a form of collective punishment prohibited by the customary-law principle set forth in Article 4(2) of Protocol II.

c) Bombardment of Civilians

Sri Lankan government forces reportedly have engaged in a pattern of indiscriminate aerial and artillery bombardment of areas populated by civilians. Many of these attacks have been badly aimed attempts to flush out LTTE cadres hiding in residential areas. There have also been reports of deliberate attacks on civilian residential areas.

The bombardment of civilians and civilian objects as a means of conducting hostilities is prohibited by customary law as codified in Article 13(2) of Protocol II, which prohibits attacks on civilians as such. Attacks on military targets in civilian areas in which precautions are not taken to avoid civilian casualties are indiscriminate and thus prohibited by the customary-law principle codified in Article 13(1) of Protocol II, which provides that "the civilian population and individual civilians shall enjoy general protection against the dangers arising from military operations."

d) The Use of Contact Land Mines

Contact land mines have been used by the parties to the conflict, particularly the LTTE, in a manner that is indiscriminate, in that there is no way of directing them at military targets as opposed to civilians who might use the same route and stumble upon a mine. Such indiscriminate use of weapons is

prohibited under the customary-law principle set forth in Article 13(1) of Protocol II.

e) Religious and Ethnic Discrimination

On many occasions, civilians have been attacked because they are, for example, Tamils, or because of their religious affiliation. This violates the customary-law prohibition against making noncombatants the subject of attack. It also violates the prohibition of adverse distinctions in applying the duty of humane treatment based on race, religion or "any other similar criteria" contained in common Article 3 and codified in similar form as a customary-law principle in Article 4(1) of Protocol II.

f) Selected Executions and Disappearances

Investigations by human rights monitors indicate that Sri Lankan government forces have engaged in a series of purges of suspected sympathizers of various guerilla groups. These purges have involved mass arrests, disappearances, and extrajudicial executions, and have been carried out summarily, without adherence to fundamental requirements of due process. As noted above, individual extrajudicial executions as well as all acts of torture violate common Article 3 as well as the customary-law principle codified in Articles 4(2) and 13(2) of Protocol II.

g) Use of Civilians as Human Shields

Eyewitnesses have described government forces rounding up civilians from refugee camps and forcing them to march ahead of government troops into LTTE gunfire or through mine fields. Execution has been threatened of those who try to escape. Such activity violates the requirement of humane treatment for noncombatants and the prohibition of cruel and degrading treatment for such people contained in common Article 3 and codified as a principal of customary international law in Article 4(2) of Protocol II.

h) Hostages

In cases in which civilians are not actually used as shields, they reportedly have been used as hostages. This practice is prohibited by common Article 3 and the customary-law rule codified in Article 4(2) of Protocol II.

i) Attacks Upon Medical Facilities and Places of Worship

On several reported occasions, Sri Lankan government forces have attacked medical facilities because they were treating wounded LTTE fighters. Such attacks violate the principle set forth in Article II that "medical units and transports shall be respected and protected at all times and shall not be the object of attack...unless they are used to commit hostile acts, outside

their humanitarian function." Treating wounded combatants is fully compatible with a medical facility's humanitarian purpose and does not render it subject to attack.

Sri Lankan government forces have also reportedly attacked places of worship in which civilians have taken refuge. Attacks on civilians are strictly prohibited by common Article 3 and the customary-law principle set forth in Article 13(2) of Protocol II. Insofar as government forces contend that rebel combatants have hidden in such facilities, efforts to attack or capture them must, under the customary-law principles set forth in Article 13(1) of Protocol II, may be made only after all feasible steps are taken to avoid collateral civilian casualties. Even then, attacks that are indiscriminate or cause disproportionate harm to civilians are prohibited.

j) Interdicting Essential Supplies

Although the ICC has been permitted to make some deliveries to the Jaffna peninsula, government troops at other times, reportedly have deprived civilians of essential food and medical supplies. Article 14 of Protocol II prohibits "starvation of civilians as a method of combat," including by attacking or removing for that purpose "objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs." As the ICRC *Commentary* notes, this prohibition "is really only a specific application of common Article 3, which imposes on parties to the conflict the obligation to guarantee humane treatment for all persons not participating in the hostilities, and in particular prohibits violence to life." Thus, as the ICRC *Commentary* explains, "the use of blockade and siege as methods of warfare... [must be] directed exclusively against combatants."

k) Displacement of Persons

Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced in the course of the war, many apparently for reasons of ethnic discrimination or to deprive opposition forces of local popular support. Under the principle set forth in Article 17(1) of Protocol II, "the displacement of the civilian population" should not take place "for reasons related to the conflict unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand."

III. Specific Rules for the Prohibition of Military Abuses in the Sri Lankan Conflict:

In light of the above, Asia Watch calls on the parties to the Sri Lankan conflict to refrain from the following actions proscribed by the laws of war:

- 1) Deliberate killing of noncombatants.
- 2) Indiscriminate attacks in civilian areas, including by bombardment or the use of contact land mines.

- 3) Attacks causing disproportionate harm to civilians or civilian objects.
- 4) Attacks in civilian areas in which all feasible steps are not taken to avoid collateral civilian casualties.
- 5) Reprisals against noncombatants by acts of violence or destruction of property.
- 6) Torture and other deliberate mistreatment of any person.
- 7) Subjecting noncombatants to adverse distinction in the duty to treat them humanely because of their religion or ethnic background.
- 8) Using noncombatants as human shields to protect a warring party from enemy fire or to detect mine fields.
- 9) Taking or using noncombatants as hostages.
- 10) Summarily executing or punishing persons suspected of participating in a rebellion or aiding enemy forces.
- 11) Imposing any punishment for a criminal offense without a trial before an independent and impartial tribunal affording fundamental due process rights.
- 12) Attacks on medical facilities and places of worship that are being used for humanitarian purposes.
- 13) Using starvation of civilians as a method of combat, or denying impartial humanitarian relief operations when there is a lack of supplies essential for the survival of the civilian population.

Commanders should order a halt to all violations of the above-listed rules, and violators should be charged, tried and punished according to due process of law.

1. During the last week in February, the army launched the largest of these recent operations, "Vanni Wickrema III." This operation, employing 3,000 troops, armor and air support took control of LTTE territory around Poornawasakulan, 15 miles northwest of Vavuniya, and Thalaimannar. Another major offensive was launched against Mullaitivu in March.
2. The food embargo was relaxed in August 1991, but by the end of the year there was still a lengthy list of prohibited items, including medicines, soya-based foods, sanitary napkins, surgical equipment, bandages, batteries, gasoline and matches. All goods transported to the northeast are subject to military approval and anything which is potentially useful to the militants is banned, no matter how essential to the general public. The official list, published in August 1991 shows only a fraction of the goods that are actually kept from reaching the north. Local commanders on the road have the final say over the import of essential supplies.

