

14/09
C.C. 138

Pravāda

Vol. 1 No. 9

September 1992

SL Rupees Ten

Contents

NOTES AND COMMENTS	03
THIRD WORLDISM	06
<i>Anila Cherian, Shan Manikalingam and Robin Varghese</i>	
RELIGION, ETHNICITY & PERSONAL IDENTITY	08
<i>Nighat Said Khan</i>	
ON STATE, SOCIETY AND DISCOURSE IN INDIA	11
<i>Sudipta Kaviraj</i>	
NATION STATE IN CRISIS—THE RISE OF ETHNO-NATIONALISM	16
<i>Stanley J. Tambiah</i>	
EMERGENCY LAWS AND LABOUR	20
<i>Charles Abeysekera</i>	
POEMS OF SIVARAMANI	21
MODERN SCIENCE: A WESTERN PATRIARCHAL MYTH?	23
<i>Meera Nanda</i>	
CHILD ABUSE	31
<i>Gameela Samarasinghe</i>	
REPRESENTATION AS OTHERING THE OTHER	32
<i>Neluka Silva</i>	
WALCOTT'S WORLD	35

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

THE DEAD END OF POPULISM

Populism, that elusive ideology so immensely flexible as to be present in and useful for every shade of politics, is again on the rise. On a global scale, one might add. A whole variety of political forces—the New Right and ex-progressives, ethno-religious fundamentalists and Third Worldists, nationalist fighters carrying guns and respectable academics sitting before word-processors, rulers and their oppositionist critics—that are locked into a collision course at the current world historical juncture, are appropriating populism towards seemingly contradictory political goals. Populism as an ideology promises panaceas; as a program it caters to elementary sentiments producing shallow differences; as a world view, it hides the complexity of the human predicament by offering simplistic explanations and solutions to profoundly disturbing problems.

Take, for example, the 'new radicalism' of the Third World intelligentsia. Refusing to come to grips with the fundamental processes that have led the developing world to a perpetual state of predicament, many progressive academics are giving increasing currency to a simplistic dichotomy of the West and the Rest of Us. Couching their theories primarily in a post-modernist theoretical language, the malcontents of capitalist modernity are engaged in a romanticist project of juxtaposing 'our own local traditions' against the 'hegemonizing Western thrust.' 'Indigenous knowledge systems' are now being posited as more authentic and, as far as their particular societies are concerned, as superior to the 'dominating knowledge systems of the colonizer.' Technology that has raised the productivity of labour immensely is rejected on the basis of a desire to voyage into

an 'eco-friendly' primitivism. Development projects based on such technologies are condemned out of hand as 'anti-people'.

This is just one side of the story of the new populism. There is another side to it, which is not very new, yet crops up again and again in new contexts. When repressive regimes of the 'third world' are critiqued and exposed by human rights communities, these governments seek to insulate themselves from such criticism by adopting a posture of deceitful innocence and concern, claiming that Western standards and values can not, and should not, be applied to Asian and African societies. A philosophical abstraction of this claim to immunity by authoritarian regimes would be that non-Western societies, in loyalty to their 'traditions', should not bother about the liberal individualism of the West. 'We are for the people, not for individuals.' True enough, most Asian societies have not had strong traditions of recognizing individual rights and liberties as they are privileged in Western liberalism; it is also true that human rights standards and values have largely come to non-Western societies from the capitalist West. However, there is a fundamental fallacy in an argument based on such a West/non-West categorization in that it totally ignores the universalist essence of human rights and political civility. Hence the reactionary appropriation of 'indigenous peoplism' by the state.

Populism has also acquired a new dimension of regressive nativism against the backdrop of the spread of ethnic and religious conflicts, specifically in South Asia. At one level, majoritarian religious and ethno-communal groups are trying to re-build existing political



Pravada

Vol 1 No 9
September 1992

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Pravada is published monthly by:

Pravada Publications
129/6A Nawala Road
Colombo 5
Sri Lanka
Telephone: 01-501339

Annual subscriptions:

Sri Lanka	Rs. 110
By Air mail:	
South Asia/Far-East	U.S. \$ 20
Europe/Africa	U.S. \$ 26
Americas/Pacific countries	U.S. \$ 30

systems through a 'discovery' of the 'true past.' Concepts of 'Hinduthva' in India and 'Sinhala-Buddhist ethos' in Sri Lanka have emerged as a rejection of both the recent political history of ethnic formation in the sub-continent and what is perceived to be the legacy of colonialism and its post-colonial consequences. Religio-communal fundamentalism of the contemporary South Asian form finds its affirmation in the negation of several centuries of recent history and in the preference for primarily a mytho-history of preceding periods several millennia ago. As much as the Hinduthva concept derives its emotional fervor from the parables-turned history of Ram, the notion of a Sinhala ethos has discovered Ravana as the representative of a 'glorious civilization' and the anchor of ethnic pride. The recent history that is rejected is in fact the history that has largely shaped our societies into what they are today. The forms of that transformation, even when they may be unsatisfactory, cannot be corrected by turning our societies into mono-religious or mono-ethnic entities, as envisioned in populist-fundamentalist projects.

Confronted with the phenomenon of intense religio-communal mobilization and the attendant conflicts, some pro-

gressive intellectuals of yester-year too have begun to summon the past in an antediluvian spirit. Meera Nanda's essay published in this issue provides a fundamental critique of this academic populism currently fashionable in India. Rejection of the European enlightenment tradition is at the philosophical and intellectual core of this populist enterprise. It is a truism that Western nations have dominated, and continue to dominate, the non-Western world in a variety of spheres, economic, political, military, cultural and intellectual. In a historical period of increasingly globalizing capitalism, humankind can fight global structures of domination only by means of a universalist strategy. Retreating to islands of 'national traditions' cannot provide more than temporary solace.

Contemporary 'anti-systemic' populism has a certain historical context. As in the phenomenon of ethno-nationalism, anti-systemic populism is also a response to the failure of both capitalist and socialist projects in non capitalist and developing societies. These twin failures have left the developing world in a quandary, because the 'socialist' project has temporarily failed, capitalism, triumphantly and arrogantly projected by the West, is making its menacing presence now felt all over the globe. Meanwhile, the traditional challengers to capitalism within national boundaries—the working class, trade union movements and the Left—have become ineffective and insignificant political forces. The working class challenge to capitalism at least posited a social order which was believed, though in a dated idiom, to be more progressive and advanced than the capitalist organization of production and exchange. At the moment, no such vision of historical progress and advancement that could look beyond the limits of capitalism is available. In this great political and intellectual vacuum, there have emerged projects of fragmented resistance to the globally homogenizing forces of capitalism. Because of the very fragmented and atomized nature of this resistance, anti-systemic populism can critique capitalism mainly through pre-capitalist imageries and imagined categories which are derived from isolationist perspectives.

A telling example of this politically regressive response is the critique of secularism developed by a number of leading Indian scholars. Their argument, simply put, is that the official and elitist ideology of secularism has

failed to recognize the liberating potential of religion. The anti-religionism of an elite minority, sanctified at the level of state policy, has, then, led to the erosion of the legitimacy of the state, because the masses perceived the world through religious, and not secular, categories. The critique further states that this secularism is essentially a part of Western rationalism which has never been a part of the South Asian cultural and epistemological tradition.

Apart from the cultural relativist assumptions of this argument, it deliberately refuses to present a critique of religion and religio-politics in South Asia. While it is true that believers understand the world through religious categories, it is also true that structures of social oppression, inequality and political authoritarianism have been historically and are presently reproduced through the mediation of religion. All South Asian religions in their present form have not produced a single social liberationist perspective that can contribute to the progress of humankind. Hence the need to re-appropriate secularism by democratic forces, instead of capitulating before populist religious obscurantism, couched in a critique of Western categories. Nigat Khan's essay appearing in this issue of *Pravada* is a pointer to the pitfalls inherent in such simplified notions as cultural identity, tradition and indigenous self.

The world is not black and white; categories of division are not as simple as West and East, or coloniser and colonised. Reverse orientalism can be as intellectually disabling as was European orientalism. Simplistic post-colonialism too is not an adequate strategy to deal with colonialism and its more pervasive contemporary manifestations. Similarly, essentialist isolationism is not a worthy substitute for liberationist universalism.

We live in a historical period where there is a deep political vacuum created by the absence of a comprehensive intellectual and political critique of all the forces of hegemonic globalization and homogenization which have produced disabling, and not enabling, differences. Perhaps it is time to return to the Old Master, Karl Marx, in order to enable ourselves to understand its kernel beyond the mystifying shell which appears to appeal so much to 'radical' populists of our age.

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

Federalism: The Debate Re-opens

It took an Indian to tell the Sri Lankans the plain and simple truth: find a federalist alternative, if you want Sri Lanka to be peaceful, democratic and united.

N. Ram, editor of *Frontline*, in Colombo this August to deliver the A. Amirthalingam memorial lecture, provocatively titled his presentation "Why not Federalism for Sri Lanka?"

Ironically, the late Mr. Amirthalingam was the Tamil leader who virtually presided over the transformation of the Tamil political demand from federalism to a separate state called Eelam. The struggle for Eelam has had a chequered history; after nearly fifteen years and three phases of a bloody war, now in 1992, Eelam no longer signifies a separate sovereign state except for diehard LTTE and some Tamil communities in exile. An ethnic unit, with power devolved politically within the territorial framework of a united Sri Lanka, seems to be the consensus goal, workable and practical, for the majority of Tamil groups.

How much devolution to the North-east and in what manner should power be shared have been the central issues that have characterized the debate on the ethnic question ever since provincial councils were set up in 1988. The debate, nonetheless, has so far remained inconclusive, seemingly fruitless and at times bitter. Indeed, Mr. Ram stepped in bringing his federalist 'advice' at a time when the terms of the debate were in need of a radical revision.

Mr. Ram is of course not the first person to argue, in the post-1987 political debate, for a federalist alternative for Sri Lanka. Nor is he the first to open up the debate. A number of Sinhala and Tamil intellectuals have, over the past few years, made the federalist point at various fora. Two years ago, Mr. H. L. de Silva, a leading constitutional lawyer, wrote a tract *contra* federalism which was reviewed by Professor G. L. Pieris in a major essay published in the *Daily News*. Yet, the discussion did not really pick up momentum, because the Tamil and Muslim political parties largely ignored it. They were busy with negotiations among themselves, within the framework of the All Party Conference, about power-sharing arrangements in the Eastern province.

Non-ethnic Solutions to Ethnic Questions

Ram's suggestion of federalism for Sri Lanka had an interesting conceptual grounding. Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka should approach federalism as a democratic solution to the ethnic question, and not as an ethnic solution. "You need to redefine the ethnic question in democratic terms. It is not a mere nationality question. It is a democratic question," said Mr. Ram, urging the Sinhalese to give up the 'Sinhala-only mentality' and the Tamils 'the Eelam mentality.' (Eelam is a pipe-dream, said Ram, the man who reportedly played a key mediatory role between New Delhi, Colombo and Jaffna in the run up to the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987).

Ram's reference to Eelam as an impossible 'pipe dream' made the TULF leadership uncomfortable. In his vote of thanks, Mr. Sivasithambaram responded, quite contrary to usual custom, with an emotionally charged defence of the Sri Lankan Tamil demand for Eelam. Many other Tamil intellectuals in the audience later commented in private that they were profoundly disturbed by the Indian editor's rejection of the historical validity of the Eelam demand. "I am very perturbed," said an academic from Jaffna.

Ram's intervention drew a further response from Mr. Sivasithambaram, the leader of the TULF in an interview published a few days later in the *Island*. He said that the implication of Ram's argument - that the Tamils should first formally abjure the notion of a separate state - was untenable; it was necessary that the government should first put on the table a concrete alternative proposal the basis of which could be a federal political structure and the Tamils could then decide whether it was an adequate alternative to Eelam. Even the TULF seems unable to draw out the theoretical implications of their present political strategy.

A closer perusal, however, of Ram's appeal to the Sinhalese and Tamils to give up their ethnic politics and work towards a democratic solution has a valid basis. Unlike classical nationalism, modern ethno-nationalism—whether Sinhala, Tamil, Georgian or Serbian—can, evidently, play only a historically limited role. The contemporary experience of ethno-nationalisms graphically demonstrates that ethno-nationalism has only a limited and fixed task; it can not do more than highlight and bring to world



attention ethnic grievances. It cannot bring about solutions. Though examples of an extreme nature, Sri Lanka and erstwhile Yugoslavia sufficiently testify to the sheer inability of ethnic forces—extreme as well as moderate—to move towards even a cessation of hostilities, let alone a solution. To make the point more forceful, acutely politicized ethnicity can have a disabling effect on political practice, because it provides political actors with an essentialist and uni-dimensional world-view. Ethnicity, in ethno-politicizing communities, also dialectically negates democratic politics; it de-politicizes them. Even the enormous human suffering and destruction brought about by ethnic wars cannot move the ethno-nationalist mind. The LTTE's militaristic aggression and the TULF's political inertia are in a way products of this disabling ethno-nationalism as much as the Sinhalese political insensitivity to Tamil political rights is a result of the social-blindness of other communities to ethnicity.

The lesson, then, is actually an uncomfortable one for ardent believers in ethnicity: ethnic questions have no ethnic solutions. There are only democratic, and therefore de-ethnicized, solutions to ethnic questions.

The Price of Free Expression

When the Free Media Movement started its campaign of public meetings two months ago, its most active participants were journalists from independent newspapers. The state-owned Lake House Press responded to the Free Media Movement with a typical Lake House smear campaign. A journalist from the *Observer*, however, had the courage to join the media movement and participate actively in its campaign; he addressed a number of its rallies in Colombo and other cities.

Keerthi Kelegama, the journalist in question, is, according to reports in the non-state press, in trouble. The management had asked him to explain why he spoke at anti-government rallies. He may or may not be penalized for his act of rare courage. Yet, the very act of calling for an explanation is clearly intimidation by the management. The cruel irony of the Kelegama case is that this journalist spoke for the freedom of expression; the implication is that talking of media freedom is a punishable offence at Lake House—the leading agit-prop agency of the state.

Third Coming of the JVP?

If the statements made by government spokes persons are to be relied upon, the JVP has the life cycle of a phoenix; it constantly regenerates itself from its own ashes.

During the past two months, the government has been more or less warning of a resurgence of the JVP. Whenever hidden arms and ammunition, allegedly belonging to the JVP, are discovered by the police, a familiar news commentary also appears: 'these are weapons intended for a major JVP operation.' Recently, the *Daily News* quoted a police source saying that they were aware of the re-grouping of the JVP, specifically in the campuses. The *Sunday Island* too recently carried, on two consecutive weeks, feature articles on the theme of JVP's resurgence in the universities.

Are the stories of the JVP's resurrection mere bogey or truly indicative of the re-grouping of JVP-DJV elements? There are two theories gaining currency. According to the first, believed to come primarily from sources connected with the state, the recent spate of big robberies are clearly evident of preparations being made by JVP elements to reorganize their military wing. An added factor in this theory is the alarming increase in desertions from armed forces; according to recent newspaper reports, nearly 8,000 servicemen have deserted, often with their automatic weapons.

The second theory, meanwhile, states that the government has been exaggerating the JVP issue for political gains. Among these political objectives, according to this school of thought, is that of using the threat of a resurgent JVP as an excuse to maintain the state of emergency, in the face of growing domestic and international pressure to withdraw at least from the south.

Despite such contending readings of events, one should not rule out a scenario in which the JVP could come back with a bang. The prevailing political confusion in the country, if it continues unabated, would provide ideal conditions for the JVP or any other militant oppositionist movement to emerge. One factor that many people have forgotten is that the JVP had in the past found necessary political space whenever the opposition to the UNP regime remained weak, fragmented and ineffective. It has always succeeded in mobilizing people on an oppositionist footing, eating into opposition constituencies and presenting its own program as the most effective and immediate oppositionist project. To put it briefly, the tendency of the JVP has been to re-emerge first as an alternative to a weak and dilapidated mainstream opposition and then to move ahead as an alternative to the regime.

Given the fact that Oedipal and sibling rivalries within the SLFP leadership have set the party, which claims to be the main opposition party, along a path of self-destruction, and the general state of political despair among the rank and file of the opposition, should the JVP alone be blamed for its Third Coming?



Detainees, Embilipitiya School Boys and Human Rights

We commented in our last issue on the work of the Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) and looked forward to the publication of its Annual Report.

The report covering the activities of the HRTF for the year ending 10 August 1992 is now out. What the report does reveal is that the chairman of the HRTF has been forced to go on a voyage of discovery to 18 detention and rehabilitation camps and to 104 police stations and has found 7356 detainees in these places. He admits that many more police stations and army camps remain to be visited; and how many more detainees remain to be discovered?

These endeavours point out a depressing fact. The main task of the HRTF is to compile a comprehensive and accurate register of detainees and ensure that the conditions of detention are humane. To compile such a register two things are necessary: a list of all places in which detainees are being held and the requirement that all officials either taking detainees into custody or holding them should report to the HRTF. From a reading of the report, it is obvious that neither of these two requirements is being met; that is why the HRTF is being compelled to discover detainees.