Moving the state away from the economic domain—'de-statization' of economies—is a major tenet in the new creed of capitalist growth formulated by international financial institutions for the developing world. Indeed, the dismantling of the erstwhile public sector has now become a contentious issue in Sri Lanka and elsewhere in the context of the new and vigorous intervention of the World Bank and the IMF in 'reforming' developing economies. In the ideology of 'free-market capitalism' there are also myths—or lies, in plain English—propagated. One such myth posits that the 'free' market, freed from the state, has achieved miracles in promoting growth and development in newly-industrialised countries. The following article, which appeared in the U. S. journal *Lies of Our Times* (*LOOT*, in short) examines this widely made claim.

The "Success" of Free Market Reforms

Arthur MacEwan

In a July 8, 1991, front-page article in the *New York Times*, Sylvia Nasar reported on "a powerful new economic pragmatism [that] is sweeping the Third World capitals from Brasilia to Bangkok." This new "pragmatism," according to Nasar, involved "such changes as allowing market forces to flourish free of government restraints, abandoning fiscal and monetary policies that were politically motivated but economically unsound, and opening borders to foreign goods and investments."

Nasar also claimed that "if these changes take root and spread, the four billion people who live in the developing world could enjoy a better standard of living." To buttress her case, she reviewed recent short growth spurts in several countries that have adapted the sorts of economic changes she advocates. She included Mexico and Chile on her list of success stories, and of course South Korea as well.

There is no doubt that the kind of policy changes Nasar described are taking place in numerous Third World countries, and that officials are singing the rhetoric of "free market." But is there reason to believe that the results will be anything like what Nasar suggests - either for economic growth or for the welfare of the people?

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The South Korean Exception?

Nasar herself seems to have recognised that something was wrong with her story. South Korea, the most marked success story of recent decades, expanded its economy with heavy government intervention, including an industrial policy that would make the free marketers cringe. So in her July 12, 1991, story, "Industrial Policy the Korean Way," (*New York Times*, p. D2) where she claimed that Korea really did fit with the approach of her free market reformers, Nasar alleged that Korean intervention worked because it was "market friendly," "outward oriented," and "less pervasive than appears at first glance."

Yet calling government intervention by some other name does not really change the reality. Nasar - through no oversight, we may presume - excluded Alice Amsden from her list of those interviewed. In *Asia's Next Giant Step: South Korea and Late Industrialisation* (Oxford University Press, 1989), the most important and widely acclaimed book on the Korean economy of recent years, Amsden wrote (p.139):

Korea is an example of a country that grew very fast yet violated the canons of conventional economic wisdom In Korea, instead of the market mechanism allocating resources and guiding private entrepreneurship, the government made most of the pivotal investment decisions. Instead

of firms operating in a competitive market structure, they each operated with an extraordinary degree of market control, protected from foreign competition. Nevertheless, most economists who recognise these realities [including those on Nasar's interview list] greet them with an unflinching faith in market laws. They suppose that while state interference in Korea is pervasive, the economy operates with a set of relative prices that is not greatly distorted [*i.e.*, the government is "market friendly"]. In fact, little evidence supports this presumption.

Not only Korea, but the greatest growth success of the post - World War II era, Japan, followed policies directly at odds with what the new free-market "reformers" are advocating. In Japan, as in Korea, the government severely restricted the role of foreign investors from the U.S. and elsewhere, bringing in technology through licensing arrangements that placed control, and ultimately profits, in the hands of national firms. Also, each of these countries limited imports and manipulated the value of its currency to assure a strong demand for its exports.

Yet there was really not much unique or new in the foundations of the Japanese and Korean accomplishments. Virtually every advanced capitalist country built its economy on the basis of a strong role of the government, which included restricting some aspects of its

involvement in the international market. Before 1800, Alexander Hamilton, the first U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, advocated a policy of protecting the country's infant industries (primarily from British competitors) as a means to spur economic development. The great industrial expansion after the Civil War was accomplished when northern industrialists got the tariff they had long advocated. German economic success during the late 19th and early 20th centuries involved an even more thorough role for the government.

Britain, as the first industrial power, may be the single example that comes closest to fitting the free-market model. British growth took place, however, when there was hardly anyone else from whom British industrialists needed protection. Also one wonders what might have happened to British economic expansion in the absence of empire and the British navy, hardly parts of the free-market package touted for today's aspiring developers.

Moreover, while programmes built on government intervention undoubtedly ran into trouble in many Third World countries, interventionist policies also could claim substantial growth success. For example, it was not so many years ago that Brazil was praised as accomplishing an economic miracle. That "miracle" was based on a military dictatorship that intervened heavily with industrial policy and control of foreign trade. Even though Brazil was relatively open to foreign investment during the military era, the government

acted to direct that investment, force partnership with national capital, and reserve certain sectors for Brazilian firms.

THE MEXICAN EXAMPLE

Mexico, too, in spite of its near collapse in the 1980s, accomplished four decades of extremely rapid growth under a regime of state-led expansion. The three years of moderate growth that Nasar cited as evidence of the success of Mexico's current free market policies hardly match up to the earlier era.

In any case, the Mexican experience of recent years is useful in putting to rest Nasar's claim that free market policies may improve the living conditions for the masses of the people in the Third World. The ground has been paved for those policies by a 60 per cent decline in the real value of the Mexican minimum wage between 1976 and 1990. Also, Mexico's increasing orientation toward foreign trade has destroyed the country's food self sufficiency, and small farmers, unable to survive in the face of the influx of foreign food grains, have been forced off the land and into the ranks of the urban unemployed. The reduction or elimination of government social welfare programmes, part of the package of free market "reforms," has further contributed to the decline of living standards in Mexico.

Mexico's growth success of earlier years was also associated with extreme inequality, but current policies are making a bad situation even worse. Moreover, while corruption was rampant in the

earlier era, the new policies seem well-designed to assure that whatever gains do come from free market policies will go directly into the hands of the rich and well-connected. As *Business Week* concluded in Stephen Baker's July 22, 1991, report on "The Friends of [Mexican President] Carlos Salinas": "The betting is that Salinas will succeed in attracting foreign capital while keeping the country's jewels, from the banks to the precious oil company, in Mexican hands. Salinas, a shrewd calculator, knows better than to put his powerful friends out of business" (p.40).

With regard to their impact on the welfare of the masses of the people, Mexico's new policies are not anomalous. Free market reforms demand that each country push down wages so that its goods can compete in world markets and so that foreign investors will be attracted. The reforms also demand the reduction, if not elimination, of social welfare programmes. If all this implies that the free market policies must be accompanied by military repression, so be it. It is no accident that Chile is high on the list of supposed free market success stories.

Historical experience and current reality notwithstanding, the claim put forth by Nasar and the economists she likes to quote may come to pass. Free markets and economic openness may, for the first time in history, bring great success and prosperity by the year 2000. That year, as many others believe, may also bring the Second Coming of Christ.

Courtesy: *Lies of our Times*,
September, 1991.

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• The following is the text of a statement from the University Teachers' Association (University of Kelaniya).

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• The brutal murder of 26 year-old Maduwanthi Gunawardene, final year Arts student at the University of Kelaniya, was unanimously and vehemently condemned by the University Teacher's Association of Kelaniya. A resolution to this effect was passed at the recent Annual General Meeting of the Union.

• The Union expressed its deep distress and shock at this inhuman act which goes against all norms of civilized human behaviour.

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Alternative Cinematic and Critical Practices

Laleen Jayamanne

I want to briefly discuss an article which Neil I. Perera wrote for the *Attha* newspaper in 1972 called "ungrammatical cinema." In this article he talks about a young man's response to seeing Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries*: "I can see that there is something serious being said in this film, but I cannot grasp it. Can you explain this to me?" It is to solve the problem involved in this question that he wrote the article reflecting on his own viewing of some 10 years prior to this of some major international modernist films such as *Hiroshima mon Amour*, *Last Year at Marienbad*, both by Alain Resnais, *La Dolce Vita* by Federico Fellini, *Ashes and Diamonds* by Andre Wajda and also Lester James Peries' controversial film *Nidhanaya* (The Treasure).

The question he asks is a paradoxical one - what makes "some films so fascinating to watch and yet so difficult to understand?" He poses here an important question about cinematic fascination which makes him vulnerable - vulnerable because these films seem 'ungrammatical', because we have to learn their grammar and syntax even as we watch them spellbound. In fact he involves the image of a child in order to understand this difficulty. The point of the analogy lies in the fact that a child's perceptual capacity outruns his/her conceptual capacity - a child constantly asks "What is this?" but his/her capacity to understand is less developed. Neil Perera says that these films make us child-like in this sense and yet that they do provide deep intellectual and emotional stimulation.

I find this article utterly engaging because a mature Sri Lankan critic has shown a responsiveness to a younger man's intellectual curiosity which then leads the critic to explore in an open way what films can do to us. He seems to explore the ontology of the cinematic experience experientially. This attitude is very different from that of the "realist critic" who is so sure of what films must do, that he/she goes to a film armed with an image of our "reality" and unflinchingly measures the film in relation to that monolithic construct in

his/her head and gives the film a plus or a minus. This marking practice is what I would call the policing of meaning, policing of the film to fit one's preconceptions of what film must do. In this model the film is rarely given an active productive function. The knowing critic always already knows what reality is and knows what film must do in relation to that.

Neil I. Perera's approach is far more appealing because of its generosity of spirit, its intellectual and emotional readiness to be transformed by the cinematic experience. But it isn't only great European modernist films that address us in a multiplicity of unpredictable ways. And here, following Neil Perera's practice of listening to a young male cinephiliac I wish to mention an anecdote told me recently by a friend, about how a group of young women reported individually their experience and reading of a recent Sinhalese film, *Sihree* (Woman, 1991) by Malini Fonseka.

This is an ambitious film that I thought would be impossible to make in Sri Lanka because of its subject. Who would want to watch the story of an old woman and her bull - even if the woman was played by Malini Fonseka. As it turned out, many did; as my friend said, these women (who rarely ever see films because they come from a rural area where there are no cinema halls) each of them read it as an allegory of our recent violent history. They read the vengeful killing of the cattle thief by the old woman as an allegory of a mother's fierce and absolutely justifiable anger at the disappearance and brutal murder of her bull/son - she does after all touch the bull and address him as son.

This reading made sense to me on reflection because there is a sequence in the film which involves the goddess/demoness Kali, via her statue. This image of the blood thirsty *kali* is I think one of the rare cinematic moments in a film that is rather undistinguished formally, despite its ambitions. I was therefore quite lukewarm about it until I heard this particular

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* Part I of this essay appeared in *Pravada*, February 1992

reading of it. Until then I too, like another urban Sri Lankan Marxist woman, thought what's all this fuss about a bull when so many human beings are being killed today in Sri Lanka. The more inventive reading by my sister and my other self I find enthralling. It doesn't, however, make it a great film but it does show how people do make something out of what is given them in popular culture, however unpromising the material might be. This is a particularly moving example of how a film (whether modernist or not) is actively produced by the viewer; Malini Fonseka's intention in making this film is irrelevant - what matters is what sense we make of it here and now.

Palama Yata (Under the Bridge), a film by H.D. Premarathna made in 1990, is most certainly a film of multiple address. The different, often contradictory ways in which this film was interpreted by both the public and the critics makes it worthwhile trying to study its reception. The fierce critical debate which attended it, its huge box office success, its mega advertising campaign (unprecedented in the history of Sri Lankan cinema) certainly make it a mass media event or phenomenon.

I don't intend to do a detailed analysis of this critical debate nor that of the film itself here. But what I want to do is extend my argument in part I by making a defence of melodrama within the context not only of this formula (genre) film but also films usually designated as "serious" or realistic by our critics.

To this end I want to look at *Palama Yata* as melodrama or more precisely as a hybrid of a certain realism and melodrama. But before I do this I want to map out the history of the melodramatic form in western theatre as the necessary background to support my argument.

MELODRAMATIC FORM, A HISTORY

Though melodrama as a western theatrical genre is a 19th century form, many scholars have argued for its centrality to 20th century mass culture, especially to cinema. This scholarship dates only from the 1960s. Prior to that, from the turn of the century to the 1960s, melodrama has been thought of largely as a trashy form. The melodramatic impulse may be seen in the 19th century rewriting of King Lear with a happy ending. Dickens is assigned a second rank by F.R. Leavis, definitely outside 'the great tradition'. Dickens was seen as a writer who, because of his melodramatic tendency, fell short of the high-seriousness and maturity of the realist novel. In this critical field tragedy and realism became standards of high cultural value, needing protection from the encroachment of mass melodramatic entertainment.

Dickens was of course a master of entertainment, a showman, writing under the pressure of the serial form.

In fact, it was cinema's intimate association with melodrama that had prevented for so long the acceptance of cinema as a serious object of study both in the university and in critical discourse. It is only with the growth of theatre studies in the 1960s (outside departments of English literature) that a concern with theatricality and performance came to the forefront of scholarship. It is within this context that melodrama received serious scholarly attention. It is even a little later that cinema studies took up the theoretical investigation of the concept of genre and melodrama in particular. Melodrama had low prestige in the early days of cinema studies itself because family melodrama and the weepies or the woman's film were, in Christine Gledhill's words, "condemned by its association with a mass female audience." In contrast, the western and the gangster films enjoyed a higher prestige as major national genres of American cinema.

Melodrama as a genre came into critical visibility due to at least two reasons. Feminist critics had begun to write about the genre giving it some minimal status. The most important reason was however methodological. Anglo-Saxon film criticism opened up to French structuralist and neo-Marxist theorising on culture which led to the discussion of popular culture and high culture, both of which were seen to be affected by capitalist commodity production. The new methods made available by structuralism and its attitudes democratised the cultural field. It was now possible to analyse a commercial film, considered either good or trashy, by using structuralist methods. It is this context, intersected by feminism, that brought melodrama firmly into the film theory agenda.

In the 20th century, in cinema, the term melodrama is less easy to localize and define because it seems all pervasive. Crime films, films noir, westerns, have all been regarded as melodramas. It has been said that hollywood's great success as a national and international cinema depends on its melodramatic inflection.