If the government has either not instructed its security forces to fulfil these requirements or is not supervising their implementation, then one must question its sincerity and motives in setting up the HRTF. The HRTF has done some work to improve the physical conditions of detention, as, for example, their nutritional, sanitary and medical needs; but this is really the least part of its work. After one year of operation, there is still no central register of detainees.

In an effort to spruce up its own image, and that of the government, The HRTF has looked into a number of incidents which are only remotely connected with its mandate. One of these incidents is of great significance. This is the case of the Embilipitiya schoolboys.

Mr. D.L. Galappatty was the principal of the Embilipitiya Central School and the head of a school cluster; he still remains in this post. Let us reproduce the details of the incident in the words of the HRTF report:

Galappatti's son Chaminda had a love affair with a schoolgirl called Pavitra Ranmali.... The love affair caused a furore in the school.

One of the love letters which Chaminda Galappatti had written to Pavithra had fallen into the hands of a boy called Rasika Kumara Wijetunga. Rasika had shown this letter to other students and they used to have fun at Chaminda using expressions which he had written in the letter. This aggravated the hostility between the two groups. There were some incidents which culminated in an incident at a cricket match between Udagama school and the Uda Walawe school on 17.11.89. There was an altercation between Nihal of Udagama school and Janaka, a friend of Galappatti's son Chaminda. Janaka threatened to finish off Nihal of Udagama school and his friends on a tyre "male".

Some boys, including Nihal, were taken into custody by the army on same day; Others, including Rasika, were taken in on following days. The Report concludes

It is alleged that it was a well known fact that Galappatti had prepared a list of 18 boys of his school who belonged to the group against his son to be dealt with. On our investigations there is evidence of the abduction or removal of the following:

[Here follows a list of 32 schoolboys]

The report also refers to a close friendship between Galappatti and Col. Liyanage, the head of the army unit at Embilipitiya.

The report says that the "above account is based on statements made by the parents of the abducted persons and set out here without prejudice in the public interest". Mr. Soza, Chairman of the HRTF, wants the law enforcement authorities to investigate this incident and assess "the involvement and criminal responsibility of the persons mentioned."

Such an inquiry is said to be in progress. The delay is said to be because the statements of "certain army personnel who are difficult to contact as they are engaged in different parts of the country" are still to be recorded.

Can there be a lamer excuse? Are the authorities really interested in pursuing an inquiry into this incident which is symptomatic of many private vendettas carried out under the shadow of the emergency? The doubts are strengthened by the fact that Mr. Galappatti still remains principal of this school, even despite protests and demonstrations by students and parents. **P**

“THIRD WORLDISM”: Reactionary Politics in Progressive Guise

Anila Cherian, Shan Manikkalingam and Robin Varghese

Third Worldism' has been a salient feature in oppositional politics in the last few decades. By 'Third Worldism' we mean the glorification and celebration of any phenomenon/movement regarding the third world that appears to challenge the West. Given the rise of cultural relativism, 'Third World' reactionary nationalism and fundamentalism have been masquerading as forms of progressive politics. A segment of the Left has mistakenly viewed these masquerades as representing a progressive alternative. Others have apologised for the excesses of 'Third World' nationalist and fundamentalist movements and governments. We believe this to be a truly dangerous trend. While opposition to the American intervention of the Persian Gulf was crucial, the subsequent defence, by some, of Saddam Hussein is a telling example of the pitfalls of Third Worldism. The support that some "progressives" gave the Khmer Rouge is "Third Worldism" at its horrific worst. Undoubtedly, resistance to all forms of imperialism has been and remains essential. However, forms of resistance that ignore class, gender, racial, and ethnic power relations must be reevaluated.

Definitions: Imposed Unity, Shattered Realities

Much of the problem with Third Worldism rests in the way the term "Third World" has been defined. The shared experience of colonialism and post-colonial dependency are the uniting features that popularised the use of the term. In the present historical context, however, the term is quite meaningless. With South Korea at one end of the spectrum and Mozambique at the other, the term Third World becomes an overarching identity, that forces an homogenisation of disparate historical, social and economic experiences/realities. The term originally reflected a historical and economic category; however, it has been transformed into a racial and cultural monolith that transfigured what once used to be a site of resistance into a site of resentment and despair. Moreover, it is an identity that exists solely in the negative, describing the major part of humanity as not of the 'First,' or what was of the 'Second,' worlds. In addition, there have always been those grey areas that defy categorisation, e.g. Ireland, Malta, Yugoslavia, and Israel. As a concept, Third World has been largely effective in the West and in discourse targeted towards the West.

As forms of domination become more subtle and multi-faceted and shared historical experiences grow distant, adherence to a universal Third World identity in the locational context of the Third World becomes tenuous at best. To this end, peasants and urban squatters, whose struggles are based on other identities - class and ethnicity, for example - see little or no validity in the term, Third World.

While resistance to all forms of imperialism is essential, it is sobering to note that anti-imperialist rhetoric has often been used by Third World elites to legitimise some of the worst horrors of our time. Indira Gandhi's imposition of the State of Emergency in 1976, Saddam Hussein's gassing of the Kurds, Abdul Nasser's persecution of the Egyptian Communists and Mengistu's war against the Tigreans and Eritreans are examples that come readily to mind. Adherents of Third Worldism have justified, ignored, or maintained a stubborn silence in the face of such nationalist excesses.

Reactionary Nationalisms

In addition to the definitional problems of the category, the political manifestations/practices it has generated must be critically examined. The rhetoric of Third Worldism has often validated reactionary politics under the banner of nationalism. Nationalism began, in the colonial world, as a means for emancipating the constructed, imagined 'nation' from colonial rule. But now it has become the legitimising myth for the preservation of a repressive order. In many of the post-colonial nation-states, proclamations of equality before the law have become meaningless because nationalists, who have draped themselves in the flag, have refused to extend equality into the social economic and political realms. In the drive towards 'nation-building,' a particularized and monolithic national identity is imposed by the post-colonial state, consequently denying alternative identities and visions of politics and reinforcing the dominance of traditional and new elites.

In his critique of nationalism, the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore parodies the hollow claims of the nationalist project:

When questioned as to the wisdom of its course, the newly converted fanatic of nationalism answers that so long as nations are rampant in this world



we have not the option to freely develop our higher humanity. We must utilize every faculty we possess to resist the evil by assuming it ourselves in the fullest degree. For, the only brotherhood possible in the modern world is the brotherhood of hooliganism.¹

Another worrying trend in much of the Third World is revivalism - specially its most acute variant of religious or ethnic fundamentalism. In trying to resurrect a pristine, imagined past, revivalist movements often valorize indigenous systems of oppression and buttress the privileges of the status quo. Like revivalism, nativism, a perspective that sees all that is indigenous as good, cleverly masks the serious and debilitating, class, gender and ethnic conflicts that exist in society. Unfortunately, cultural relativism lends a helping hand in preventing and abating opposition to fundamentalist forces. "Third Worldists," with their cultural relativist lenses, are hard pressed to acknowledge the existence of, let alone criticise, native systems of oppression. When they do acknowledge the existence of oppressive practices, such as caste discrimination, female genital mutilation, or Sha'ria [Islamic law], it is usually in the form of an apology.

Conclusion

The state or reactions to it is the arena in which regressive nationalism and nativism are encapsulated. In the limited world of 'modernise at any cost,' the state is held to be the unitary actor whose sole objective is self-perpetuation and power-goals valorized by 'Third Worldists' as essential to 'nationhood.' However, in the 'Third World,' the state itself, given its crisis of legitimacy, is a site of contestation. A state-centric view endorses the crushing of all oppositional social movements. When calls from peasants, workers, women, or minorities to alter the status quo are crushed, it is often nationalism that is used as the legitimising agent.

The unequal relationship between state and civil society seldom appears in "Third Worldist" discourse. The fragmentation and repression of society by the so-called anti-imperialist states is glossed over, and issues such as distributive justice and political accountability are ignored. The calls for "nation building," implicit in the arguments of those who call to "strengthen the state at any expense," have often permitted the dismissal of critical identities such as class, gender and ethnicity.

Another equally alarming development is the recent rise of ethno-nationalist movements that have adopted nativistic politics in their contest for state power. The BJP in India, and the JVP and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka are examples of this. Often "radical" apologists justify these groups on the grounds that they are supposedly "organic," home-grown and oppose the West. Radical rhetoric aside, these groups oppose liberal democratic rights on the basis that they are Western, while advocating racist reactionary politics. Paradoxically, these same groups have uncritically embraced nationalism which also has its origins in Enlightenment Europe.

Professor S. Gopal of Delhi University argues that while Hinduism is used by the BJP as a nativist ideology to oppose the West, its conceptual origin lies in the attempts of German and British orientalist to categorise the religions of India.

Thus, the ostensibly anti-western politics of "Third Worldism" is ultimately derived from western ideas. This indicates that "Third Worldists," themselves, have not been averse to a selective appropriation from the west. The problem with Third Worldists, however, is not that they have borrowed from the west, but that they have only borrowed the bad.

Note

1. Tagore, Rabindranath 1976. *Nationalism* Madras: MacMillan India Ltd. (p 16).

Letter

Reading Qadri Ismail's piece [*Pravada*, July 1992] prompts me to make this point. The problem with Mr. Prabakaran, is not that he doesn't have a correct stand on the "woman question" and that he thinks that "women must be adjuncts to men in the struggle". The problem is that he is a fascist.

Tisarane Gunasekara
Colombo.

An article by Radhika Coomaraswamy entitled "The Swamy and the Sub-Text" appeared in *Pravada* No.6, June 1992. It discussed a dilemma with which many South Asian intellectuals are faced:

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.

This article provoked much comment and criticism in private, but we are disappointed that no one has come forward to propose an alternative way of meeting the dilemma that the writer posed.

*We publish below extracts from the introduction by Nighat Said Khan to a book entitled **Voices Within :Dialogues with Women on Islam** (1992), published in Lahore by ASR Publications. We hope this will stimulate further discussion.*

RELIGION, ETHNICITY AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

Nighat Said Khan

Much has been written about the political, economic, and religious reasons that led to Pakistan. While I agree that the answers lie in these and other areas, and that the economic and political reasons may have been paramount, I am concerned here only with the religious separateness and more concerned with trying to isolate that strand of feeling within religion that constitutes and manifests itself as identity, a dimension I find seldom considered or expressed. What does it actually mean to be a Muslim, how is this articulated and how and why do economic and political issues get played out through religion? Regarding the partition of India, I am intrigued as to how the leadership on both sides was able to tap a religious identity within the Hindus and the Muslims and to separate this religious identity from an overall cultural and historical identity which all the people of India had in common, especially those in the North and the East, the two areas that were partitioned.

Obviously these separate religious identities existed and, as history testifies, were repeatedly used by the British to divide the people. But I think that we have been looking at the issue the wrong way around. Hindu and Muslim identities and their separateness were not positive affirmations of their respective faiths. Had this been the case, Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists would have been the first to have articulated this and would have been in the forefront of the struggle to separate the two. But those supposedly most intolerant of the other did not think that their separateness warranted a division of the country; while those supposedly most tolerant of difference, the

secular and progressive elements on both sides, took positions that divided the people and eventually the country.

However, when I say that we need to look at the issue the other way around I mean that we should not be looking at the obvious: that the Muslim League was able to draw upon a creative Muslim identity which looked to the realization of the dream for a homeland for the Muslims; or that Congress was able to hold together a national liberation struggle that was decidedly secular and singularly non-Hindu. The Muslim League was not as Muslim as it was made out to be, and the Congress was more Hindu than it professed. Yet in articulating the concerns of Indian Muslims, and needing to establish a separateness, the Muslim League used Islamic symbols and slogans that necessarily alienated Hindus, an alienation which intensified when the Hindus felt that their nation itself was being threatened.

However, this is somewhat understandable since the Muslim League never pretended not to be of and for the Muslims. But many Muslims were unable to identify with the Hindu symbols, colours and images used by the Congress and felt excluded from the national liberation movement. Added to this was the linguistic struggle between Hindi and Urdu. The Indian State identified the Urdu language and script as 'Muslim' and made attempts to 'Indianize' it. But in giving language a religious identity, it alienated Urdu-speaking Muslims who felt that their language, expression, culture and history were being obliterated, and with it, themselves (it is interesting that post partition, Jinnah supported Urdu as the national language of Pakistan because it was closer to other Muslim languages, and Nehru rejected it as one of the national languages of India for precisely the same reasons). On both sides therefore, the separateness was not positive ex-

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pressions of religion and identity from within, but being pushed into these identities by the other.

After the creation of Pakistan other identities surfaced: linguistic, ethnic, sub-national and provincial, and ideological. It took nine years for the nation to come to some sort of an agreement on a Constitution, but in these years far from anything getting resolved, the other identities became more articulate.

However the lynchpin of this process Islamization was women. In his first address to the nation Zia-ul-Haq vowed to uphold 'the sanctity of chaddar and chardivari.' The State moved to take over the lives of women, to control their bodies, their space, to decide what they should wear, how they should conduct themselves, the jobs they could take, the sports they could play, and took it upon itself to define and regulate women's morality. This was done through a series of legislative changes such as the Zina and Hudood Ordinances, and the Islamic Law of Evidence; through directives such as the dress code, women not being allowed to participate in spectator sports; but mainly through a persistent ideology that women were not equal to men and that they must be regulated.

While the people of Pakistan have resisted Islamization, particularly women, Islamization has been very detrimental to the nation. It has given legitimacy to fundamentalism and has put the nation, especially the urban middle class on the defensive, by constantly having to prove its identity. There is always a tendency that in asking larger questions such as what is a Pakistani or a Muslim, one ends up with narrower answers and narrower identities, because the more refined the definition, the greater will be the exclusion. This constriction is continuing in Pakistan, with even Islamic sects being pushed out of the central discourse.

Also since Islam has no ultimate authority on earth to determine what Islam is, or who a Muslim is, the attempt to impose a single interpretation of Islam has pitted Islam against Islam, and sect against sect, and has also led to a proliferation of sub-sects. All of this has made every one, other than those in one's own community, the 'other' and has made for a very disintegrated and violent society.

Yet while being against a single interpretation of Islam, and against the theocracy, Muslims in Pakistan have

internalized an Islamic identity and they see themselves as Muslim. It is this core that the State is able to tap, and this identity that makes it difficult even for progressive movements to move outside the Islamic debate.

Women in particular have been fighting back, especially since 1981. The Haddood Ordinance which specifies Islamic punishments was passed in 1979. It requires the evidence of four Muslim males of good repute for maximum punishment, and makes no distinction between rape, adultery or fornication. Since then women's organizations have fought every anti-woman measure, and the first demonstration against Islamization under Martial Law was a women's demonstration in 1983 against the proposed Law of Evidence which stipulated that the evidence of two women would be equal to that of one man.

But there is an ambivalence in the movement. It has also raised a host of questions in terms of the movement itself and what constitutes it, its positions and strategies, and its future.

If the tradition, or ethnic, or code of life of a people is to kill a woman who disobeys, as is the case in parts of Pakistan, I do not and cannot respect their way of life, and do impose my own morality on them. There must be a point where acceptance and respect of difference ends. What is this point?

What does constitute the women's movement in Pakistan? The spectrum in the movement that opposes Islamization the way that it has been articulated since 1977, ranges from women's rights groups; women in progressive political parties; women in the left; professional women's groups; development groups; resource centres; and individual women. But women in the right and Islamic fundamentalist women are organized,

in many cases, as an opposition to the women's movement. These women also struggle for the rights of women as they see them and are often able to mobilize a much larger number of women. Often these women have found an identity, a space, and even a freedom within the right. They are empowered by this, and even though their ideology totally negates the struggle of the progressive women's movement, their experiences can't be denied.

Again, since these women also take up similar issues such as rape, pornography, or using women as sex symbols, do these then make for a commonality of women, and a consequent commonality of struggle? And if one allies with the right, how far does one go without being changed in the process? In a demonstration against an incident of rape, in Karachi, women from the whole political spectrum came together. But since the progressive women's movement took the position that this rape was connected to the whole process of Islamization, the Islamic fundamentalist women separated themselves.



This also raises another series of questions on the issue of diversity and the acceptance of difference. While I have no problems with it conceptually, especially given how I grapple with my own multiple identities and expressions, I do wonder if there is not a point beyond which one cannot accept the other as they are, or where their expression lies. I think sometimes we, in the women's movement and those of us into participatory and alternative development, bend over backwards to respect the cultural norms and knowledge systems 'of the people'.

As we listen to the voices of 'the people' we must be aware of the danger in this. I have often listened to voices that I don't want to hear, and I do feel an intervention is in order. To give a crude example, if the tradition, or ethic, or code of life of a people is to kill a woman who disobeys, as is the case in parts of Pakistan, I do not and cannot respect their way of life, and do impose my own morality on them. There must be a point where acceptance and respect of difference ends. What is that point?

The women's movement, and Women's Action Forum in particular, initially used the strategy of using progressive interpretations of Islam to counter the interpretation of the State. In other words it used Islam against Islam, and was reasonably successful in sometimes pushing the State into a difficult position, but even more successful in mobilizing women who identified with Islam, and who would not have gone along if they felt that what they were doing was against their religion. Yet I have personally been very uncomfortable with this, especially if it is 'strategic use' and not faith. Also if we ourselves are selective in what we use from the Qur'an, are we in a position to oppose the State or the fundamentalists for being selective? The other aspect of the strategy of using Islam to fight Islam is that there is a danger that we will end up reinforcing it, or at least reinforcing the notion that it is only within the Qur'an that we can demand our rights.

To return to religion, culture, and identity in the larger context, I find that like most Pakistanis, I have not resolved these issues, for myself or within myself. They are all obviously interrelated and interconnected. Religion is not only faith, but a world view and a way of life, especially in a codified religion like Islam; and culture is not just what we eat or the way we dress, or the language we speak in, or the music we listen to; and in any case all these are not

unrelated to religion. Identity comes from both and from a variety of other interrelationships. Yet there is sometimes even an intangible, Muslim identity, unique in itself. It stems from Islam and no Muslim can therefore ever get away from it.

Given this I wonder about secularism, especially in the context of Pakistan. Women's Action Forum recently made the demand that Pakistan should be a secular State. I am very supportive of this position and had actively worked for it. But somewhere within me this is a hollow victory. In a country where Muslims are in a majority, even if legislators are not actively seeking guidance from the Qur'an and Sunnah, the laws that they make will not be religion free or value free. As Muslims they will have internalized Islam, and this world view, and way of living, will be reflected in the laws and in governance. No State is really secular, and all carry within it the seeds of the predominant faith.

As we listen to the voices of 'the people' we must be aware of the danger in this. I have often listened to voices that I don't want to hear, and I do feel an intervention is in order.

In any case Pakistan cannot replicate the experience of Western secularism since that came out of specific historical conditions. We do not have a history of a breaking away from the Church, or of that period of Western industrialization, and Imperialism. Also there is a problem for Islam in the classic definition of secularism. The

notion of the State is built into Islam on the one hand, and on the other, Islam has no Church to break away from. Again, can one have a personal faith in Islam when the essence of Islam is the community? Can feminists say that their faith is personal and has nothing to do with the public, while still upholding that the personal is the political?

Perhaps these are unresolvable issues. I raise them here because women speak on these issues. Since even peeling layer after layer, trying to unravel my own identities, I am still unable to make sense of my core, I accept what each of these women say as long as they don't try to convert me. My problem lies not with the expressions of identity, for my commitment lies beyond personal faith or the nation state. My resentment surfaces when identity, especially religious identity and nationalism is thrust upon me, either directly through coercion, or by being pushed into becoming the 'other'. However I am equally resentful when my identity is subsumed or negated when I express it, or when I am dismissed as being negative when I give voice to my difference.

ON STATE, SOCIETY AND DISCOURSE IN INDIA

Sudipta Kaviraj

The colonial period saw the appearance of two types of divisions in Indian society. The first was a division between those who made the world they inhabited intelligible in terms of modernist discourse and those who did not. This division ran decisively between the Indian elite and the lower orders. On top of it, however, nationalism put in place a second political division between colonialism and the Indian nation. I consider Gandhi's discourse or rather his discursive position to be of crucial importance. This is not because he created a discourse of inexhaustible originality, as some argue. But his kind of discourse managed to bridge the gulf between the lower orders and the elite and to keep the values, objectives and conceptions of the world of the two sides intelligible to each other. The Indian national movement did not produce an inevitable Nehruvian result. The way in which Nehru was able to shape the ideals of the Indian state after independence was partly a result of some fortuitous circumstances. No logic of the previous movements, no wave made it necessary for the Nehruvian elite to come to power, but there was something deeper which went in favour of this modernist dominance at the time of independence. He enjoyed a silent but subtle and massively significant cultural approval of the modern elite. Members of this class, dispersed thinly but crucially throughout the governmental and modern sectors, approved spontaneously the assumption of power by a rationalist 'philosopher king' - though some of them knew that he might incline towards a statist radicalism common in the forties and fifties. However, this did not represent a serious discontinuity at the level of discourse. Entrepreneurial groups and politicians favouring the propertied classes knew that they would have differences with Nehru, on socialism the state sector, redistribution, foreign policy, land reforms, the state's power to take away property, etc. But these were comprehensible differences, differences of political ideology among those who inhabited the same social discourse. Political disagreement is of course a form of successful communication.

A paradox of mobilisation made this early period of political construction in India relatively easy. If the divergent types of political discourse, with what they considered to be politically rational, their incommensurable ideals, had simultaneously found utterance in Indian political life, it must have been exceedingly difficult to carry on institu-

tional formation. But the backwash of mobilisation of the national movement ensured an implicit trust of the masses in the initiatives of their leaders. Thus these various conflicting discourses were not brought immediately into dialogue on equal terms. During the nationalist struggle there had occasionally been distinct initiatives from the lower orders, when political space was opened up within the national movement. But recent historical research has also shown how quickly the main Congress leadership was able to shut off such space, or bring their movements under control. Thus the support that the Congress leadership received was not of the kind that the bourgeoisie in classical bourgeois revolutions of the west created for themselves, by reconstituting through a process of prior cultural movement a hegemony and directive pre-eminence for themselves. Ordinary people were mobilised in the Indian national movement in tremendous numbers, but not by creating hegemony of this kind. At the same time, as the failure of the communist moves towards insurgency indicated the subaltern groups were not ready to break with the bourgeois nationalist leadership, or prepared to take large world-constructing actions on their own.

This had several consequences. First, of course, the setting up of political institutions passed off relatively peacefully; the Constituent Assembly, though strangely unrepresentative, still represented a sufficient consensus of the organised groups to bring off a constitution which was not seriously contested. At the same time, internal realignments within the Congress led to serious political decisions. The systematic exodus of the socialist left from the Congress weakened Nehru considerably inside the party that he formally commanded, but the death of Patel also left his own personal eminence uncontested. He was therefore free to pursue a set of policies for which his party colleagues would not have been wholly enthusiastic. The construction he placed on secularism for instance was clearly resented by a section of Congress leaders. His drive for redistributive policies of land reforms met with serious, if undeclared hostility from his own party's lower level leadership. Most Congress leaders would have been more lukewarm than Nehru in developing friendly relations with the Soviet Union, and would not have understood in a clear theoretical form the logic of the massive heavy industrialisation drive that he pursued through the second five year plan. This shows in a sense a miraculous contingency of some of the central segments of the fairly impressive institutional structure that Congress under Nehru built up. But precisely because of his relative isolation within his own party, Nehru undertook another initiative which has seemed

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over the long run to overshadow other parts of his institutional strategy.

Nehru began to create an alternative apparatus in the bureaucracy. Planning on a large scale, from 1956 onwards, made for a great extension of an economic bureaucracy inside the government. As the rhetoric of social justice and redistribution increased, this bureaucracy expanded rapidly. This differed from classical European bourgeois revolutions, where capitalism first emerged in initiatives and in institutions within civil society, and the state was later used as an instrument to correct its spontaneous production of inequality. In India, there was no developed civil society and many of capitalism's classical initiatives within civil society were undertaken by the state.¹ The most serious consequence of this of course was that the state became omnipresent, since it was performing functions left to the institutions of civil society, and it was impossible to abjure transactions with this state. At the same time, it could only work through the techniques of an unreconstructed colonialist bureaucratic style, wholly monological, criminally wasteful, utterly irresponsible and unresponsive to public sensitivity. Those after power would want to get into its seats, completely screened as they appeared to be from accountability, and those who could not get into them would become increasingly alienated.

The manner and structure of capitalist growth accentuated such differences. Instead of reducing regional inequalities, capitalism intensified them and tended to concentrate opportunities and resources in centres of political power. The cultural consequences of this process have not been analysed carefully until recently. Over the long term, the strategy of development in India, precisely through its relative successes, has tended to reopen the deep division of discourse in Indian society, between a homogenising elite speaking English, the *esperanto* of the upper orders, and a vast lower order population looking and speaking with an intense vernacular hostility against some of the consequences of this form of capitalist development.

The Nature of Indian Nationalism

From this point of view it appears justified to say with Rajni Kothari² that the first phase of Indian politics was built on a kind of consensus, but he seems to have misjudged the nature of the consensus he identified, and its possibilities. It was of course an elite consensus, which passed uncontested because of its nearness to the mobilisation of the national movement and the relation of implicit trust between its leadership and the masses. It was a consensus of discourse, rather than of ideological positions. The institutional pattern that Nehru wished to put in place came up against serious ideological criticism from the left, especially the socialists and the communists. But there was still a commonality at a different level: they had very different things to say about the political world, its structure, purposes, ideals, but they shared a common way

of arguing about these things. This seemed to create real divisions among them, which was primarily what they saw. But this also created underlying unities among them when looked at from outside this discourse, which is what must have impressed the other classes and groups in Indian society. The constitutional frame that was adopted, though it was exhaustingly detailed (and therefore a lawyers' constitution rather than a citizens') still was silent and vague on various questions. And although the ideological conflicts in the Constituent Assembly went in favour of a more conservative reading of the Congress programme, the Nehru regime took significant steps immediately afterward to counteract this in actual policy. The Planning Commission soon to become the actual centre of economic policy making, remained outside the formal constitutional framework. Initially, the federal structure worked through the federalism inside the Congress Party rather than constitutional channels. The regime of rights centred on the individual subject, made legal concessions to minority rights which could be enjoyed only as members of communities, rather than as bourgeois individuals. But despite these underlying problems which took some time to break out into the open, the achievements of the Nehru regime were massive by any standards. True, some of this was fortuitous, and caused by the fortunate over determination at the time of freedom. But one can clearly see that given a slightly different turn of events, India could have had a very different set of foundational policies, and these most likely would have been more retrograde.

It was in the economic sphere that Nehru's policies have enjoyed the greatest long term success, though at the start his government seemed often on the point of being overwhelmed by financial and resource difficulties. By the time he became prime minister, Nehru had moved away from his 'scientific socialist' beliefs, though importantly he would still have characterised his beliefs as scientific. From his point of view, he moved away from that doctrine because it was not scientific. He had given up that construction of socialism, but he had not given up science. Still, his commitment to a British Labour version of social democracy made him interfere with what others would have considered the more 'natural' course of capitalist growth. Indeed, Nehru's certainties were shaped by and shared with the emerging discourses of social theory, soon to be inscribed on the whole world in the form of reformist Keynesian economism in all sectors of public policy. The economic growth of society was predicated on the building of the industrial sector. In this, heavy capital goods industries took precedence and since these could not be built by private capital, this led to the steady growth of a large public sector with strong links to ministerial bureaucracies.³ In this milieu it was subtly misleading to speak in the language of the interventionist state, and to transfer, implicitly, a whole set of expectations from the European case because that was a language on which the history of European capitalism was inscribed quite clearly. In Eu-



rope, the state did 'intervene' in a society whose basic structures had been formed earlier by civil society, and the existence of a strong civil society made the state act in responsible ways. In India, where there was no prior civil society, one could hardly talk of an interventionist state since many of those institutions were brought into existence by the state. Therefore, in a subtle but significant way, the direction of the descriptive language and justificatory rhetoric was wrong.

Some of the problems of this kind of economic planning have long been noted. Even economists who favour the state sector and its leading role agree that the planning models probably neglected the questions of agriculture. Not surprisingly, the Nehru regime faced both economic and political difficulties arising out of food shortages during the late fifties. The theoretical fault in all this was that the regime worked, along with all others thinking about the development at the time irrespective of ideological positions, with a heavily reductive economic theory of social change. Economic arguments tended to be aggressively ahistorical. Everything else was turned into problems to which economic policies had the solutions. The sequence in which the sectors had emerged, their specific institutional forms, how the historical sequence of their emergence could have affected their institutional logic—such questions were seldom asked. There is a minor irony in this since much of this discussion was analysed by Marxism, and Marxism in its classical form at least is deeply sensitive to sequences and trajectories.

Second, the bureaucratisation of social life, in the absence of the structures of civil society, created difficulties. But the effects of these politics on the discursive map of Indian society were interesting, and have not been carefully analysed. The structure of Nehruvian democracy was raised on an anomalous base. It did represent, as some of its admirers put it, the greatest experiment with democracy in the history of the world, but that was possible partly because the large masses on whom these rights were conferred found them too unfamiliar at first for immediate use. Planning was aimed not only at the construction of a wide industrialised base, but also at reduction of some of the gross inequalities in incomes. Nehru certainly saw an alleviation of poverty as a condition for genuine democracy, but it depended increasingly on the monologic instruments of the state and its bureaucracy rather than dialogical, movement-like forms. The falling apart of the Gandhian language in Indian politics, which had reduced for a time the hostile unfamiliarity between elite and subaltern political semiotics, contributed to this widening gap, accentuating the divergence between populist government policies and popular consciousness. And the discourse of the elite tended to turn increasingly inward in two senses. First, the debates were directed at the intelligibility and justifiability in terms of the political stances of the high discourse, leaving the task of formation of a vernacular, popular discourse around these questions to an unmindful educa-

tional policy. Second, there was a further tendency in later years to withdraw issues of development from public arenas of discussion and to surrender it to so-called expert groups, creating a sort of elite confidentiality around the vital decisions about politics and society.

It must be acknowledged that Nehru personally was conscious of this withdrawal, and sought to continue to publicise the development debate. But it was not a matter so much of personal predilections of leaders, but a tendency of the structure of development strategy. Indian democracy remained vibrant, with occasional mass movements being able to register their demands on the state, as with the regional autonomy movements of the fifties, and the food movements some years later. So the enormous extension of the state was not coercive, but remained external. The elite around Nehru were sensitive about retaining democratic forms and pursuing, within what they considered to be reasonable limits, the reformist aspirations of the state. But they did not see the problem of its externality. In retrospect, its basic failure seems to have been the almost total neglect of the question of the cultural reproduction of society. It did not try deliberately to create or reconstitute popular commonsense about the political world, taking the new conceptual vocabulary of rights, institutions, impersonal power into the vernacular everyday discourses of rural or smalltown Indian society.

Thus unnoticed by the bustling technocracy of the modern sector, the transient links across the political and discursive divide tended to give way. The independent Indian state followed a programme of modernity which did not seek to be grounded in the political vocabulary of the nation, or at least its major part. As a result, precisely those ideals - of a modern nationalism, industrial modernity, secular state, democracy and minority rights - came in the long run to appear not as institutions won by a common national movement, but as ideals intelligible to and pursued by the modern elite which inherited power from the British. More than that: subtle and interesting things began to happen to this logic of 'modernisation' which have gone unnoticed. Precisely because the state continued to expand, precisely because it went in a frenetic search of alibis to control ever larger areas of social life, it had to find its personnel, especially at lower levels, from groups who did not inhabit the modernist discourse. Thus it is wrong to believe that the Indian state or its massive bureaucracy is a huge Weberian organisation binding the relaxed, fuzzy, slow-moving society in an iron structure. What has actually been happening is more complex. By overstretching, the state has been forced to recruit personnel from the groups who speak and interpret the world in terms of the other discourse. Since major government policies have their final point of implementation very low down in the bureaucracy, they are reinterpreted beyond recognition.

As a result of its uncontrolled growth, the policies of the state have also lost some of their cohesion. If one does not



have a purely romantic view of the Indian past, one can see the direction this reinterpretation of government policies, this utilisation of internal space for lower level initiative would take. It is not surprising that arguments of social justice are often used as an unanswered justification for the encouragement of nepotism and corruption. Indeed, there is very little corruption in India that is not done for high moral principles. The actual conduct of those in authority has also tended in recent years to slide backwards towards a more historically 'familiar' style of irresponsible power, with the withdrawal of significant decisions, under various excuses, from the arenas of public criticism and responsibility. It must be seen, while debating the effects and justification of modernity, that these trends come straight out of India's glorious past.

However, the point here is not to tell the story of Indian politics, or to present a convincing periodisation. In the accepted ways of standard social science the story has been told many times over. Indeed, my point is that despite those familiar narratives of the achievements and failures of Indian democratic institutions, there is another story to be told. This seems to be sketchily glimpsed by recent observers of Indian politics, but no one seems to know what the story is about. I am quite clear that this ambiguity is reflected in the curious way I have just presented the problem. I think it can be sorted out in a preliminary way by using the distinction between political ideology and structures of discourse, and acknowledging that the classifications that can be produced by their different criteria are quite different. I should like to look at some of these diagnoses of the recent problems of the Indian state, and move our discussion towards some theoretical conclusions.