In a more limited sense, melodrama has also come to be associated with a cycle of films centering on women and the family - films that are markedly different from the action genre. This is the area of the 'woman's film', and the TV soap opera.

Christine Gledhill has argued that the 20th century restriction of the genre melodrama to refer only to family melodrama and the weepies is an impoverishment of the more full blooded 19th century sense of genre, and she traces its history in theatre and shows its class origins and its ability

to respond to the beginnings of the commodification of entertainment.

The so called "legitimate theatre" in both France and England had dialogue while the visual or so called "illegitimate" theatre specialised in spectacle such as ballets, pantomime, acrobatics, clowning, exhibitions of animals, freaks, music and song. All of this depended on visual display or spectacle. Here we see the commodification of former folk and popular entertainment forms.

What came out of this was an alternative dramatic rhetoric that was visual, rather than verbal. It is this spectacular mode which is one of the main sources of 19th century melodrama. Because this form of theatre was very popular and attracted a wide public (the emerging middle-class, the lower middle-class and the working class) the "legitimate" theatre of the aristocracy was compelled to use aspects of this popular theatrical rhetoric, so as to not be obsolete in the entertainment business.

Another source that fed into 19th century melodrama was the form of drama known as bourgeois sentimental drama which was a corruption of classical tragedy. In this form, the family became the central focus of personal, moral and social conflict. The triad of hero, villain and heroine derives from this form. It is from this sentimental form that melodrama draws its character types and plot devices.

According to Peter Brooks³, this bourgeois sentimental form lacked "overt excitement", "the cosmic ambition" and a sense of evil; and violence which melodrama would provide. It is these missing theatrical elements that were drawn from the popular forms of spectacular, non-verbal, physical theater. It is the merging of these two quite distinct theatrical traditions that gives rise to melodrama in the 19th century. With the entry of film into the cultural field it inherits this rich tradition of theatrical melodrama. Part of cinema's immediate popularity lay in its ability to combine photographic realism with pictorial sensationalism.

Let us remember that B.A.W. Jayamanne's Minerva players who created some of Sri Lanka's earliest films, came from the Nurti theatrical tradition into film. Nurti, deriving from a Parsi theatre was a melodramatic form of variety entertainment which was influenced by western variety theatrical forms of the 19th century.

Peter Brooks has developed the theoretical and philosophical implications of the "melodramatic imagination" in a very influential book of that name. According to Brooks the aim of melodrama is the spectacular staging or enactment of moral imperatives, the struggle between strictly polarised forces of good and evil, conscious and unconscious in a

post-sacred era. He posits the European Enlightenment and the consequent French revolution of the 18th century as the two moments of the decisive end of the sacred era marked by Christianity in the west. His argument is that in a post-sacred world popular melodrama fills a moral vacuum. Further, its formal devices and structures enable the expression of an essentially moral universe. Melodrama, according to him, feeds a demand for significances unavailable within the constraints of socially legitimate discourses. To fulfil this demand, melodrama invests in highly symbolised personages, events and relations. The characters are of the type father, mother, son, so that there are really psychic types. The events in the narrative are plotted to maximise tension, to bring out and stage conflicts. He says that melodrama uncovers the "psychic occult" and the "moral occult," i.e., it drags out psychological forces from the depths of the family and evil forces from cover.

Christine Gledhill agrees with Brooks in saying that melodrama is less about the release of individual repression and is more about "the public enactment of socially unacknowledged states" - the family is a means to this end.

So this staging of the social unconscious is essential to the melodramatic impulse, which is why melodrama includes not just tears but terror as well. This imperative to and delight in a spectacular staging of the socially repressed or inexpressible is probably what makes melodrama still so popular in mass culture. So it could be said that, from the 19th century on, the melodramatic imagination is a pervasive mode of understanding and constructing worlds.

Palama Yata as critical melodrama

I want to return to *Palama Yata*, (Under the Bridge), after this recounting of the history of the melodramatic form. The two aspects I want to develop are: (i) melodrama's capacity to stage the social and psychic unconscious and (ii) the relationship of melodrama to forms of realism. While melodrama may be limited by its will to stage conflict in highly polarised forms such as good vs. bad, etc., this aspect may be modified by a realism in the acting and the staging (mise-en-scene).

The critical debate on *Palama Yata*, anthologised in the booklet "Under the Bridge and its Critics"⁴ is itself a sharply polarised one. There were those critics who thought it a good film and those who thought it bad.

This melodramatic polarisation of the critical field is itself a noteworthy phenomena in the Sri Lankan context. But what is even more striking to me is that critics of both camps

do not discuss the film as melodrama. Indeed, a concept of genre is absent as a critical tool in the evaluation of this film. So I see my function here to be one of reformulating the terms of the debate, not taking sides, though I do in fact like the film.

I would call *Palama Yata* a maternal melodrama because it spotlights and stages the tensions of the life of a lumpen mother. It is an iconoclastic representation of the maternal. The icon that is shattered is that of the sexually pure, long suffering, sacrificial mother. We do have other maternal melodramas in our cinema which represent bad mothers, for e.g. *Duhulu Malak*, *Ihatha Atmaya*. The mothers in these films are middle-class, so in this respect, too, *Palama Yata* marks a departure from tradition. What is new about this representation of the lumpen mother, Dottie in this film is that her active sexuality, expressed in adulterous desire is made appealing. Dottie is torn between her lover and the love for her son, her desire to give the child a proper future.

This is an unusual triangle, because the husband is absent in prison. One might say that this very triangular configuration is a melodramatic one, because it polarises conflict in order to heighten it, to stage it. The choice of the actress Geetha Kumarasingha as the unconventional mother is perfect because in her past roles she has always represented sexual desires in the realm of taboo (*Karumakkarayo*, *Siribo Aiya*). One has to only think of interchanging Vasanthi Chaturani for Geetha Kumaranasinghe in this maternal role to realise how an actress' body gets coded and over-coded by the roles she has played. The polarisation of conflicts, which are economic, sexual and familial are carried out through a melodramatic narrative structure. If the imperative of the melodramatic imagination is to stage the unspeakable, the socially repressed, then the narrative structure of melodrama has to be flexible. That is, it cannot work within the logic of linear causality and psychologically motivated action. Linear causality and psychological motivation of action leads to a certain coherence, whereas the melodramatic experience is about incoherence and the attempt to articulate it. Therefore, melodramatic narratives are structured on the following:

- Revelations
- Loaded moments
- Sudden reversals
- Last-minute rescues
- Lack of satisfactory cause-effect relations

These are structural elements that realist narratives shy away from. Melodramatic narratives are constructed on these principles because they are concerned with intensity and with staging contradictory desires. Melodrama has been aptly called the 'art of proper exaggeration' and what the above structural features show is how it is created at the level

of the plot. It can also be done in terms of acting and mise-en-scene (the visual composition of the frame). Or instead, one of the elements such as the plot can be melodramatic while the acting may be realist; any of these elements can be structured in such a way that melodramatic devices and realist ones are mixed in uncertain ways. I see *Palama Yata* as a hybrid of melodrama and realism.