Political Diagnoses

One of the punctuations generally observed in Indian politics is the spectacular difference between the Nehru period, which ended in 1964, and the later one. I have argued elsewhere that there is a further division: the electoral instability of governments in the period after the fourth general elections in 1967 has since been changed into a more serious and frightening uncertainty about the state form itself. On the one side the political behaviour of party leaders and managers seem to discredit the institutions of democracy; on the other, sometimes popular anger against such political games has assumed a form in which it seems that it might pass into a vote of no confidence on the state form itself.

What has been the historical record of this complex of institutions? This question has been discussed so often that there are only some of its implications which need to be assessed. But we must also keep in view, the standard and fairly reasonable defence by Nehru's followers, (in ideas, not in party affiliations; indeed, the Congress Party under later leaders, has been the main destroyer of the institutional logic that Nehru sought to make safe) that

forty years is too short a span for institutions to take root or to adapt themselves to a very different historical milieu. But even in the short time its achievements are not negligible. Unlike in most other third world states, a formal democratic constitution was not initially adopted to be dropped soon after in favour of dictatorial authority. In fact, the way the emergency ended in India, showed the great ideological depth of the democratic idea. Mrs Gandhi believed that even the record of the emergency regime, had to be electorally justified. Often, however, other achievements of the Nehruvian model, are clouded in a discussion either of pure economic growth in which dictatorial regimes accepting subordinate productive roles in the International capitalist system are shown to be remarkably superior to India's record in growth rates, or of radical theories based on strategic ignorance, which show the distributive advantages of a communist economy. But industrialisation in India, though wasteful in many ways, has a wide base. And the institutional form of the economy has ensured that its political sovereignty has not been renegotiated through extreme economic pressure. All these relative achievements are undeniable, but this shows the present predicament of the Indian state in a curious light. For the state is not threatened by forces from outside. On the contrary, most powers acknowledge its resilience and regional dominance. But it appears threatened from inside. Its difficulties arise not because its performance was bad, but rather from what its rulers would no doubt consider among its modest achievements. And most remarkably, the institutional forms that the early nationalist leadership created for the benefit and well being of the common people have entered into party politics.

This then is the basic form of the paradox of democracy in India. It is undoubtedly true that some of Indira Gandhi's electoral moves, and the rhetoric consistently used by all political parties - of popular participation, realisation of rights, eradication of poverty - have led to a greater political articulateness (coherence) of the ordinary people. To that extent, high politics, even in the spectacular arenas, which were earlier preserves of the modernist elite are coming under pressure from the alphabet of the lower discourse. It seems, however, that the more ordinary people have written their minds into the format of politics, the greater the pressure or threat on democratic structures as generally understood in terms of western precedents. There seems to be some incompatibility between the institutional logic of democratic forms and the logic of popular mobilisation. The more one part of the democratic ideal is realised the more the other part is undermined. The paradox as T. N. Madan recently put it is that if Indian politics become genuinely democratic in the sense of coming into line with what the majority of ordinary Indians would consider reasonable, they will become less democratic in the sense of conforming to the principles of a secular, democratic state acceptable to the early nationalist elite. What seems to have begun in Indian politics is the conflict over intelligibility, a writing of the political world that is



more fundamental than traditional ideological disputes. It appears that the difference between the two discourses is reappearing, now that the lower discourse is asserting itself and making itself heard precisely through the opportunities created by the upper one. The way it rewrites the political world might not be liked by the ruling modernist elites. But it is too late to disenfranchise them.

This is an interesting and challenging line of thought, and very different from earlier diagnoses of political difficulties in India. Earlier, social scientists usually began by expressing solidarity with the project of introducing modernity, equating the modernity with a re-enactment of the European drama. (Indeed, there was no Asian drama to stage at all. What occurred in India was merely the Asian premier of the European narrative, luckily with an appropriately cultivated cast). They expressed irritation or puzzlement at the obduracy with which society seemed to resist it, and such resistance was generally accounted for through some simple, malignant form of direct political agency - corruption, lack of political will, etc. The explanation that I am proposing seeks a less agency-oriented answer to the difficulties, and is prepared to be puzzled by deeper questions, and is ready to turn the questions around towards social science itself. From this perspective, the equation is to be arranged not between a rational programme prepared by the elite and carried out by an instrumentally viewed state on the one hand, and a resisting, irrational society, but the other way around. Indian politicians of the Nehru type made a mistake very similar to the one that has now been, a trifle theatrically, traced through the entire history of social science. Western social theory moved from a sort of high orientalism practised by Marx and Weber to a very inadequate theory of modernisation worked out by Parsonian developmentalists, a move often celebrated as from philosophy to science, but in reality from tragedy to farce.

Nothing is more disorienting than when our fundamental taxonomies are turned around and we blink at a world in which things occupy entirely unaccustomed places. This argument tries something like this about development thinking in India. Clearly many Indian social scientists carried on their earlier debates within a world which was firmly held by the solid homogenising taxonomies established by nationalist beliefs. Most political argument was internal to these boundaries. The emergence of such arguments in serious social theory shows that the pervasiveness, the self-evidentiality of the nationalist construction of the world is gradually fraying and disappearing. It has been argued forcefully in recent years, by social scientists like Chatterjee, Nandy and Madan⁵, that the state and the ruling elite uncritically adopted an orientalist, externalist construction of their society and its destiny reflected in the wonderful and tragic symbolism of the 'discovery of India'. Its initiatives were bound to be one-sided. To the world of India's lower orders, it simply refused or merely forgot to explain itself. Indeed, to some it would

have seemed that the Indian elite was more concerned about justifying its initiatives to external audiences than to its own. Historically, its absentmindedness about cultural unity has driven apart the political diglossia of the national movement, held together in a sense by the easy bilingualism of its political leaders and cultural intelligentsia. Today, that cultural terrain is increasingly broken into a unilingual English speaking elite, and an equally monolingual conglomerate of regional groups which are losing a dialogical relation not only with upper strata but between languages as well, leading to a greater friction and hostility among regions.

The implications of this critique must be seen clearly. It has brought into question the cognitive, the political and the moral legitimacy of the whole institutional regime constructed after independence. About the whole lot - the impersonal nature of public power, the rule of law, the democratic order, the idea of a complex and composite nation, a secular polity - it asks whether it is legitimate for a relatively small elite to impose their ideals on others who do not necessarily share them. It also asks if this political form, because of its unintelligibility, can be worked by these people. It must be seen that it moves to cognitive questions to radicalise its critique. It must also be clear that these questions are addressed not only to the Indian political or modernist ruling elite, but also to social theory in equal measure - because they can be logically so directed, and also because it is these theories, which the elite believed, that gave them the intellectual justification to do what they had undertaken.

But some of the more general, abstract, epistemic implications of this kind of argument should be noted. In a sense, this sort of theoretical discomfort tries to break from the vulgar pretensions of being a policy science (which posited too direct a relation between social science and government policy) and seeks to return to a more classical conception of political theory, as a kind of historical self-reflection of society. It assumes that one of the tests of good social theory is whether it can relevantly comment on what is happening in society, and contribute to general management of social destiny. It rules out a distancing, reflective attitude to social and political questions. Its own performance must be as subject to this criterion of success as that of the previous theory that it rejects.

Notes

1. I have advanced an argument of this kind in 'A Critique of the Passive Revolution', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual Number, March 1989.
2. R. Kothari, *Political in India* (Boston, 1970).
3. For a detailed historical argument, rich in empirical detail, F. Frankel, *India's Political Economy* (Princeton, 1977).
4. T.N. Madan, 'Secularism in its Place', *Journal of Asian Studies* (November, 1987).
5. P. Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Delhi, 1986); Madan, *ibid*; and A. Nandy *The Intimate Enemy* (Delhi, 1986).

THE NATION STATE IN CRISIS AND THE RISE OF ETHNO-NATIONALISM

Stanley J. Tambiah

Introduction

To put it somewhat starkly, and ignoring many nuances, there are two models of nationalism that are in interaction as well as contention in many parts of the world. Each model has its benefits and its costs, and our existential task at the close of the twentieth century is to find a way of reconciling both and of finding a new synthesis in the political life of collectivities of people.

There is the nationalism of the *nation state*, which, historically was conceived and first substantially realized in Europe, particularly in Western Europe. There is another form, which I shall label "Ethno-nationalism" which has originated separately in many parts of the globe. It has had, and continues to have, its European formulation and presence in parts of Germany; and today it exists in more distinctive and similar ways in many other parts of the world - in Africa, the middle East, South and South East Asia, and in Latin America. Ethno-nationalism in its varied forms is most definitely not solely a western construction. Being more general in its impulses, it has independently emerged in many different sites, though today global processes may push them towards convergence.

The charter of the nation state, our first model, has been widely sought to be transplanted by its European progenitors, in their global role as imperial powers, on to their dependencies and colonies of the Third World. The transplantation was especially active and speeded up at the time of decolonization after the Second World War. Its impact on, and dialectic with the social forms and practices of these erstwhile colonies, has in fact brought into prominence an intensified form of ethno-nationalism as a regional reaction against the excessive or unwelcome centralizing and homogenizing policies of the nation state. In Eastern Europe, a similar imposition after the First World War of a nation-state blueprint on a terrain differentiated by linguistic, religious and ethnic cleavages, followed by a subsequent imposition on the same terrain after the Second World War, of authoritarian communist regimes, has been succeeded today by an outbreak of ethno-nationalist claims that are competitive, divisive and violent as well as euphoric and full of promise for the participants.

It is this historic meeting, collision and dialectic between the project of nation state making, and counter claims of ethnonationalism that provides a focus for this address. A thread that runs through it is that what is happening in the countries of South Asia (and in many other newly independent third world countries) is not very different from what is happening in Eastern Europe and the newly founded Commonwealth of Independent States.

The Nation State as a Historical Construction

The Western European model of a secular nation state was predicated on the ideals proclaimed by the French revolution on the one hand, and on the other, on the universalist claims of Enlightenment rationalism. Essential components of this nation state were the separation of Church and State and the virtual privatization of religion, the conception of citizenship based on the formal equality of all individuals who are its members, the jurisdiction of the nation state as valid in the territory that it covers and that is defined by its frontiers, and finally, the arguable notion that politics is a secularized domain of activity shaped by its own objectives of power and by its own logic and rules.

The secularization of politics carried distinctive entailments which are worth underscoring. In Western European history the separation of Church and State, and the relegation or confinement of religion to the private domain, were linked to the stimulation given to the scientific revolution. Experimentation by certain trends in Protestant Reformation thereby also in the long run had opened the door for God to become otiose or distant with regard to the pursuit of science. The scientists' religious beliefs and attachments, if they had any, were supposedly irrelevant in establishing the laws of science.

Historically, the development of the Western nation state was linked to the launching of the industrial revolution, and the impulsion of capitalism as an expansionary force, creating wide ranging and interlocking markets for goods, creating labour markets with relatively free mobility of labour geographically, and progressively erasing parochial boundaries. Capitalism was a dynamic homogenizing agent in the newly industrializing countries. It also generated the expectations and hopes of a



continuing economic expansion, despite “temporary” slumps and downturns.

The expectation of economic growth and expansion generated aspirations for social mobility, cultural homogenisation, and more egalitarian distributions of wealth.

We may also introduce to this heady mix another tendency: the drive to create a national culture, usually around a common dominant language (which gains precedence over other dialects or minority languages). (Switzerland is an exception in this respect.) The growth in literacy rates, linked to expanding educational facilities and opportunities, and the implosion of cheap printing (what Benedict Anderson has called “print capitalism”) are other integral components of the Western success story.

Thus we may say in sum that in the creation of the Western nation state, political integration, continuous economic expansion, and frequently linguistic homogenization for administrative purposes and for ‘high’ cultural productions went hand in hand. The concepts of nation and state were fused in an entity, the bounded nation state. And in the end, above all, national identity required from the citizen loyalty to the state conceived as a secular entity. This was the ideal, typical construction, claiming normative authority, whatever the deviations in actual fact.

Now, since the secular nation state has been advocated by many Western theorists and third world intellectuals and political leaders as the bedrock on which modernization and economic development can be raised, it is extremely relevant to bear in mind two warnings.

Firstly, the West European nation-state was established as the end result of certain specific developments, and many social upheavals, internal strains, revolutions, and divisive wars between states. (We tend to forget this when we are impatient with the problems of governance and economic development in other countries).

Secondly, there is the possibility of a fundamental fallacy being perpetrated when an attempt is made to impose an historical construction such as the nation-state, formed on distinctive soil, on a dependent world as if its realization is a *necessary stage in Universal History*. This supposition derived from Enlightenment assumptions might have a near “hegemonic” domination in global affairs. (As we shall see later, within Europe itself this claim was questioned and contested and that is why we shall later be concerned with the ideas of Herder).

What happens - and indeed how do we perceive, represent and interpret what happens - in many parts of the world where the chain and configuration of events that led to the realization of the European secular nation state have not taken place, or are actively resisted as harmful (as for example in Iran by Shiite Fundamentalism or in India by Hindu nationalists)? Is it now time to shift from

the language of “obstacles” to “development” to the language of active subaltern “resistance” to it?

While trying to sort out these issues, it is important to note that the other side of the Western model of the secular nation-state is its aggressive nationalism, and its imperialist expansion and penetration into what became its colonial dependencies. So it would seem that liberal democracy at home in Western Europe and the United States could assume the fierce shape of authoritarian rule abroad, the exploitation of native labour and resources, and the inferiorization, if not erosion, of the cultures of the colonized. (There seems to have been a linear path connecting Napoleon’s expansion in Europe to the French, British and Dutch empires in Asia and Africa.) Marxists explained these processes in terms of capitalism gaining a new lease of life through colonial exploitation. This inferiorization and threat of cultural extinction in large part impels the rise of Islamic fundamentalism or Buddhist nationalism or Hindu nationalism and other such reactions, and their taking a retaliatory attitude to the West - its exercise of economic affluence and domination, its political supremacy, its alleged consumerist values, its celebration of sexual eroticism, its erosion of family durability, and so on.

The Three Phases of Independence

Keeping in mind that their political objective was the establishment of nation states, I would like to delineate three phases in the political history of a number of third world countries like India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Guyana, and Nigeria, which received their independence soon after the Second World War. The characteristic issues of each phase are stated in terms of the ideological rhetoric and distinctive labels used by politicians and academic commentators alike. (I do not intend these phases to be taken as discontinuous shifts but merely as showing different emphases.)

1. The first stage is the actual “decolonization” process itself, when Western imperial powers, following the Second World War “transferred power” to local elite groups. While the colonial period created certain dislocations, decolonization itself was preceded and accompanied by violence when, as was the case with Algeria, the colony fought a “war of liberation”. In other countries such as Sri Lanka and Burma, the transfer of power was more peaceful though not entirely without the staging of civil disobedience movements and other forms of resistance, as, for example, those mounted in India by the Indian National Congress or in Malaya by the Chinese communist guerrillas.

2. The second phase, spanning the late 1950’s and gathering momentum in the 1960’s, was characterized by optimistic and even strident claims made in these newly independent countries concerning their objectives of “nation making”, strengthening “national sovereignty”,



creating "national culture" and "national identity" and achieving "national integration". The slogans of the time accented "national dimensions", and in doing so played down and wished away internal diversity and social cleavages in favor of the primacy of nation - states as the accredited units of the United Nations and the modern world system. Interestingly, Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968) belongs to this phase with its programmatic celebration of "national literature" and "national culture" in the African states, newly delivered from the chains of colonialism. Fanon proclaimed the need "to fight for the liberation of the nation, that material key stone which makes the building of a culture possible" (1968;233).

This phase of optimistic nation building was enacted as the work of "national coalition governments," examples of which were Nehru presiding over a monolithic Congress Party; Cheddi Jagan, an East Asian, and L.F. S. Burnham, a Creole, in the early 1950's heading the People's Progressive in Guyana; Tunjku Abdul Rahman presiding over the Malaysian Alliance, again in the 1950's, and D.S. Senanayake at the same time over the United National Party in Ceylon. Political parties seemed willing to collaborate rather than emphasize their separate interests and their special constituencies.

This phase was also marked by confident expectations of expanding economic horizons, instanced by faith in economic planning and growth, and the spawning of "five-year-plans" funded by foreign aid, whose smooth flow it was hoped would make the world safe for capitalism and democracy.

3. In a dislocating, and sometimes disconcerting manner this hopeful expansive phase of nation building has been put to the test, seriously questioned, imperiled and even reversed in the third phase, from the 1960's onwards, by the eruption of ethnic conflicts. The divisiveness has revolved around issues of language, race, religion and territory. Accordingly, there has been a shift again in slogans and concepts. "Ethnic Groups" and "Ethnic Conflict" are the salient labels for talking about these events. The terms "plural society", "devolution of powers" "traditional homelands," "self-determination"-old words given new force and urgency- have begun to frame the political debate and academic analyses. The central policy authority, the state, which in the previous phase of nation building and economic growth was designated as the prime actor and central intelligence in initiating, directing and controlling the country's future and historical trajectory, is now, after years of escalating ethnic divisiveness and pluralistic awareness, counselled to be "a referee" adjudicating differences and enabling regional cultures and societies to attain their "authentic" identities and interests.

In our present phase of ethno-nationalism, characterised by the politicization of ethnicity, there are two salient

features. The ethnic groups *qua* groups demand and bargain for collective entitlements (the concepts of individual rights and individual identity are secondary here), and it is usually a majority group that demands affirmative action on its behalf to put to right an alleged historical injustice, thereby once again giving a new content to affirmative action that is usually undertaken on behalf of depressed minorities and underclasses.

What I call ethno-nationalism relates to the generation of regional or sub-national reactions and resistances to what is seen as an over-centralized and hegemonic state, and their drive to achieve their own regional and local socio-political formations.

Now let me enumerate four issues that have posed problems with regard to nation-state making and "modernization" in newly independent and so-called developing third world countries, and which have increasingly generated the politics of ethno-nationalism. They are four rocks on which the nation state project has foundered.

1. In a country with plural languages, what shall be the language or languages of education and administration? A post-colonial problem that has plagued countries such as India, Pakistan, Burma, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, which have their own written languages and literary capital, is the replacement of English by *swabasha*. The ramifications of this language issue are many.

2. Closely related to the foregoing, is the "modernization" program that has entailed the launching of ambitious literacy programmes in the context of a population explosion, and the creation of large numbers of educated or semi-educated youths seeking employment in economies slow in growth and unable to accommodate them. It is this category of unemployed youth in urban sites that has been in all countries the most visible and activist participant in ethno-nationalist movements and ethnic riots.

3. A major divisive and contentious issue, generated by economic development and modernisation in countries of low income and high population density and rural under-employment is large scale population movements and migration that cause dramatic and speedy changes in the demographic ratios of peoples in a region who perceive themselves as different on the basis of ethnic origins, religion, length of residence and so on.

Myron Weiner has proposed two hypotheses concerning "the social and political consequences of internal migration in a multi-ethnic low-income society":

1. "that the process of modernization by providing incentives and opportunity for mobility creates the conditions for increasing internal migration."

2. "that the modernization process nurtures the growth of ethnic identification and ethnic cohesions."



The second proposition is specially true when migration and collision of groups produces "competition for control over or access to economic wealth, political power and social status": when there is a strong notion of "territorial ethnicity", the notion that certain ethnic groups are rooted in space as *bhumiputra* (son's of the soil), especially among the indigenous folk of the region into which migrants are coming; and when migration changes the demographic balance and the mix of ethnic groups within a given space.

We frequently witness two kinds of migration that produce quite different results.

- a. Migrants belonging to a particular ethnic group may move in from the periphery to work in subordinate positions to the ethnic group or nationality predominating in the core region. This situation results in a "dual labour market," and applies to Turkish and Greek guest workers in Germany, Moroccans in France, Mexican labour migrants to the U.S., who frequently become depressed minorities victimised by discrimination.
- b. Quite different outcomes ensue, when the population flows in the opposite direction, that is when it is the migrants who have skills and capacities superior to those of the locals, and enjoy affluence and social prestige.

This second situation can become particularly acrimonious and contentious, especially in post-colonial and post-independence times, when power shifts to, and is exercised by, the most numerous, usually the local "sons of the soil," who then wish to displace these successful so-called "aliens" and newcomers. Frequently this thrust coincides with the "indigenous" or local population producing its own educated youth who aspire to move into occupations held and enterprises managed by the migrants. Such moves to displace people in favored positions is particularly acute when the avenues of employment in the modern sector are not expanding fast enough to incorporate the number of entrants among the locals into the ranks of the middle class. When such bottlenecks occur, the successful migrants are viewed as obstacles to the social mobility and well being of the indigenous majority.

Examples illustrating this are found, in North East India, in Assam and Tripura and elsewhere: the collisions between the local hill tribes and the incoming West Bengali Hindu and Bangladeshi Muslim migrants; in Pakistan, the animus against the Muhajir who migrated to Sind after partition, and became prominent in Karachi; in Uganda, Idi Amin's expulsion of Indian merchants and professionals; in Fiji the tensions between the Fijians and the Indian immigrants. With the dissolution of the USSR we find that many Russian professionals and administrators, who were sent or migrated to the various

non Russian Republics, are faced with similar displacement by the "indigenous" populations.

4. The fourth issue pertains to the degree of viability of secularism as specified in Western Nation state philosophy in civilizational contexts of the sort prevailing in many parts of the world-in-the Middle East, in South and South East Asia (and elsewhere)- where many persons reject the relegation of religion to the private domain, and are earnestly committed to the idea that religious values and beliefs must necessarily inform politics and economic activities. The vexed issue is how to implement this world view in a context where multiple religions with their distinctive practices and with followers of different numerical sizes are co-present in the same political arena. It has been asserted that India has been the home of a conception of secularism, different from the Western, that holds that the State rather than excluding religion from politics is exhorted to be even handed in its dealings with multiple co-existing religions which give direction to the lives of its congregations. Mahatma Gandhi who once said that those who want to separate religion from politics understand neither, is held to be the quintessential proponent of the finest distilled wisdom of India that religions must co-exist in a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect within the same polity. (In earlier times such precedents were allegedly set by two celebrated Indian Emperors, Asoka, whose "righteous rule" was touched by Buddhist values of tolerance and non violence, and Akbar, the Moghul Emperor who ecumenically reached out to Hinduism.)

These were indeed glorious precedents and moments. But recent developments in India in the form of Sikh fundamentalism and the cry for Khalistan, and in the form of Hindu nationalism propagated and propagandized with great effect by such organisations as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), and which generated the recent Ayodhya temple dispute (the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhumi dispute), have rejected the Nehruvian version of secularism and are severely putting to the test India's capacity to negotiate a viable relation between a unified polity and divisive sectarian regio-politics. There are similar developments in other neighboring countries, including Sri Lanka.

The conundrum that faces many of us South Asians is this; while we all should make the effort to comprehend and appreciate the reasons for the rejection of Western secularism by certain religious communities, we also have to face upto the issue of what policy to put in its place in an arena where multiple religious communities with their divergent political agendas contest each other and make claims which threaten to engender discrimination and inequality among citizens who in principle must enjoy the same civil rights, and should live in peaceful co-existence. ■

EMERGENCY LAWS AND LABOUR

The government announced, on August 22, 1992, the promulgation of Emergency Regulations banning 'disruptive activities' in the export sector. The wording, and of course the intentions, of the Emergency (Maintenance of Exports) Regulation No.1 of 1992 were quite frightening. It read: "No persons shall by words of either spoken or intended to be read or by signs or by visible representation or by conduct or by any other act intimidate any person employed or engaged in any enterprise which manufactures or processes any article for export with the intention of disrupting the activities of such enterprise." The prohibition of bail pending trial and the imposition of a compulsory 10 year prison sentence underscored the viciousness of the regulation; it was also another instance of the executive usurping the power of the judiciary or, at the least, restricting its power of discretion.

Was the export manufacturing sector really threatened with disruption? Except for the government's statement that 'threatening letters' had been received by some factory managers at the Free Trade Zone, there were no signs of any trade union action affecting the manufacturing sector. The government, incidentally, interpreted the alleged phenomenon of 'threatening letters' as a sign of the JVP's re-activation; nor was it ever made clear why the normal law of criminal intimidation was inadequate to deal with the situation.

The opposition trade unions and political parties took up the issue. They planned a concerted campaign protesting against this 'move to suppress workers' rights.' And indeed, as many opposition trade unions pointed out, these emergency regulations were so wide in scope that even distribution of leaflets concerning the export sector could have been considered illegal. No trade union action would have been possible in the export sector either.

The government retreated before this concerted campaign; on September 29, it announced the rescinding of this emergency regulation.

The trade unions are justifiably jubilant. But they should not be. The emergency regulations are still a serious threat to genuine trade union activity and the campaign that the trade unions proposed needs to be carried on until all such obnoxious regulations are withdrawn.

Look at the present situation. The Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions and Powers) Regulations have created a category of offenses relating to "essential services".

And what are these essential services? They are defined as,

any service which is of public utility or essential for national security or preservation of public order or to the life of the community and includes any department of government or any branch thereof.

Specific services have been added to the schedule from time to time. These now include banking, hospitals, broadcasting and television, fuel, all activities connected with the export of tea, rubber, coconut, other commodities and garments, the business of the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd., and lastly a catchall category - the supply and distribution of any article of food or medicine or any other article required by a member of the public. It is difficult now to see what is not an essential service. And these are not new regulations; the Civil Rights Movement says in a recent statement that the "part of the EMPPR dealing with offenses relating to essential services in their present form can be traced back at least as far as May 1987".

The point of declaring any service as essential is to compel the attendance of workers and prevent work stoppages or strikes. Any person employed in an essential service who absents him/herself from work is immediately deemed to have vacated employment; in certain specified services, refusal to work overtime or on holidays can result in vacation of post.

These regulations have in effect been used by employers precisely for this purpose. We quote from the Annual Survey of Trade Union Rights 1992 of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, an organization which is reactionary by the standards of our trade unions:

The President has used powers available to him under the state of emergency to issue emergency regulations that restrict severely the exercise of basic trade union freedoms and particularly the right to strike. Emergency Regulation No.1 of 1989 provides that any workers undertaking a work stoppage in an essential service industry are deemed to have terminated their employment contracts.

These provisions were used by the management of Simca Garments at Jaela to justify the dis-



missal of 236 textile workers who went on strike on 20 February 1991 in support of the trade union they had formed in November 1990. The company argued that it had no legal obligation to extend recognition of the trade union despite its representation of the overwhelming majority of its workforce and refused to comply with requests by government mediators for reinstatement of those dismissed on the ground that it fell within the definition of an essential service under emergency regulations.

However, vacation of post which takes place automatically is not the only ill consequence. The absenting worker has committed an offence punishable with a fine of between Rs. 500 and 5000 and rigorous imprisonment from three months to five years; in addition, all his movable and immovable property are forfeit to the Republic.

It is not only the worker who is at risk. Any person who incites or encourages any worker in an essential service to absent himself from work is also guilty of an offence and shall suffer the same consequences.

The regulation also falls heavily on any organization which, in the opinion of the President, is committing or aiding and abetting the commission of these offences. The President can proscribe any such organization; thereupon all its members lose their jobs and are deemed to have committed an offence punishable as indicated earlier. Membership is here the automatic offence, regardless of whether the particular member supported or opposed the action.

These obnoxious regulations have been in force for some years and are currently in force. They have been used by employers to stifle trade union activity. That the government has not, to our knowledge, gone to the extent of prosecuting offenders or of forfeiting their property is no reason for tolerating their presence as part of our legal system.

The trade union movement must carry on its campaign until all these anti-democratic regulations are rescinded.

Charles Abeysekera

POEMS OF SIVARAMANI

INTRODUCED BY SITRALEGA MAUNAGURU

The two poems published below were written by Sivaramani, who killed herself on May 19, 1991 at the age of twenty three in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. Sivaramani lived and died in a place where the act of suicide is glorified and praised as the ultimate symbol of patriotism. Sivaramani, however, did not die by swallowing a cyanide capsule or leaping at a target with a bomb-fitted bodice, and thus was not praised as a martyr. Instead, her action will go unnoticed and even be ridiculed as an act of cowardice.

Sivaramani's death is a tragic indicator of the level of desperation and hopelessness she suffered in a climate of social and political upheaval. Her poems serve as a testimony of such personal struggle. On the day of her suicide, Sivaramani burned all her poems that she could get hold of. These are some of the twenty three that survived.

These poems capture the wartime reality of Jaffna in unusual, powerful images and raise critical questions. Through these poems, Sivaramani expresses her sensitivity towards the current situation, particularly in Jaffna, where all avenues of criticism have been shut down.

These poems bear profound witness to her unease over the decay of civil society and the continuing silence towards political authoritarianism. In addition to this general atmosphere of frustration, as a woman she had to confront the social conservatism that is very harsh towards independent and critical-minded women.

Sivaramani fought with all her might to uphold her aspirations and ideals. There were many instances when she was ridiculed when she stood for the rights of women. Perhaps, she realised that she could not keep her dreams and ideals alive in a society which tried so persistently to make her compromise with its conservatism.

Other important poets have committed suicide. These are not mere incidents. They tell us about the personality of the poets, their struggles, and the society in which they lived. Sometimes, an individual's vehement protest against the oppression of society takes the form of suicide. Sivaramani's was one such.

These poems were translated by a group of Tamil poets and scholars. A collection of Sivaramani's poems will be published soon.



1

In a night
of war
pressure-filled
the young ones
grow up.

Across the paths
of their mornings
like delicate birds
are thrown
blood soaked
faceless bodies,
walls crumble
on their spirited laughter
our young
are young
no more.

A burst of gunfire
shatters the stillness
of a star-filled sky
destroying the meaning
of children's stories.

In the little
that is left
of day they forget
to make chariots
of palmyrah nuts
and play kilithatu
Then they learn
to shut the cadjan
fence on time
and differentiate
between the barkings
of a dog,
not to question
and be silent
when questions
possess no answers,

like sheep
they have learned
all of this

To tear off
the wings of insects
make guns
from sticks and logs
kill friends
thinking them enemies,
these are the games
our children play.

In a night
full of pressure
during war
our young have grown up.

2

In the evenings
all burdens
weigh heavily.

Inevitably
heat and light
shimmer
on the lifeless day
like writings
on a slate
that rub off to
leave no trace,

I count my breaths
not merely
to pass time.

Fireflies
fall dead
by the lamp
what should I
dwell on?
Fireflies?
Or the stars
shining
with no meaning
like the light

that emits
from a corpse's eye?

Truth
is not visible
in this darkness.
To discern untruths
is not an easy task.

But my younger sister
preparing for exams
I cannot ask
what motivates you
why you peer in this darkness?

All are in a hurry
I am left
with only memories

Outside,
calm, silent trees
cast torn shadows
when anguish
and chaos
rule the streets
with barking dogs
and locked doors
checked and rechecked
in readiness for night,
I cannot think
of the Sun
rising tomorrow.

The night
is important to me
like yesterday
another friend
maybe lost
in this dark.

The night;
It is valuable
to me.

(Translated from Tamil)



MODERN SCIENCE - WESTERN, PATRIARCHAL MYTH?

Part I

A CRITIQUE OF THE POPULIST ORTHODOXY

Meera Nanda

INTRODUCTION

A strange anomaly has come to mark the current crisis in the Third World. The more intractable the problems have become, both internally and in relation to global capital in this post cold war phase, the deeper the Third World intellectuals have tended to retreat into the womb of some primordial past.

In the name of finding a "third way" that would somehow rejuvenate the civilization projects rudely interrupted by colonialism, many Third World intellectuals have parted company with all "alien" ideas. Their zeal for the indigenous, the supposedly "authentic" voice of the oppressed, has blinded them to all distinctions between the universal, humanistic kernel of western thought and its racist and ethno-centric manifestations.

A fundamentalist fog seems to have settled on the minds of our "progressive" intellectuals who can only think in terms of the "inherent" viciousness of the "West" and modernity as opposed to a fundamentally virtuous "Third World." History and contradictions do not figure in their moral outrage which has become a substitute for analysis.

This fundamentalism is especially noticeable in India. Formal democracy and well-established institutions of higher learning in that country have helped produce a fairly large group of intellectuals who are well versed in, and work in close contact with, intellectual and political movements in the rest of the world. This has resulted in the flowering of a variety of social movements not associated with formal political parties and ideologies and active in issues related to ecology, gender, civil rights, and so on.

There is no denying that some of the "public intellectuals" associated with these movements have done a seminal job in bringing issues affecting women, the environment, and related issues to the forefront of politics. But their philosophical borrowings from western avant-garde movements like post-modernism, coupled with their staunch cultural

and economic nationalism, have led them into the blind alley of populism. Their brand of populism, unfortunately, happens to find a deep emotional resonance in the angst-ridden Western academe and the nationalistic upper classes of post-colonial societies - who have everything to gain by substituting for internal class issues (and the looming specter of an all-out class struggle) a great and eternal civilizational battle between the good, spiritual "East" and the corrupt, predatory "West".

This article aims to delineate and critique the ideological planks of this populist thinking that has gained a substantial following in the new social movements in India (and elsewhere) in recent years. I will be mainly concerned here with the deeply conservative and rejectionist stance of the populists towards modern science and technology, and by extension, modern science-led development projects. For this purpose, I will use a recently published book that summarizes the oft-heard populist arguments against modern science-based development projects as a vantage point. I refer to Vandana Shiva's much-acclaimed *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*.¹

Shiva, in the classic populist mode, zeroes in on the very real pain of working men and women caught in the epic drama of modernization. She examines how the everyday rituals, work practices, and social mores of small peasant communities are crumbling; how the social and the physical ecologies of traditional societies are being rapidly transformed. But, again like most populists, her answers to what will soothe this pain, what will make these societies whole, healthy - and for the first time ever - democratic and egalitarian, lead nowhere. Shiva's answer can be summed up in one line: Reclaim the past to build the future. And the past that she, and her fellow populists, would return to is a past without any contradictions or oppressions. The past Shiva constructs is a kind of Rousseauist paradise of small property holders, operating within an egalitarian, communitarian framework; it is a past where patriarchy and caste oppression are unknown, and scarcity, disease, and ignorance do not waste lives. That this is a contra-factual past goes without saying. It is a construct, meant to provide the populists with a blueprint of, and an endpoint for, the development of non-western societies.