I wish to argue that the film's huge popularity has something to do with the convergence of a melodramatic aesthetic with a certain realism.

While the plot is melodramatic in order to stage the 'unorthodox' desires of the lumpen mother Dottie, the realism of the film is to be found in the conception and performance of that role by Geetha Kumarasingha. The plot is under motivated in typically melodramatic fashion. Dottie's catastrophic fall into a stage of degradation under the influence of her gangster-lover is never explained. It is shown as a fait-accompli. A simple title "10 years later" shows us the changed Dottie addicted to drugs and alcohol, endangering her son's life. The plot transition condenses her emotional experience melodramatically. Dottie has to reach the depths of misery and why she got there, the various moments in this journey, are of no importance. She has to reach a point of intense degradation before something else could happen. The misogyny, the punishing of the feminine that characterizes melodrama is however absent in *Palama Yata* and characterizes H.D. Premarathna's earlier works as well.

Here it is worth mentioning his *Sikuruliya* (The Fated One) 1978 which displays a fine melodramatic sensibility in contriving the marriage of beauty and the beast (a midget). The fated one circulates among several men before she is rescued by her true love. But none of her previous liaisons are judged moralistically. So the woman is not condemned by the narrative. This sympathetic representation of woman is central to H.D. Premarathna's work and brings in a new realism in its refusal to melodramatically punish the woman who breaks the norms of sexual conduct thought proper to women. Like in much of melodramatic cinema, Sri Lankan cinematic melodrama has also thrived on the punishing of the feminine and consequent spectacular display of victimhood. In such a context H.D. Premarathna's *Palama Yata* marks a significant advance.

Palama Yata is a well structured narrative and has a tighter formal organisation than any of H.D. Premarathna's previous work. This formal care strengthens the film. The realism in the performance of the role of Dottie is seen in certain key scenes. The scene of seduction is one such. While the scene is played for its full melodramatic theatrical value, the way in which Dottie shows her ambivalent desires for the gangster makes the representation of adulterous desire complex,

no small achievement this, for our cinema. It is this nuanced, complex representation of sexual desire outside a moralistic condemnation that makes the scene of seduction so powerful.

Even the narrative plotting swerves from full melodramatically polarised conflict by making the imprisoned husband's return a peaceful one. According to the melodramatic conventions of our cinema, an absent husband usually returns to punish the adulterous wife by butchering her either in imagination as in *Duhulumalak* or in reality as in *Suddilage Katawa*. But in the case of *Palama Yata* our conventional expectations are left unfulfilled by Dottie's husband who returns only to see his son and leave. That the same actor plays a similar role in this film and in *Suddilage Katawa* but reacts so differently is I think worth noting. It is as though a certain cinematic education in the performance of genre roles is being conducted between certain films, actors and roles.

The other aspect of realism I see in this film is the scenario of the weak son killing the strong gangster villain, which certainly has a certain melodramatic charge to it. However, I still see a new realism in this because, unlike in say *Ihatha Atmaya* where the son (unknowingly) kills his adulterous and mad mother, in *Palama Yata* it is Dottie who fights back against her degradation and attacks her lover. It is after she has initiated this act of self-defense and self-reclamation that the son joins in, inadvertently killing the villain in defence of his mother and himself. Nowhere in this scenario is the mother condemned for the choices she has made. This is a major achievement in the context of the Sri Lankan cinema.

The main slogan used to advertise the film was "the story of a Mother Courage of the lower-depths". This conjunction of the maternal woman with the idea of the illicit (lower-depths) has created an unusual representation of the maternal which would have contributed to the film's popularity. Within the context of our genre cinema this configuration marks a new realism. Conflicting emotions (both sexual and other) are presented without moralising. It is the non-judgmental manner in which a melodramatic situation is elaborated that creates a new realism in our cinema. Here I would like to invoke a statement R.W. Fassbinder made in relation to his melodramatic films:

The only kind of realism that interests me is that which happens in the head of the spectator, not the realism on the screen.

The criticism that found *Palama Yata* deficient and inadequate was based on its alleged inaccurate representation of the lumpen milieu under the bridge. This view holds that the film was a look at under the bridge from on top of the bridge, i.e. that it romanticised misery. The film in fact has a strangely depopulated feeling and this has been criticised as

being unrealistic of a milieu where people live in close proximity to each other due to poverty and such isolation seems improbable.

According to this view, if the film is called *Under the Bridge*, then what it must show is the life there and not the erotic life and struggles of one woman. Perhaps it is the title that has led critics to expect more than the film gives; perhaps if it was called *Dottie's Story*, much of the adverse criticism may not have arisen. Perhaps the sense of isolation and foregrounding of Dottie's emotional and economic struggles need not be used to condemn the film if we view the film as melodrama - let us remember Fassbinder's *Ali-fear eats the soul* where the German city in which the circular drama of ethnic and sexual oppression is enacted seems strangely empty - depopulated. These are melodramatic devices that intensify the emotional experiences of the protagonists and are as such justified. To wish for an "epic presentation" of life under the bridge is to wish that it changed its genre. This is not fruitful criticism. At a time when Sri Lankan films are showing signs of widening their range, to melodramatically pose options as an either/or choice between "good film" vs. genre film is constricting and debilitating. The possibility of the development of a critical melodramatic genre cinema is lessened by such criticism. H.D. Premarathna's *Palama Yata* more than any other work of his approaches this ideal both formally and thematically. Perhaps in this instance the audience was definitely ahead of the critics in endorsing the film.

Cinematic Capability

In this final section, I want to briefly introduce Jean Baudrillard's⁵ theorising of the successive phases of the image, as a way of talking about the productive power of the cinematic image. He says that in the first phase it is the reflection of the basic reality. So one could make the distinction between

Image and Reality

In this phase the image reflects a basic reality. In the second phase the image deforms a basic reality, so that we would have the following model

Image	vs	Reality
False	vs	True
Illusory	vs	Real

In the final phase the image precedes and in fact forms our reality. This is when the clear distinction between Image and Reality can not be maintained because images are part of our reality. This process of images forming their own reality is what he calls stimulation in order to distinguish it from



representation. The latter assumes the separability of reality from the image, from the representation. According to Baudrillard it is the technologies of mass reproduction and the electronic media that create the new regime of image-making in the era of late capitalist consumer culture. According to this argument, TV and the mass media are not simply reflecting our reality; they are in fact forming or constituting our experience of the real. Following this logic, the image of Dottie in *Palama Yata* can not be criticised for being unreal. There might not be a woman like Dottie in real life yet she has a palpable screen presence and she is the result of a significant mutation in the image of femininity in our cinema. To see the issue of the construction of femininity in film not simply as a reflection of the social but as an active struggle within genre representation is to give cinema a productive power. Film is not simply a mirror; it can in fact create affects and hopes that we can barely articulate without its help.