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Shiva's book is an especially interesting example of this vision for she pulls together many hitherto diverse strands in populist discourse.

This synthesis lends Shiva's book a deceptive theoretical depth. It makes populism look like the only social program that is consistent with the philosophical principles of post-modernism, feminism/eco-feminism, and liberatory science. Moreover, by presenting the populist program as as the wave of the future (that will be led by Third World women but will revolutionize the whole world), Shiva gives the impression that post-modernism has definitively won the war against the Enlightenment values of progress and rationality.

I believe it is important to challenge this kind of populist triumphalism. The values of the Enlightenment and modernity must be defended in the face of this reactionary assault. And this defense is best accomplished, in my view, by engaging with the philosophical tenets of this neo-romantic, Third Worldism represented by Shiva. It is important to deconstruct the emotional, nationalistic rhetoric to lay bare its theoretical poverty. Once that is accomplished, it will be easy to see populism for the airless, dark, unlivable trap that it is.

The Political and Philosophical contours on Indian Neo-populism

For all their co-option of post-modernist, feminist and radical relativist critiques of science, rationality, and progress so fashionable in universities in the west, Shiva, Ashish Nandy and other crusading neo-Gandhians are firmly located in the age old tradition of populism. Indeed, their brand of neo-populism is even more potent as it is wedded to nationalism, one of the most pernicious doctrines of the twentieth century.

Populism is a reactionary rejection of the scientific and industrial revolutions that have changed the course of human history. According to a critic, Gavin Kitching, populist tendencies are "counter-doctrines, minority oppositional creeds" to the idea of development fueled by industrialization. Populism does not take into account the social context of modernization: capitalism and socialism are considered equally destructive of the pre-modern village communities, which populists hold as the exemplar of ecological and social harmony. Kitching locates populism within the ideological currents and political movements rooted in the threat experienced by small producers (peasants, artisans and businessmen) as a result of modern industrialization. It includes the theories of various intellectuals who identify themselves with the fate of small-scale production and champion its merits as the basis of an alternative to socialism and to capitalism.

Populism has a history as old as industrialization itself. Wherever predominantly peasant societies have been confronted with the possibility or actuality of industrializa-

tion, populist ideas have come to the fore. These ideas have sought to confront the impending change with an alternative "vision" of small-scale enterprise of peasants and artisans in a "community" of villages and small towns. Gandhi, Nyerere and contemporary protagonists of "small is beautiful" belong together with Sismondi in nineteenth century France, Proudhon and the Ricardian Socialists in England, Russian and East European populists, anarchists and the well known narodniks at the turn of the century² Indeed, the label of "ecological neo-narodnism" is quite apt as often applied to the populist strand in Indian environmental movement.

Kitching distinguishes between the romantic rejection of the "dark satanic mills" found in the nineteenth century poetic works of Wordsworth, Shelley and others and populism proper. Populism has a relatively well defined and often sophisticated economic argument against industrialization. One hallmark of a populist, as compared to a romantic, is a profession of faith in material progress. The populists argue that an increase in material well being can come about without large scale industrialization or technological modernization of means of production. They believe that such progress is perfectly compatible with preserving a society in which small-scale peasants and artisans are in a large majority. While the populist vision of more rooted communities of small independent producers is attractive, it refuses to engage with the economic logic behind modernization and industrialization. It does not recognize that its vision of community can come to fruition only within a context of sustained industrialization.³ This *a priori* rejection of modern technology-based industrialization in favor of the traditional, the supposedly more "organic" and "authentic" knowledge of the people is buttressed by a radical rejection of scientific rationality itself as western, imperialistic and oppressive.

Born in the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment project that gave birth to the modern was incredibly optimistic. It believed in equality, liberty, human perfectibility and universal reason and sought to release the potential of all human beings to attain these goals. It aimed to reveal the universal, eternal and the immutable qualities of all humanity through the application of reason to "develop objective science, universal morality and law." The twentieth century - with its colonial empires, death camps, world wars, nuclear annihilation and gulags - has shattered this optimism. Especially after the disillusionment of events in 1968, many intellectuals in Europe and North America have been inclined to reject the very ideals of the Enlightenment - universalism and progress - as inherently totalitarian and imperialistic. This "rage against humanism" as Richard Bernstein has described the post-modern mood, has resulted in a denunciation of abstract reason and a deep aversion to any project that seeks universal human emancipation through mobilization of powers of science, technology and reason. The failure of socialism, moreover, to replace commodity relations and capitalist



rationality in their own societies has led these intellectuals into a nostalgic search for some ideal space outside of capitalism; alternatives rationalities uncontaminated by the Enlightenment values of reason and progress.

This is where our Third-Worldist intellectuals come handy: they obligingly retrieve from their pasts an idealized version of a world-we-have-lost, a paradise destroyed by the evil forces of modernity. This not only provides ready-made answers to angst-ridden post-modernists but also stokes their self-righteousness in giving a hearing to “marginal” voices supposedly silenced by the imperialism of reason and western science. The neo-populists claim to be the “authentic” leaders of “development” in their societies, as compared to the “westernized,” de-cultured Third World intellectuals. The route to development they favor, paradoxically, assumes that the past is a suitable model for the future; that the way forward will be found by looking backwards.

In keeping with the idealism of post-modernism, populists do not see the uneven development of Third World societies as a result of contradictory interests of global and national capital, mediated by the class relations of the latter. The problem instead is assumed to lie in the irreconcilable differences between the traditional world-view (for some reason, almost invariably called “wisdom”) of the “subjugated cultures” and the project of modernity and Enlightenment which is posited not only as Eurocentric or western in origin but also imperialistic in intention. Modernity is thus considered incompatible with or even inimical to the Third World. “True” development in this view is simply the development of indigenous systems of knowledge and production. Indeed, our nativist, born again Third Worldists have been singing “requiems for modernity” for quite some time now.⁴

This philosophical anti-modernism is matched by a romantic anti-capitalism in politics. Unlike socialism, the anti-capitalism of populist offers only a “moral and a historical critique of capitalism which can be backward looking and reactionary or both.”⁵ Socialism fully acknowledges the achievements of capitalism and then seeks to transcend its contradictions through social struggle; in other words, convert the potential released by capitalism into actuality. The anti-capitalism fashionable among Third World neo-populists takes a nationalist, pre-capitalist and often petty-bourgeois stand against capitalism and rejects it *in toto*.

One problem with neo-populists’ appropriation of post-modernism is that its understanding of modernity is a laughable caricature of the real thing. The metanarratives of progress and reason that they decry are *much more open, nuanced and sophisticated than they care to admit*. They completely fail to acknowledge the affirmative and emancipatory promise of modernity that “all that is solid [will melt] into air,”⁶ that all relationships of oppression “fixed and fast-frozen” (Marx) will collapse, setting humanity

free from arbitrary authority, able for the first time ever to take collective control over its destiny. When Third World populists extol the virtues of pre-capitalist communities, they ignore the lack of genuine moral choice for individuals living in such communities. They fail to realize that pre-capitalist, peasant societies could not but be *coercive, authoritarian and patriarchal* for it is only with capitalism that the material foundations needed for a consensual community have been created. Only with industrial advances made possible by capitalism have more and more segments of people the world over been able to free themselves from the leaden weight of nature - the necessary (though not sufficient) pre-condition for individuals to take control of their destiny.

It is to this genre of Third World populism that Vandana Shiva’s *Staying Alive* belongs. To the existing critique of modernity and science-based development as “western and bourgeois,” Shiva adds the category of gender: development henceforth becomes a “western, bourgeois and patriarchal” or, more simply, a “white, capitalist and male” project.

Shiva charges that modern science-based development is an “inherently patriarchal and violent” project. She thus moves beyond the weak and empirically verifiable thesis that development projects are often designed with a male bias and can hurt the interests of the weaker social groups (gender, classes and castes) and makes a much more damning charge: development and science are *inherently, ipso facto* patriarchal. This charge is premised on the central tenet of eco-feminist thinking - the so called “feminine principle” (or “prakriti” as Shiva’s puts it).⁷ It simply states that women are closer to nature than men. Once this equivalence is accepted the rest follows as a corollary: the forces that degrade nature are bound to degrade women; and the world-views and practices that are “in harmony with nature” become, by definition, liberatory for women. And once ecological degradation and resource depletion in India can be blamed on modern development projects, traditional technologies and world-views by definition become the saviors of nature and women. Shiva lays out this thesis in the first three chapters and elaborates on it in the rest of the book using case studies from the social forestry programs, Green Revolution and modern irrigation regimes.

In this article, I propose to use Shiva’s book as a platform for critically examining the underlying assumptions of the larger neo-populist, Third Worldist discourse about development. I will be mainly concerned with the premises on which modern science is critiqued and rejected in the populist discourse on development. I shall marshal recent writings from literature on western civilization, feminism, philosophy of science and agricultural development in the Third World to show:

- a) The rejection of science as “western” is based on an uncritical acceptance by Third World intellectuals of



a racist, Eurocentric construction of the history of ideas put forward by some western intellectuals aligned with imperialism in the 19th century. Prisoners of a myth created and promoted by imperialism in the first place, these self-described "anti-imperialist" scholars are blind to all that is genuinely universal in science.

- b) The rejection of science as "inherently masculine" is based on a tacit acceptance of the age old misogynist myths by "radical" feminists. This feminist critique of science as a mere fabrication of patriarchy has been lately subjected to searching critiques by some feminists themselves. Moreover, this new feminine mystique that stresses "difference" over gender equality, however problematic as a political program, has come to the west only *after* most formal and cultural blocks to women's entry into science and the public sphere have weakened. Third World feminists need to be very cautious with "difference theories" since the political and social context in which most Third World women live their lives needs to stress gender equality if any real gains are to be made for the majority of Indian women.
- c) The rejection of science as "just another social construct" of the same epistemological status as traditional knowledge systems (or Shiva's "ethno science") is based on an incomplete and incorrect understanding of the recent developments in history and philosophy of science.

The displacement of the idea that scientific reasoning is based on facts and evidence by the relativist thesis that everything boils down to subjective interests and perspectives is the most prominent and pernicious manifestation of anti-intellectualism in our times. Regrettably, the left has embraced and championed this mistaken and dead-end relativism, greatly detrimental to itself and the masses of poor people in the Third World. That natural science is "nothing but" class/gender/western interests is by now so entrenched in leftist thinking that it is hard to dislodge.

After showing why neo-populist's rejection of science cannot be sustained on philosophical grounds, this article will try to show that there is nothing inherently western or patriarchal about science-based development projects. Here again due to personal interests, the focus will only be on the Green Revolution.

Science and development are "western" projects

In the standard history of ideas written by westerners, the origin of all rational and scientific thought is presented as a uniquely western European phenomenon. While progressive historians of science in the west have long argued against this parochial interpretation, Indian

and Third World science critics have accepted it uncritically and completely. Indeed, they outdo the most conservative western ideologues in insisting that science is a purely "western" knowledge system and that non-western societies have played no role in its development - apart from being its victim. They then go on to invoke what Daniel Bell has called the "genetic fallacy" and explain away the past and present instances of western domination of non-western societies as a result of the western nature of science.

The word "western" has acquired so many negative connotations that its mere use signals rejection. It is indeed used more as an epithet than as an analytic category in most populist discourses. In other words, the reader is not invited to ask: "So what?" but is assumed to share the view that any idea qualified as "western" cannot but have imperialistic or other malevolent intentions and effects.

Shiva employs "western" more as an epithet than as an analytic category while describing science-led development: "... science and development are not universal categories of progress [as Enlightenment claims] but special projects of modern western patriarchy" (Introduction, p xiv); "They are "projects of male western origin both historically and ideologically" (p.xvi); "In Bacon's experimental method...there was a conjunction of masculine and scientific domination over nature, women and the non-west: (p.16). Development is a "post colonial project in which the entire world remade itself on the model of colonizing west ... development was equated with westernisation of economic categories" (p.1).

In a faithful rendering of the genetic fallacy the western origin is supposed to have significant political implications. Western science according to Shiva provided the ideological cover for colonialism:

... the domination of South by North, of women by men, of nature by westernized man are... rooted in the domination inherent to the world-view created by western man over the last three centuries through which he could subjugate the rest of the humanity (p.30)

... development being a westernization of economic categories... was thus reduced to a continuation of a process of colonization, economic growth becomes a new colonialism (pp.1-2)

The problem with such characterizations is that they accept that science was "created by western man" without any questions. But as recent scholarship shows, this assumption rests on an Aryan construction of ancient history put forward by European historians during the nineteenth century when imperialism was at its zenith and, incidentally, when the Enlightenment world-view was giving way to Romanticism. Recent works including Martin Bernal's *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of*



Classical Civilization, St. Clair Drake's *Black Folk Here and There* and Samir Amin's *Eurocentrism* have begun to chip away at this myth.⁹

In a recent review of Bernal and Drake, Vasant Kaiwar explains how the universal humanism of the Renaissance (that flowered from the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries and led to the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century) came to be appropriated for a mythic rational and scientific "west."¹⁰ This construction erased from the history of ancient Greece, the supposed cradle of "western" philosophy, all traces of the "eastern" cultures that were pivotal for the formation of Greek thought. Influenced by the racist-romantic ideologies of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, British and European intellectuals set out, self-consciously and purposefully to define a cultural identity of their "people" that would set them categorically apart from other cultural groups. Their recounting of history specifically set out to deny that:

... the ancient Greek civilization had its roots in the East Mediterranean cultures of Egypt and Phoenicia and that Egypt in turn had a profound connection with Africa and Phoenicia with Semitic cultures of the Near East. The elimination of these two from the ranks of great civilizations, and from having made any contribution to Greek language and religion, coincided temporally with black slavery, imperialism and subsequently with anti-semitism in Europe ... This innovation was in Bernal's view politically and racially motivated ... Mendacious arguments were used to suggest that Egyptian civilization could not have been African and that it was necessary for Asians to bring civilization and high culture to Egypt.¹¹

Creation of this Eurocentric myth, according to Samir Amin, was a result of a constant tension between the progressive and humanistic aspirations of Enlightenment thought (which emerged as a challenge to the universalism and dogmatism of Christianity) and its recognition of its own superiority:

This embryonic culture was in fact superior, both materially and in many other aspects to earlier societies both on its own territory (feudal Europe) and in other regions of the world (in the neighboring Islamic orient). The culture of the Enlightenment was unable to reconcile the fact of its superiority with its universalist ambitions. On the contrary it gradually drifted towards racism as an explanation for the contrast between it and other cultures.¹²

The result was the creation of Eurocentric history that assumed the "existence of irreducibly distinct cultural invariants that shape the historical paths of different people."¹³ In other words, the rationalism that flowered into the Enlightenment was claimed as a part of the

"national character" of the west: Ancient Greece then became merely the childhood of this inherent European cultural trait. Consequently, rationality and science came to be seen as purely Greek and therefore "western" while the "orient" became associated with metaphysics at best and irrationality at worst. This construction of "essences" of nations and civilizations, as Kaiwar shows, was not a result of the much-maligned rationalism of the Enlightenment but came about with the rise of Romanticism (evident in the ideology of organicity, purity of the "people" and pre-industrial imagery) in Germany and elsewhere in Europe in the late eighteenth century and after.¹⁴ The currently fashionable trend of claiming the "right to be different" based on endlessly fragmenting "identities" based on nationality, race, gender and ethnicity is in fact a betrayal of the Enlightenment project, a betrayal born out of fascism, world wars, the Gulags and anti-colonial wars.

But what if it can be shown that civilizations do not come with their "characters" already made and engraved on them for all eternity? What if it can be shown that "civilizations flower when cultures meet"?¹⁵ Bernal and others who are challenging the racist historiography of Eurocentrists are trying to show that ancient cultures - Greek, west Semitic and Egyptian - engaged in a dynamic exchange and syntheses of new ideas. But unlike provincial Third Worldists, Bernal and Amin do not deny or minimize the achievements of the tradition of scientific inquiry that the Renaissance and Enlightenment ushered in. They are comfortable with the idea of progress in a world-historical sense. As Amin emphasizes, the movement of pre-capitalist "tributary"¹⁶ cultures towards capitalism requires an "abandonment of metaphysics" defined as the "search for absolute truth" in favour of the search for "partial truths" of science. In other words, the evolution of science is rooted not in any fixed cultural trait of nations and peoples but in structural, and material changes in a society. According to Amin, the culturalist reactions flourishing all around the Third World stem from an impasse rooted in the fact that:

... modernity requires an abandonment of metaphysics. The failure to recognize this leads to a false construction of the question of "cultural identity" and a confused debate in which "identity" (and "heritage") are placed in absolute contrast with "modernization," viewed as synonymous with "Westernization" (p.133).