I wish finally to present three brief examples of cinematic capability from the history of cinema:

- 1 D. Pathiraja's *Bambaru Evith*. In the midst of largely very favourable reviews there was one criticism of the film that I found limiting, which was the criticism of the character played by Wimal Kumar de Costa. It was said that his character was unrealistic, that such a character does not exist in contemporary Sri Lanka. The assumption underlying this argument does not permit the cinematic medium to produce characters, because it assumes that the function of the cinema is to realistically reflect the real. This is only one of the many ways in which cinematic capability or filmic performance can create the human form. Pathiraja, who came to cinema after writing and producing the stage play *Kora Saha Andhaya*, was never criticised for creating those two memorable characters on the ground that their counterparts did not exist in everyday life. This is because theatre criticism in Sri Lanka had/has a far more sophisticated sense of theatre's creative potential, while cinema criticism based on a realist epistemology is far too restrictive.
- 2 The next example is about gender - the celebrated face of Greta Garbo (the Swedish actress who worked in Hollywood). Via lighting, framing, texture, make up,

Like much of melodramatic cinema, the Sri Lankan too thrives on punishing the feminine. Some critics found 'Palama Yata' inadequate because it inaccurately represented the lumpen milieu under the bridge. To wish for 'epic presentation' of life under the bridge, however, is to wish that it changed its genre.

- 3 The third example is about ethnicity, image and the register of voices. Here I'd like to involve another local example of cinematic capability by moving from the face of Garbo to the voice of Rukmani Devi. Rukmani Devi, as we all know was of course a Tamil and also the first and foremost star of the Sinhala cinema. I should imagine that no one thought, then or think now, that she took a place or a job that should have gone to a Sinhalese girl. It is only in a utopian medium like film that we may see, hear and experience what is as yet not possible in flesh and blood.

Notes

- 1 Neil I Perera, *Aththa*, March 12th 1972, Reprinted in *Sinesith*.
- 2 Christine Gledhill (ed) *Home is where the heart is, Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, BFI, 1987. This whole section is drawn heavily from Gledhill's introductory chapter "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation".
- 3 Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination, Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess*, Yale University, 1976. I have drawn heavily from this book to present the philosophical implications of the notion of melodrama.
- 4 *Under the Bridge and its Critics*, A Lanka Kala Kendra publication, 1990.
- 5 Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" in *Simulation, Semiotext*, 1983, NYC. p.11.
- 6 The question that has guided me in writing this lecture is how does one produce alternative readings of films without constructing some monolithic Big bad Thing, be it Hollywood or our own formula cinema? I have tried to move away from simple oppositional binary thinking to a more complex way of trying to create change in the field of study.

Giraya: The harsh grip of a moral dialectic

Mala de Alwis

The recent telecasting of *Giraya* mesmerised all classes, and all generations in Sri Lanka. Its popularity was such that references to it entered parliamentary debates and the sale of imitation 'girayas' in Anuradhapura increased dramatically (*Ravaya* 5/10/92). Young boys in my neighbourhood even evinced interest in visiting the Colombo Museum on the "tip off" that the giraya used in the teledrama had been loaned by this institution.

The success of *Giraya* must have been especially heartening for director Lester James Peiris whose previous (and first) teledrama — *Awarjana*, was a terrible flop. However, despite the rave reviews, I felt a deep sense of disappointment as I watched *Giraya*. True, the cinematography was good, the acting passable and as Nishantha Alwis pointed out in *Ravaya*, it was a relief to see that Mr. Peiris had slightly moved out of the 'Walauwa culture'.

The main focus of *Giraya* was the relationships between various family members within the Walauwa, not feudal social relations. In this sense, Peiris' focus on family melodrama — the main genre of teledramas in Sri Lanka, also allowed him to fully exploit the dramatic potential of the physical setting of the family, the home. The highly connotative architectural organization of the walauwa and its gardens was carefully manipulated to highlight with claustrophobic intensity the passions and antagonisms that were simmering within it.

Yet, for those like me who had read Punyakante Wijenaiké's novel on which this teledrama was based, *Giraya* was extremely disappointing in its erasure of the sexual and the sensual and its failure to come to terms with the complex passions and desires of its protagonists. I will briefly discuss two "moments" of erasure here.

(1) The Erasure of Lal's homosexuality

In Wijenaiké's novel, Lal's homosexuality is negatively coded through the suggestion of (i) childishness (ii) effeminacy and (iii) friendship with males.

(i) Childishness: We are first introduced to Lal as he and his family receive the greetings of their workers and tenants during Avurudu. He stands beside his mother smiling nervously "like a child unsure of itself" in stark contrast to his two month old son in whose sleeping face Kamini (Lal's wife) can already detect "a man's firmness, of maturity that is so lacking in his father" (p 7). Lal's food continues to be dished out by his mother who is the most dominant force in his life and to whom he always looks for guidance. Even in the privacy of his bedroom when he attempts to make love to Kamini he fumbles at her nightdress "like a new born babe searching for its mother's breast" (p 37).

(ii) Effeminacy: While Lal as a child had his hair "in long ringlets like a girls" (p 18), even in adulthood he is tall and thin, "face fair almost effeminate with weak pink lips"; his hands are "long and soft with the nails pointed and polished, as a woman's hands" (p 35). These physical characteristics that Kamini had admired in Lal as a sign of sophistication and culture is seen as a sign of weakness as she gets to know him better. She is pleased to notice in her son a resemblance to her own father who was "strong of body" with "sun-browned shoulders" (p13). Lal is also juxtaposed against his own (supposed) father whose full cheeks and hard brown body stand testimony to many years spent in the outdoors swimming, hunting etc.

Lal's feminization through repeated unknown illnesses throughout the novel is extended to his fanatical fastidiousness about cleanliness which keeps him away from mingling with the devotees at the temple and makes him feverishly wash himself with Dettol after ejaculation. Wijenaiké's description of the latter "event" was especially powerful in its evocation of a man who desperately wants to deny his "manliness" and "virility" (p 37).

(iii) Friendship with males: The reader's first intimation of the focus of Lal's frequent absences from the Walauwa is when Kamini notices a young boy dressed in nylon shirt and brightly coloured silk sarong, "his hair set in waves and face fair and arrogant" lounging about the

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grounds. Interestingly, he smells strongly of an after-shave lotion that is also used by Lal (p 21). This same boy waves to Lal as he drives his family to the temple but receives none in answer. Finally, Manel's gentle hints that Lal had a lot of friends is fleshed out more fully at the end of the novel when Manel "confesses" to Kamini that "Lal was never a normal man... I told you he had many friends. But they were all men" (p 136).

It is unfortunate that Punyakante Wijenaikē in her somewhat gentle and subdued dealing with homosexuality in this novel, falls into the homophobic trap of reading homosexuality as an abnormality and a horrible aberration of manhood.

It is with a similar attitude that she writes of the semi-erotic relationship between Adelaine and Lucia Hamy: "The relationship between mistress and servant is not a normal one" (p 59).

(2) The Erasure of the Domesticated Erotic

In the same way that Wijenaikē feminizes Lal, she masculinizes Lucia Hamy whose "dark, ugly face", whose short body "brutal in its strength" (p 9) is juxtaposed against Adelaine "dainty and fair of skin with finely set features over delicate bone" (p 6).