Let us move from historiography to the political implications of equating science and reason with the West. If the nativism of our populists was just a nostalgic look-back, there would be no argument. But their world-view has real practical and political implications. This becomes evident on examining the populist agendas in the economic and cultural spheres. In both, the boundary between the "west" and the "Third World," the "alien" and the "indigenous" serves an ideological function. It allows a deeply conserva-



tive ethos to present itself as a "radical" alternative. Drawing a clear line between two supposedly distinct and antagonistic categories - the "west" and the "Third World" - removes the need for critically examining the *material sources of oppression* in either of these categories.

Freed from the need to examine the sources of oppression in their own traditions, the protagonists of the indigenous, the authentic, and so on easily come to present themselves as the voice of the oppressed. This ideological work is done through a constant, mind-numbing invocation of the supposedly irreconcilable differences between East and West. And given the history of colonialism, this easily builds up an association of the west with plunder and Third World with hapless suffering. The need for an rigorous analysis of concrete situations is minimized. Assertions are substituted for analysis. Shiva makes full use of the ideological potential of the word "western." She juxtaposes "western Cartesian dualism" with the "dialectical harmony between male and female and between nature and man" that supposedly leads to the treatment of "nature as integral and inviolable" in "Indian cosmology" (p.40-41).

The onus is on her and anyone else defending this view to explain why the same cosmology that venerates nature legitimated, and continues to condone, a caste system that utterly degrades (through the phenomenon of Untouchability) those whose work involves contact with the elements of nature. This raises questions about what this nature veneration signifies, and what material interests it served in the traditional societies. Once these questions are dispassionately explored, it becomes clear that in spite of our nativists, "Indian cosmology" in itself cannot provide a progressive program of action to stem not just the degradation of the natural environment but also the *degradation of human beings*.

In a similar attempt to challenge the "arrogance of the west and those who ape it," Shiva contrasts the "reductionist" and "inherently violent" (against women and nature) western, male science with an inherently "holistic" and life-enhancing knowledge of women and tribals in Third World societies. The former:

violates [the latter] socially through the expert/non expert divide which converts them into non-knowers even in those areas of living in which through daily participation, they are the real experts.

In other words, scientific knowledge devalues indigenous knowers and knowledge. There is no denying that given the elitism that pervades all aspects of Indian society, the "modernizers" have been less than respectful of the local knowledge and local knowers. And given the dismal situation in primary education we are raising a generation of "non-knowers" deprived of any systematic knowledge, traditional or otherwise. But it does not in any way follow that the "western" science is inherently violent towards

local traditions and women or that it is inherently reductionist.

But scientific education does not take place in a vacuum. However exciting, liberating and delightful in theory, it can be thrust upon people in a paternalistic, authoritarian manner. Shiva and her fellow populists are not completely wrong in their discomfort with what has gone on under the name of "scientific development." I sympathize and share their anguish. But I believe they are wrong in their understanding of the problem. It is not the western origin - and therefore inherent nature - of scientific ideas but the social relations and cultural norms of our own society that can and often do make scientific ideas seem oppressive.

Turning now to the sphere of material production, the equation of science with the west gets translated into an equation of all modern science-based development (always mentioned within a set of mocking quotation marks) with the west. Subsequently, more by implication than by hard evidence, the western connection comes to stand for exploitation by the multinational corporations. Thus Shiva charges that development itself entails "westernization of economic categories" derived from the experience of the imperialist west and universalized to apply to an "entirely different context of basic needs satisfaction" of the people in the Third World (p.1). "Our" context of "need satisfaction," furthermore, is not really one of poverty: it is only "culturally perceived" to be so when seen through "their" eyes (pp.10-12 and *passim*). Traditional economies were the "original affluent societies" as they satisfied the "basic and vital needs" of all.

Arguing that development entails capital accumulation which apparently *requires* colonialism and commercialization, Shiva concludes that "economic growth is new colonialism." She further asserts that the very ideas of productivity, commodity production and growth are western, implying that prior to Adam Smith and colonialism, production was not for profit or trade but only for "need satisfaction" and "sustaining nature's productivity." In keeping with the genetic fallacy, Shiva derives truly sinister conclusions from the "western nature" of economic categories. A good example is her treatment of the Green Revolution which she assumes was initiated by "western male experts" with no other motive but of wresting control over food production away from poor Third World peasants so that western agribusiness could make profits.¹⁷

To anyone familiar with populist literature on India's development, the statements made above will seem self-evident: the repetition of a set of half truths - in the media, in international conferences and through books like Shiva's - has lent them an air of "truth." Indeed the shrill rhetoric of populists has created an atmosphere where a defense of even the most self-evident and basic gains from science and technology is considered heretical. But the populists' noisy assertions, like all half-truths, only distort



and over-simplify. My reasons for suggesting this are as follows:

- i) The claim that Third World people have “entirely different context of basic needs satisfaction” and that context is not “really” one of poverty and deprivation but only appears so when seen through “western categories” does not accurately describe the reality of India’s contemporary or past economic structures. Would Shiva deny that adequate calorie intake and life beyond infancy are “basic vital needs”? Examination of data on just these two needs, from India or any other technologically under-developed society, current or as far back in history as possible, should be enough to show the fallacy of Shiva’s claims.

Shiva is unable even to imagine that “basic and vital needs” can and must extend beyond mere survival and that it *is* possible, for the first time in human history, to include education, health, leisure in the rubric of “basic vital needs” for all of humanity. The hubris of our nativists would rather celebrate the “difference” of the “simple” ways of their people than allow the poor and long-suffering masses to participate in the new vistas opened up by science and technology.

Furthermore, the jet-setting, globe-trotting neo-populist intellectual’s propensity to project the life style of the poor and the oppressed as morally superior and socially richer than that of the Western oppressors is hypocritical to say the least. It is a sign of what Andrew Collier has aptly described as “nihilistic asceticism.”¹⁸ It is a common tendency among oppressed groups and their leaders to “idealize features of their lives that are, in fact, effects of oppression and to denigrate power, knowledge, beauty, culture, pleasure, etc.” (p.160). This is the reason why Third World radicalism that claims to look at the world through the vantage point of the oppressed fails to offer a progressive and feasible program for change.

- ii) Shiva and the anti-capitalist populists in general, have a tendency to lump and condemn all production for exchange together - be it for export markets linked to the global economy, for sale in urban areas or for local markets. “Commodity production” (production for sale) *per se* is supposed to be exploitative of subsistence producers. This position has been criticized. A recent article critiqued Shiva’s claim that the market oppresses tribal and peasant women by showing that in Jharkhand, women gatherers who sell their forest produce in local markets have in fact “greater rights over the income from their labor in gathering than they have over the income from their labor in agriculture” because:

...the income from sale of forest produce tends to be counted as the income of the individual who

gathers and sells the produce. In this system the introduction of commercial production of various forest produce, production not for direct use but for sale, has not worsened the position of women. Increasing the income from forestry will thus help strengthen the position of women within the family.¹⁹

At a more theoretical level, this generalized antagonism towards markets has been forcefully critiqued by Maureen Mackintosh, an economist associated with the Open University.²⁰ Instead of treating markets like a “black box,” they need to be analyzed as follows: the terms (ownership) on which people come to the market; the power and control of the producers in local markets and of Third World governments in global markets; the class structure of trade within the Third World and the terms of the labor market. It is these considerations more than any east-west, traditional-modern divide that will lead to a meaningful discussion about the role of the market and commodities in the subsistence economy.

- iii) The equation of development with internal colonization is questionable. The claim here is that because of commodity production and resource intensive industrialization, resources are being withdrawn from the subsistence economy. It is never made clear who is draining the subsistence economy and why: sometimes it is international capital through the MNCs, at other times it is the “national elites,” or even the whole project of “maldevelopment” itself. There is no indication of any linkages in the other direction, namely, the resource movement from the modern industrial sector into the rural area. Furthermore, Shiva’s peasant and subsistence economy lacks any reference to the class and caste differentiations internal to itself. The exploitation of natural resources and abuse of human labor that they entail is completely absent from Shiva’s treatment of the relations between the modern and the traditional sectors of the economy.

This emotive “taking the part of the peasant” has been seriously questioned by a number of scholars including Henry Bernstein and Hamza Alavi.²¹ Both challenge the suggestion that peasants/rural producers can be considered as members of any “pre-capitalist” or rural “moral economy.” According to Alavi, “such a view obscures the far reaching ways in which a long period of subordination to colonial and indigenous capital and the colonial and post-colonial state have transformed them. They have long since ceased to be pre-capitalists.” Bernstein too describes peasants as fully integrated with capitalist economy as:

...agrarian petty commodity producers within capitalism... there is no *necessary* contradiction



between peasants and capital, or the state (as there is between workers and the capital). Peasants cannot then constitute an intrinsically "exploited" class in capitalism if the condition for their freedom is the "freedom of the market."²²

Shiva's women, peasants and tribals who are allegedly struggling against "development" are not necessarily struggling against capitalism. Their demands can be fairly easily met within the existing social relations. Moreover, again following Bernstein, the charge of "colonization" fails to consider the place of agriculture and subsistence economy in a comprehensive agenda for progressive change at the national level. In other words, it overlooks the many backward and forward linkages between the agrarian/subsistence and industrial/urban economy and simply paints the former as virtuous and the latter as vicious.

iv) Strains of a conspiracy theory run right through all populist "analysis" of development projects. For instance, Shiva simply assumes that because the Green Revolution was initiated by western foundations and business interests, its real purpose was to swell profits for western agri-businesses. I am by no means suggesting that global capital does not profit from the sale of products and technologies in the Third World. But the mere presence of a foreign interest must not be read as exploitative and therefore harmful to Third World economies. As the burgeoning literature on dependent development suggests, the linkages between the Third World and the MNCs are more complex and allow much more "play" than earlier theorized by the "development of underdevelopment" school.²³

Indian critics need to be even more cautious in using dependency arguments for the simple reason that India has had the most self-reliant and insulated capitalist economy in the entire Third World. As Achin Vanaik points out in his recent book, most Indian leftists tend to over-emphasize the "imperialist" connection without due regard to actual economic facts. In India's most liberal and outward oriented plan, the seventh plan (1986 to 1990), the total foreign inflow did not amount to more than six per cent of the total investment and exports were only six per cent of the GDP in 1986.²⁴ Vanaik concludes that even after taking into account the indirect means of control, one cannot assign a meaningful place to imperialism in any sober analysis of India's post-independence economic history.

Populists who nevertheless insist on invoking external influences as the chief contradiction for Indian economy must be required to provide evidence for their claims and delineate mechanisms through which foreign capital works in concrete cases.

The second part of this article, on *The Green Revolution as "Western, Patriarchal and Anti-Nature" Agriculture* will appear in the next issue.

Notes

1. Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, Kali for Women, New Delhi and Zed Books, London, 1988.
2. But in contrast with classical populism, the modern Third World neo-populism that has gained prominence since the late 1960s does not seek to arrest industrialization per se but to direct it into new forms and channels, to maximise employment and to increase equality. But as Kitching points out, in spite of all the discontinuities, the "essential 'vision' - a world of equality, of small property, a minimally urbanized world - manifests itself again and again." (Kitching, pp. 98-102).
3. Industrialisation, especially in the Third World can be legitimately criticized for its un-evenness and incompleteness. But populists go far beyond that: they question the very superiority of modern, science-based technology that fuels industrialisation over the more traditional, handicraft based "appropriate technologies."
4. See Ashish Nandy, *Science, Hegemony and Violence: A Requiem for Modernity*, 1989. Oxford University Press
5. From Bill Warren, *Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism*, Verso, 1980, pp. 7 and 20.
6. This phrase of Marx is the title of Marshall Berman's most inspiring and sensitive account of the experience of modernity. *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, Simon and Schuster, 1982. Modern society, according to this book, is racked with pain and misery yet it is also a place where men and women can become freer and more creative than ever before. The fact that "all that is solid melts into air" is a source not of despair but of strength and affirmation. See also Berman's "Why Modernism Still Matters," *Tikkun*, 1990, Vol. 4, No.1, p.11. for a strong defence of modernity in the face of the intellectually fashionable post-modernist nihilism.
7. Equating a Hindu view of the world with "Indian cosmology", Shiva defines Prakriti thus: "Women in India are an intimate part of nature, both in imagination and in practice.... All existence arises from...primordial energy (*Shakti*).
8. Genetic fallacy simply states that the origin of an institution explains and even determines its function. Daniel Bell, "Resolving the Contradictions of Modernity and Modernism," *Society*, May/July, 1990.
9. Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilisation, Vol. 1, The Fabrication of Ancient Greece*, Rutgers, 1987; St. Clair Drake, *Black Folk Here and There: An Essay in History and Anthropology*, Centre for Afro-American Studies, UCLA, 1987; Samir Amin, *Eurocentricism*, Monthly Review Press, 1989.
10. Vasant Kaiwar, "Racism and the Writing of History, Part I", *South Asia Bulletin*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1989.
11. Kaiwar, p. 32.
12. Samir Amin, *ibid*, p 105.
13. Amin, *ibid*, p. vii.
14. Quoting Bernal, Kaiwar writes: "The change from the Enlightenment to Romanticism also involved a reversal of emphasis from 'cultivation and improvement' to the Romantic stress on 'nature and distinct, permanent national essences.' In the Enlightenment world-view, it was 'no great slur on the Greeks [and by extension Europeans] for their civilisation to be attributed to Egyptians and Phoenician colonisation.' In the Romantic view, it was 'intolerable to suggest that the Greeks had ever been more primitive than Africans and Asians.'
15. Kaiwar, p. 34.



CHILD ABUSE

Gameela Samarasinghe

How can we remain silent any longer after having witnessed on television an evident case of child abuse?

Of all places, it happened at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall during the inauguration ceremony of the SAARC Ministerial Conference on Children in South Asia in the presence of the very people who had been responsible for the drafting of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, eminent delegates from the region working with children and supposedly sensitive to their well-being, lawyers, doctors, human rights activists, journalists, ministers, the President.

It happened when seven year old Kamal Ratnayake from Kurunegala, a child with stumps for hands and legs appeared on stage and read out a speech in Sinhala and later in English, evidently not written by him, in which he related the story of his life and which apparently moved the audience to tears. He ended his speech by thanking President Premadasa for giving him, what until that day had not been given, what any ordinary human being would aspire to, but not have the power to give, a reason for Kamal to live.

The silence following the Conference may have been due to the unawareness or rather the ignorance of what child abuse in fact is.

Child abuse is not limited to infanticide, abandonment, exploitation of children as cheap labour or battering as most people tend to believe.

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It is also realising through the child, one's own aspirations and using the child as a vehicle for this purpose.

This happens daily but is not always viewed as child abuse. For example, when a child is exploited as cheap domestic labour, the employer is not the main offender but the parent too, as the child's earnings are used for the benefit of the family. Parents who pressurize their children to achieve academically regardless of their abilities or interests may do so for themselves, for many personal reasons such as to climb the social ladder or to indirectly blame their own parents for not having provided them with enough opportunities during their childhood. Similarly, a child who must beg or perform for the benefit (not always financial) of an adult is also to be viewed as a victim of abuse.

School children are frequently made to participate in sports activities, religious and non religious ceremonies or political meetings. For these they have to rehearse for long hours often in the blazing sun, at times during school hours. Even if they do not always understand the purpose of the event, sometimes against their will, they are made to parade before eminent personalities whom they may not even know. As a result, their studies get disrupted and the health of some affected.

Ignorance could perhaps excuse some for remaining silent. However, it is hard to believe that it is ignorance that kept the entire audience at the conference silent. Assuming that indeed it was not ignorance, then let us hope that it was not fear. ■

Contd. from p. 30

16. Amin's name for all pre-capitalist societies where surplus is extracted as a "tribute" through extra-economic means.
17. "What has been called scientific agriculture and the Green Revolution is in reality a western patriarchal anti-nature model of agriculture which shifts the control of food systems from women to agribusiness multinationals and disrupts natural processes (p. 97)... (it was) designed by MNC and western male experts, homogenising nature's diversity and diversity of human knowledge on a reductionist pattern of agriculture" (p. 99). "It was power, profits and control that made global corporate and aid interests opt for "miracle seeds" which made peasants dependent on internationally produced seeds and chemicals. Other alternatives would have left control with women and peasants and would have kept people fed but would not have generated profits." (pp. 134; 96-178 passim).
18. Andrew Collier, *Socialist Reasoning: An Inquiry into the Political Philosophy of Scientific Socialism*, Pluto Press, London, 1990, p. 160.
19. D.N. "Women and Forests," *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 14, 1990.
20. Maureen Mackintosh, "Abstract Markets and Real Needs," in Henry Bernstein, Ben Crow et al (eds.), *The Food Question*, pp. 43-53.
21. Henry Bernstein, "Taking the Part of Peasants?" in Henry Bernstein, Ben Crow, Maureen Mackintosh and Charlotte Martin (eds), *The Food Question: Profits v. People?* Monthly Review Press, 1990. Hamza Alavi, "Peasantry and Capitalism: A Marxist Discourse," in Teodor Shanin (ed), *Peasants and Peasant Societies*, Basil Blackwell, 1987.
22. Bernstein, p. 74.
23. Diane Elson provides a good overview of the issues involved in dependent development "Dominance and Dependency in the World Economy", in Ben Crow, Mary Thrope et al (eds.) *Survival and Change in the Third World*, Oxford University Press, 1988.
24. Achn Vanaik, *The Painful Transition: Bourgeois Democracy in India* Verso, 1990.