While Adelaine is portrayed as a cold, hard hearted woman, it is only Lucia Hamy with her "furious limp", twisted mouth, and rolling eyes "like a sea in storm" who is the evil, demented, and abnormal one. Even the only exaggerated indication of her sex, her "pendulous breasts" with their dark tipped nipples hanging beneath her loose blouse is a sight that is revolting (p 111).

Lucia Hamy who now occupies Adelaine's husband's dressing room with its collection of stuffed animals and pornography seems to have slipped into the shoes of this dead man. Whenever a mosquito "dared bite" Adelaine, it was Lucia Hamy who "tenderly" rubbed eau-de-cologne on her "soft flesh" (p 3), and who attended to the toilette of her mistress "patting on the powder with a large long handled puff in the private places of her body..." (p 7). However, it is in Adelaine's bedroom that these ministrations take on a special sexual charge as is witnessed by Kamini:

Adelaine lies upon her great bed... Lucia Hamy kneels at the foot of the bed stroking the naked, soft fair skin of her legs. Back and forth the rough, dark hand glides gently, tenderly like a lover's hand. I can feel the skin on my body prickling. Then she picked up an inert foot and placed the sole of it upon her lips in a passionate kiss... (p 59).

Why is it that though *Giraya* the novel provided many opportunities for a challenging exploration of human passions and desires, *Giraya* the teledrama was so assiduous in its erasure? The reason for this has been suggested by many critics of the electronic media including Nishantha Alwis who have pointed out that unlike films, teledramas which are beamed right into our homes have to be watered down to suit the palate of the entire family (*Ravaya* 5/10/92). Yet, I think by erasing a reality of life such as homosexuality/lesbianism, our film and teledrama directors do us a great disservice.

Though she deals gently with homosexuality, Wijenaikē also falls into the homophobic trap of reading it as an abnormality.

By erasing a reality of life such as homosexuality/lesbianism, our film and teledrama directors do us a great disservice.

Take for instance, the absolute horror and ignorance with which the AIDS epidemic is viewed by the majority of the population in Sri Lanka. The demonizing of homosexuality in this country has also been transposed onto the AIDS disease. In the recent widely publicized policing of our coastal areas, the carriers of AIDS have been simplistically reduced to foreigners

and lower class beach boys and girls. However, what Sri Lanka's bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie have to come to terms with is that homosexuality/lesbianism is not simply a lower class or foreign 'phenomenon' and that AIDS can also be transmitted through heterosexual relations as well as blood transfusions and the sharing of needles.

Notes

1. The only sophisticated and critical review of *Giraya* that I have seen was written by Nishantha Alwis in the *Ravaya* of 10th May 1992.
2. Both markers of a certain decadence and vulgar flamboyance.
3. Also not the dichotomous shading of Lucia Hamy = dark and Adelaine = fair.

A FIRST CLASS GOVIGAMA

Michael Roberts

The Expedient Utopian: Bandaranaike and Ceylon, By James Manor, Cambridge University Press, 1989, 338 pp.

James Manor has produced a solid political biography of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, whose coalition of parties (known as the MEP) effected a striking electoral victory in 1956 and inaugurated momentous changes in Sri Lanka's political order. These changes are still being worked through, for the ethnic competition between Tamils and Sinhalese was aggravated by the forces of 1956. Bandaranaike did not live to influence these developing effects because he was assassinated by a disaffected clique led by a Buddhist monk.

Manor's approach is a combination of the transactionalist, the intellectual historian and the organisation theorist. His narrative follows the chronological sequence in great detail, the detail reflecting the breadth of his sources and being enriched by oral communications from many individuals. The book's rich minutiae may alienate non-specialists. Inevitably, too, such detail takes Manor into a few areas in which his expertise is limited: so that, for instance, the interpretive errors in his description of land policy in the twentieth century are quite striking.

An important thread in *The Expedient Utopian* is provided by Manor's dissection of Bandaranaike's political thought and the identification of the influences, intellectual and otherwise, which shaped his thinking. Manor argues that Bandaranaike has no systematic body of ideas and that his moralising was lyrical. These utopian fancies, his "monumental conceit," his opportunism and his preoccupation with power enabled Bandaranaike to both adopt and accept egalitarian and reformist ideas. The very isolation of his early aristocratic upbringing enabled him to transcend class prejudices and his class-cum-caste fraction (the first class Govigama) and to harness the grievances of disaffected caste fractions to his drive for power through the ballot.

Manor's decoding of Bandaranaike's intellectual interventions is contextualised through the detailing of events and an unveiling of his personal foibles. The presentation is both deft and balanced, cleaving a middle path between cavil and eulogy. Manor's narrative strategy is to place Bandaranaike "at the centre" and to move out "from the centre in ever-widening circles." In this fashion "each new arena that [Bandaranaike] enters, each new group and social stratum that he meets, [is] dealt with as and when he encounters them" (p. 1). This strategy is explicitly intended to guard against the great man theory of history.

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It works up to a point. The questions remain: what about Bandaranaike's silences? What major stands, what processes, in the history of the island did he not engage? And doesn't the great man theory slip in when it is claimed that "Bandaranaike was the central, pivotal figure in Ceylon's modern political transformation" (p.1)?

By pursuing this strategy, Manor's significant contribution is to reveal two overlapping threads in the story of Bandaranaike and Sri Lanka's twentieth century politics. One is the interplay between social reform and populist nationalism with a chauvinist hue, two political strands which were often in contradiction to each other (pp. 9, 127, 135-37, 169, 202, 253 and 254-318). The second theme is the resulting picture of ambiguity. Indeed, ambiguity and incongruity emerge as one of the book's major findings, ambiguity within Bandaranaike, inconsistency in his rhetoric and his programmes, and ambiguity in the developing political order.

In presenting these motifs, Manor reiterates one of his favourite criticisms of the political system established in 1948-and-thereafter: it is fatally overcentralised and there are few institutional links between the grassroots level and the centres of decision-making. Thus, Manor takes every opportunity to illustrate his contention that all the major political associations in Ceylon have "suffered from an excessive concentration of power in the hands of its leader" (p.140; also pp. 145-46, 147, 202, 208, 264).

This is a cogent finding which bears repetition, because the new constitutions of 1972 and 1978 did not modify this weakness. I would, however, have liked to see this argument related to the suggestion, made in different ways by Calvin Woodward and this reviewer, that democratic traditions have been weak in Sri Lanka - even among the much vaunted middle class generations of the 1930s -1960s. It would also have been useful to have Manor's reflections on another argument which I have presented, viz. to the effect that a cultural model of authoritarian and pontifical leadership deriving from Buddhist cosmology and Sinhala-Buddhist traditions of kingship have been kept alive, i.e. been reproduced, in modern times despite the demise of monarchy (1815), the implantation of capitalism and the establishment of democratic political institutions from 1931.¹ To the extent that these several contentions are valid, their precise mix over time becomes a major subject for investigation.



In pressing his criticism of the political system, Manor develops a sub-theme during his discussions of electoral politics in the era of 1931 to the 1950s: viz, that the networks maintained by individual notables rather than party machinery dominated the mobilisation of votes (pp. 74, 115-22, 168-184). This is an argument that has been developed earlier by Woodward (acknowledged rather belatedly by Manor, on page 179). It is in Manor's discussion of this issue that a reader becomes aware of his principle yardsticks, his bias, one might say. Manor is an organisation man. He in effect requires that a modern political association must necessarily have spatially widespread and democratically-chosen central command which is responsive to pressures from the rank and file. Thus "[organisational] substance, based on democratic decision-making (such as, for example, the Congress in India after 1919)" is Manor's talisman (p. 143, also pp. 140, 147, 202, 208, 264).

Directed by this talisman, Manor finds that Bandaranaike's Sinhala Maha Sabha (1936-51) "possessed only very modest organisational substance" (p. 138). And he dismisses the Ceylon National Congress (1919-51) as "a loosely structured, undisciplined, unrepresentative, undemocratic and insubstantial thing" (p. 72, also pp. 73, 192-93).

There is a touch of the doctrinaire outsider here, swayed by his Eurocentric, liberal model. The art of politics, as Cavour would have reminded anyone, is the art of the possible. The possible is historically and culturally specific. In electoral politics in Sri Lanka in the period 1931-1950s, the kin, caste and friendship networks of magnates were adequate to secure election (and that was their goal, not democracy in the abstract). Likewise, the Ceylon National Congress was able to make a noise when required. From 1931, moreover, its role was supplementary to that of the Board of Ministers established under the Donoughmore constitution. The latter made the running in the efforts to secure the further devolution of power. Their pressures may not have been pragmatic and effective. They were tailored to British Ceylon's geo-political circumstances.

That, then, is the point: their specific relevance. Differences in scale render the comparison with India, however "natural," a misleading one. This comparison has been deployed by a long line of Ceylonese radicals and romantics from the 1940s and 1960s in order to belittle the achievements of the conservative politicians who pressed for the devolution of British authority from 1907 onwards. It was in their immediate political interest to do so. Without any such interest, an equally long line of foreign scholars have adopted this criticism hook, like and sinker. In joining this band, Manor ignores arguments that qualify and modify this line of criticism.

The fact is that in about 21 years, between 1907 and 1928, when the Donoughmore Report appeared, the pressures exerted by these moderate politicians had contributed towards constitutional reforms the like of which the Indian nationalists took fifty years, 1885 to 1935, to secure. To be sure, there were other factors which contributed to this result: viz (i) the vision of the Donoughmore Commissioners and Sidney Webb (Lord Passfield) for one; and

(ii) the geo-political factor of the island's size, which, given the British naval power, encourages the British authorities to take greater risks than, say, in India. However, the Donoughmore Commission was sent out because the politicians had made the existing constitution, *established only in 1924*, unworkable. And the fact that these moderates spoke in the British idiom and displayed moderation may well have encouraged the British to be liberal in their devolutionary grants. It is a common, and valid, criticism that these moderates were opposed to universal suffrage when the issue was raised by the Donoughmore Commissioners. But it is forgotten that the leading players readily acquiesced in the recommendation to this effect by the Donoughmore Commission. They even suggested that the franchise qualification for women should be reduced from the age of 30 to 21, on a par with the men.

What is more, within a few months of the State Council taking its seats in 1931, these moderates demanded a further devolution of power. Their targets were the remaining institutional repositories of British power: the Governor's reserve powers and the three ex-officio ministers (British civil servants who had been quickly nicknamed "the three policemen"). While these demands did not get very far at the outset, the insistent and pragmatic politics directed by D.B. Jayatilaka and D.S. Senanayake has brought them on the verge of gaining a cabinet system of government without ex-officio ministers in 1938-39, when the second world war broke out and the issue was postponed. In brief, the war delayed Ceylon's progress towards independence.

In other words, Manor underestimates the pragmatic astuteness of D.S. Senanayake, W.A. de Silva and their associates. It was sagacity that led D.S. Senanayake *et al* to construct the Ceylon National Congress as "an umbrella organisation" and to resist the repeated efforts (by Amarasuriya, Kannangara, Bandaranaike *et al* in 1931-36 and by J.R. Jayewardene *et al* from 1938-43) to transform it into a party. The splits which occurred in the 1940s as a result of such efforts proved their point.

From our analytical position, further confirmation of their astuteness on this issue is provided by the character of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party in the years 1935-39. Though its leaders were aware of the deep rift between Trotskyists and Stalinists in their own ranks, the party was set up as a broad front of socialists seeking liberation from capitalist oppression as well as imperial rule. It was only the accident of the second world war and Stalinist Russia's allegiance with the Allies that enforced a break up of this front into its constituent units.

Notes

- 1 Roberts 1980. Because it is mimeographed this essay is not widely available outside Sri Lanka, but as a Ceylon Studies Seminar paper it should be known to aficionados. The paradigm termed "the Asokan Persona" is also clarified in Roberts 1984. Manor places some emphasis on the extent of defence shown in political and other circles in Sri Lanka (1989: 101, 205 & 264) in ways which support my thesis. He is wrong, however, in believing that deference decreases as one moves beyond the westernized elites. (p.101).

Letter

Murder Condoned

On 22 April 1992, a woman undergraduate of the University of Kelaniya, Maduwanthi Gunewardena, was stabbed to death inside the campus premises, looked on by fellow undergraduates and university security staff. It may be assumed that it took time for Maduwanthi to die, since she did manage to break away and flee from her assailant, but was pursued through the campus grounds and struck with a knife repeatedly, until she was dead. No attempt was made to stop Maduwanthi from being killed. However, after the murder, the killer was prevented from taking poison by his fellow students.

The murder was publicised in the media in a manner which regarded the incident in terms of a tragic love affair or a crime of passion, while various reasons were put forward to 'explain' the actions of the killer. Some members of the student community expounded theories which justified the act of murder, particularly, in view of the relationship between Maduwanthi and her killer (as they saw it). Even the public at large when referring to the incident felt that Maduwanthi was murdered due to *her* actions as highlighted in the media and that a certain amount of sympathy was due to her murderer.

What disturbed us is the comfortable ability of our society to explain away murder. As '*Women Against Violence Against Women*', we see the slaying of Maduwanthi as part of the continuum of violence against women, particularly, in view of the fact that a Peradeniya undergraduate was stabbed to death last year, and a Colombo woman undergraduate was subjected to physical abuse on campus, a week after Maduwanthi's murder. We perceive a growing pattern of violent victimisation of women within personal relationships - specially as a mode of revenge - not only in the universities but elsewhere as well.

We condemn this gross act of violence and the justifications of it. Murder cannot be justified or explained away, whatever the reason. We see these explanations for the killing as a violation of women's rights. Women are being denied the right to express themselves, specially the right to say no. Women like Maduwanthi who do say no, are being made to pay for that choice with their lives. In other words, women who dare to make a choice or act against social 'norms' are publicly condemned and made to live in constant fear of violence, rape and death.

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