REPRESENTATION AS 'OTHERING THE OTHER:' NON SRI-LANKAN IN SINHALA THEATRE

Neluka Silva

Modern Sinhala theatre is a popular cultural genre that has secured a place of recognition among urban and semi-rural audiences. Despite the advent of teledrama and the availability of films, the appeal of the theatre has not waned. Each year more than a hundred plays are presented and the more popular plays remain on the boards for years.¹

Given the privileged space it occupies, the contemporary Sinhala theatre serves as an index of prevailing ideologies; a critical examination of reveals that it reinforces dominant ideological strands. The strand that I want to discuss is that in which the Sinhala theatre posits itself as embodying the 'radical' voice, lashing out at repressive structures. This 'radical' appeal is generally sanctioned by an audience which conceives the theatre as a medium of propagating 'revolutionary' themes. Yet, the 'radical' theatrical project is often fraught with reactionary representation of a number of issues, notably gender, ethnicity and race.

Most of the current Sinhala plays work within the patriarchal, chauvinist and often xenophobic parameters of populist and popular ideologies. In representing women, the ethnic minorities and non-Sri Lankans, negative formulae are very much in place. A recurrent phenomenon in a disconcerting number of recent Sinhala plays is the construction of a foreign 'other' in a narrowly nationalistic and xenophobic idiom. This essay will evaluate two popular and acclaimed plays - *Thalamala Pipila* and *Uk Dandu Ginna* (hereafter *Thalamala* and *Uk* respectively) - in relation to the implications of this portrayal, the contradictions it engenders and its ideological affiliations.

Thalamala deals with the conflict between the traditional village life as represented by an old dancer *guru* and the move towards modernization brought into the village by his son. The son and his wife attempt to 'upgrade' the village by first cutting down the tree under which the old man held his dance classes and then by replacing it with a showy building where they begin to train students in Western ballet. Introduced into the ensuing conflict is the grandson of the old man who is closely attached to him. Meanwhile, a foreigner representing entrepreneurship comes to the village and offers to take the little boy to the west to study dance. The foreigner then becomes the force

which not only ruptures the peaceful ethos of the village but also the relationship between the grandfather and grandson.

Uk also presents a conflict between traditional village life and its transformation by agents from outside, with the political implications that the modernization process is endorsed by the State. The villagers are sugar cane farmers under the patronage of the Pelwatte sugar corporation. The cultivators are initially seen as an amicable and content community. Into this schema arrives 'development' in the guise of a multi-national corporation. The multi-national deludes the workers with false promises; but after a while the multi-national company (typically) becomes the malevolent exploiter that one expects them to be. The foreigner here is not the white man, but a Malaysian who represents the newly capitalised states.

The first question addressed by both these plays within the parameters of native/non-native conflict is the notion of identity. The current ethnic tension creates the urgent need to fashion and reinforce group identities because the strife and the political instability it generates consistently threatens the hegemonic unity of the group.² Similarly, the post-1977 open-economic policies have increasingly linked Sri Lanka with the world outside, sometimes with disastrous consequences for the middle class and other under-privileged social groups. The rapid expansion of Western cultural products through television and video is also a recent development that 'threatens' the norms of traditional and indigenous culture.

The consequent rise of nationalist and cultural fundamentalism in the ideological terrain is reflected in cultural practices and art forms. The Sinhala theatre has now become an arena for this ideological debate. In both plays, while the condemnation of the western influences may be over-stressed, there is no escape from the fact that the forces of Westernization have had negative consequences. In *Uk* and *Thalamala* even the indigenous characters influenced by neo-colonialism are corrupt and rapacious. In *Uk*, the local personnel of the multinational corporation are sycophants who enjoy exploiting workers.

The assertion of Sinhala ethnic identity runs parallel to the construction of an 'ethnic Other' with regard to the minorities, particularly the Tamils. Plays like *Thalamala* and *Uthure Rahula Himi* depend heavily on a hegemonic Sinhala-ideological construction of the ethnic other.

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Thalamala constantly invokes Anagarika Dharmapala's name and ideology to bolster its 'message.' In order to establish the authenticity of the Sinhala Nationalist character, the playwrights appear to believe that it has to be posited against another 'Other' too—the foreigner. Roland Barthes provides a useful perspective on this question:

The critical feature in ethnic identity is the characteristic of self-ascription by others. A categorical ascription is an ethnic ascription when it classifies a person in terms of his basic most general identity, presumptively determined by his origin and background.

In practically all the plays where the foreign 'personae' are depicted, a clear distinction is made that he/she is the 'alien' and the interloper. He/she, by mere intervention, ruptures the halcyon nature of the *status quo*. The foreigner is the agent of western capitalism synonymous with cultural 'pollution.' For instance, in *Thalamala*, in addition to contaminating the local culture with alien influences, the foreigner ridicules and dismisses the guru's dance classes and traditional lifestyle as primitive. In order to counteract the foreigner's denigration of native forces, it becomes necessary to lampoon him.

Thus from the moment of entry, the 'intruder's' actions, language, dress and manner are designed to generate hysterics. In *Thalamala* and *Uk*, the audiences were in raucous laughter at the ludicrous clothing of the foreigner: garish trousers and shirt, most often an outsized wig. This hideous sight is completed by near-white make-up (to give the 'foreign' effect) creating a cadaverous appearance. After the initial dose of derision via the external component of clothing and mannerism, the denigration is further bolstered by the character's use of language. Here, the language used is English, often generating further laughter; the linguistic medium thus becomes another technique for insidious vilification of the 'alien.' Thus, the 'otherness' of the Other is reinforced through a linguistic demarcation from the vernacular Sinhala.

The delineation of the character traits is also significant. The foreigner is typically rendered in over-simplistic terms. He/she is the ruthless, mercenary malefactor whose transgressions assume a satanic character. In *Thalamala*, the foreigner's egregious values tarnish the traditional, pristine beauty of the village. The foreigner smokes, drinks and indulges in all the vices that go against Dharmapala's philosophy of total abstinence. In *Uk*, the foreigner, the agent of Westernization, takes on a similar role. He is the oppressor of the workers in the sugarcane factory, a relentless torturer when they demand justice. This is established powerfully, in a scene where the leader of the workers rebels against authority and is imprisoned in a cage-like structure suspended from a rope. The foreign taskmaster enters the cage, whip in hand and flogs the worker. In this technically evocative scene, the ruthless

foreigner is framed against the piercing screams of the 'good' worker.

A significant aspect of this phenomenon is that it is not merely the Western other that is held up as the pernicious force. It appears that even a non-Western representative of 'development', and any character who isn't Sri Lankan, merits such stereotyping. The consequences of this construction is that *anyone* foreign becomes automatically suspect, because he/she represents predatory capitalism.

This near-rabid antipathy towards the foreigner is closely aligned to the *Jathika Chintanaya* ideology. In valorizing an 'authentic' Sri Lankan identity synonymous with Sinhala/Buddhist rural culture, it excludes all other elements that are posited to be not in accordance with the *jathika* ethos. The non-*jathikas* are also blamed for socio-political and economic ills. The non-native is thus made culpable for cultural bastardization, decadence and moral degeneration. This simplistic view is in fact shared by many different ideological strata and transcends the boundaries of class. The Sinhala theatre thus plays a significant role in re-articulating this xenophobic ideology.

Through this schema of things, the subtextual paradoxes and ambivalences inherent in the ethno-nationalist enterprise also comes to the surface. While it is convenient to deposit the misfortunes of our society on this character, the official policy remains one of unqualified enthusiasm for tourism. In addition, while the accent on the use of English is severely ridiculed, there is an almost grudging respect for the power that is associated with the foreign other. In both plays the non-Sri Lankan characters though impugned, wield the power, and the local characters, despite their hostility, acknowledge their superior social status and authority. In *Uk* after a while, the villagers themselves embrace western values by adopting European dress. In *Thalamala* despite the old man's vehement protestations against the child's departure to the west, he ultimately yields to his son's demands, invoking Anagarika Dharmapala's name in a rather strange manner. He says: "Son, the late Anagarika Dharmapala has said that one should obey one's parents, so obey your parents' wishes." Here one is not sure whether he truly believes in this dictum or whether he uses Dharmapala merely as an alibi. Whatever the reason, it is significant that he compromises his stand by allowing his grandson to leave the village.

In another play which attempts to present the plight of the Third World, *Thunveni Lokaya*, which satirizes the World Bank and the IMF, the point is also made that the economic power these groups exercise cannot be either overlooked or disregarded. In *Thalamala*, though Western elements come under assault, ironically the most effective scene is the ballet sequence. This piece of dance visually subverts the overt message that is hammered out. While most sequences of the play appear flawed, under-rehearsed and incoherent, this episode stands apart in its professionalism.



This practice of representing the ethnic 'other' in derogatory idiom has become more common recently. Though it becomes imperative that the other is created, it is also difficult to posit non-Sinhalese Sri Lankans as the 'inimical' Other at this juncture of Sri Lankan politics. This is not to say that Tamils, Muslims and Burghers are no longer subject to this racist treatment (for instance the Tamils are depicted in odiously racist terms in plays like *Uthure Rahula*

Himi while the harlot/'loose women' in popular media remains the Burgher stereotype). However, since Sinhala theatre projects itself as a radical and politically 'correct' instrument that forms the thinking of the people and overtly at least attempts to disseminate liberal views, the ethnic chauvinist portrayal undercuts its agenda. Hence, it is politically 'safe' to blame the non-native, for it appeals to the sentiments of a wider audience.

Letter

TEXT IN/AND VIOLENCE

In the editorial of the May issue of *Pravada*, the absence of a peace content in modern Sinhala Buddhism is lamented, and an analysis of the transformation within Buddhism in the last 150 years is urged as a possible way of understanding this. I also deplore any sanctification of war and feel both anger and pain when I hear religious leaders blessing military action. Whilst not discounting the nineteenth century developments which led to Buddhism becoming "an ethnic identity marker of a exclusivist kind" in Sri Lanka, I would contend, however, that the Buddhist texts themselves can be used to justify violence against a perceived aggressor if isolated passages are taken out of the wider context of Buddhism.

There is no doubt that the general tenor of the Buddhist texts is that responding to violence with *Metta* (loving kindness) and *adosa* (non-hatred or in positive terms the love which is able to forgive) is the best path, both for one's own good and for societal harmony. There is no glorification of the military in the texts. For instance when a professional soldier is reported to have stressed to the Buddha his belief that a warrior killed whilst energetically fighting in battle would be re-born in company of the Devas of Passionate Delight, the Buddha is said to have condemned the idea as perverted, stressing in contrast that it could only lead downward because of the wish to kill inherent in the warrior's mind. On the basis of this, any Buddhist, therefore, who claims those who die fighting for their motherland will attain nibbana does not know his own religion! (*Samyutta Nikaya* Text IV: 308).

However, it is also true that the empiricism of early Buddhism can be twisted to justify violence. When the Buddha speaks about the causes and remedies of violence his approach is dependent on the conditions of the situation concerned. Whilst psychological causes might be stressed when speaking to monks, social and economic causes are emphasized when addressing those with state power. And when speaking to the king of Kosala, Pasanadi, there is a point where he does not condemn violence in defence of the realm.

The advice to Pasenadi is significant here. Pasenadi is in conflict with king Ajatasattu; and both are using force. The latter is presented as the aggressor and is first victorious. Concerning this, the Buddha is reported to have said:

Almsmen, the king of Magadha, Ajatasattu, son of the Accomplished Princess, is a friend to, an intimate of, mixed up with whatever is evil. The king, Kosala Pasenadi, is friend to, an intimate of, mixed up with, whatever is good (*Samyutta Nikaya* Text I: 82).

Pasenadi's role as defender of the nation against aggression is therefore accepted as necessary and praiseworthy. When Ajatasattu is eventually defeated, Pasenadi's role is presented as being the instrument of karmic justice (SN Text I: 83).

The tenor of the Pasenadi incident is that forces of the state to protect the people against what is seen as evil, is justified by religion. Within the core texts of Buddhism, therefore, there is a paradigm with potentially devastating implications if drawn on without the qualities described in Buddhism as *kalannuta* (discrimination of proper occasions or discernment) and *viraga* (detachment or without the craving which blurs objective analysis). It means that the use of violence against any group can be justified if that group - nation, race, caste - is seen as the primary aggressor or wrongdoer. I fear it is this form of justification which is being used by some leaders in Sri Lanka at the moment, without realising that the complexity of the present situation forestalls any simplistic judgement about who the true aggressor is but rather demands objective historical analysis and the willingness to see that even victory would be hollow and non-definitive:

Victory breeds hatred
The defeated live in pain
Happily the peaceful live
Giving up victory and defeat
(*Dhammapada*, Verse 201)

Elizabeth Harris
Kelaniya

WALCOTT'S WORLD

Derek Walcott, who was awarded the Nobel prize for literature this year, was born in 1930, in St. Lucia, a Caribbean island that passed from British to French hands no less than 13 times. The island's rich heritage encompassing Carib, African, French and British traditions, its schizophrenia as a British colony which was mainly Catholic, its history of slavery and colonialism, find expression in Walcott's poetry, as he explores his identity as a 'divided child', an exile, a mulatto of style. The figure of Crusoe, who was castaway on a Caribbean island figures prominently in Walcott's work, as he identifies with Crusoe the castaway, survivor, artist and coloniser, while also acknowledging Friday, the colonised ancestor.

CRUSOE'S JOURNAL

I looked now upon the world as a thing remote, which I had nothing to do with, no expectation from, and, indeed, no desire about. In a word, I had nothing to do with it, nor was ever like to have; so I thought it looked as we may perhaps look upon it hereafter, viz., as a place I had lived in but was come out of it; and well might I say, as Father Abraham to Dives, 'Between me and thee is a great gulf fixed'.

-ROBINSON CRUSOE

Once we have driven past Mundo Nuevo trace
safely to this beach house
perched between ocean and green, churning forest
the intellect appraises
objects surely, even the bare necessities
of style are turned to use,
like those plain iron tools he salvages
from shipwreck, hewing a prose
as odorous as raw wood to the adze;
out of such timbers
came our first book, our profane Genesis
whose Adam speaks that prose
which, blessing some sea-rock, startles itself
with poetry's surprise,
in a green world, one without metaphors;
like Christofer he bears
in speech mnemonic as a missionary's
the Word to savages,
it's shape an earthen, water-bearing vessel's
whose sprinkling alters us
into good Fridays who recite His praise
parroting our master's

style and voice, we make his language ours,
converted cannibals
we learn with him to eat the flesh of Christ.

All shapes, all objects multiplied from his,
our ocean's Proteus;
in childhood, his derelict's old age
was like a god's. (Now pass
in memory, in serene parenthesis,
the cliff-deep leeward coast
of my own island filing past the noise
of stuttering canvas,
some noon-struck village, Choiseul, Canaries,
crouched crocodile canoes,
a savage settlement from Henty's novels,
Marryat or R.L.S.,
with one boy signalling at the sea's edge,
though what he cried is lost.)
So time, that makes us objects, multiplies
our natural loneliness.

CRUSOE'S JOURNAL...

For the hermetic skill, that from earth's clays
 shapes something without use,
and, separate from itself, lives somewhere else,
 sharing with every beach
a longing for those gulls that cloud the cays
 with raw, mimetic cries,
never surrenders wholly, for it knows
 it needs another's praise
like hoar, half-cracked Ben Gunn, until it cries
 at last, "O happy desert!"
and learns again the self-creating peace
 of islands. So from this house
that faces nothing but the sea, his journals
 assume a household use;
we learn to shape from them, where nothing was
 the language of a race
and since the intellect demands its mask
 that sun-cracked, bearded face
provides us with the wish to dramatize
 ourselves at nature's cost,
to attempt a beard, to squint through the sea-haze,
 posing as naturalists,
drunks, castaways, beachcombers, all of us
 yearn for those fantasies
of innocence, for our faith's arrested phase
 when the clear voice
startled itself saying "water, heaven, Christ,"
 hoarding such heresies as
God's loneliness moves in His smallest creatures.

DEREK WALCOTT

Pravada thanks Vivimarie Van Der Poorten and Lakmali Gunawardena
for their help in bringing out this issue.