

# Pravāda

Vol. 1 No. 11

November 1992

SL Rupees Ten

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

## CONSENSUS STILL ELUSIVE

The debate on devolution, was still-born several decades ago as indicated in a speech of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike published elsewhere in this issue. Resurrected as a solution to the ethnic conflict in the eighties, it has now gained new relevance. Federalism, or its content, has now emerged to constitute the general framework of an alternative political structure for Sri Lanka.

The Parliamentary select committee, headed by Mangala Moonesinghe of the SLFP, began its arduous task of bringing about a consensus among political parties, amidst some optimism as well as skepticism. Few new ideas came up on how to tackle this most intractable of Sri Lanka's problems. After nearly a year of seemingly fruitless deliberations, the Select Committee appeared to have arrived at a deadlock. Then in October came Moonesinghe's initiative - he submitted to the Committee a 'concept paper', followed by an 'option paper', both suggesting a compromise on the thorniest issue of the North-South debate - the merger/non-merger of the Northern and Eastern provinces. The Moonesinghe compromise formula suggested two separate councils for the two provinces, and an apex Regional Council for the entire North East with substantial powers devolved to the regional body, giving it control over the powers that are now in the concurrent list of the 13th amendment. The Option Paper even suggested a series of reforms at the centre; these included a devolution commission and a second chamber; these reforms are significant in that they cover an area which has so far not received much attention from the Tamil parties.

Although publicly rejected by the Tamil political parties, the 'option paper' revived the discussion on a compromise formula, and an intense debate took place, with the Tamil parties consistently insisting on merger. Into this discussion then dropped in K. Sirinivasan, an ENDP MP from the Jaffna district long resident in London, with a one-and-half page document, proposing federalism and de-merger. The notion of a federalist polity gained further legitimacy when the Communist Party and the Lanka Sama Samaja Party supported the idea in their responses to the Select Committee.

Meanwhile, the enormity of the difficulties besetting a search for peace in Sri Lanka was once again demonstrated by the variety and confusion of the contending responses of Sinhala and Tamil political parties to Sirinivasan's proposals for de-merger and federalism. The initial responses of both the UNP and the SLFP were non-rejectionist, even cautiously supportive, even though both were anxious in their reluctance to openly commit themselves to a federalist solution. Then came the dropping of a dual bomb-shell by Mrs. Bandaranaike of the SLFP, accepting and rejecting federalism, both within a relatively short temporal span of 24 hours!

The Tamil parties too found Sirinivasan's proposal publicly unacceptable. While the ENDF, of which Sirinivasan is a member, dissociated itself from the proposal, the TULF, EPRLF, Tamil Congress and the CWC strongly opposed it. Besides personal differences with Sirinivasan, some Tamil parties thought that Sirinivasan's idea of making the Northern and Eastern provinces two distinct entities was an





# Pravāda

Vol 1 No 11  
November 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

unpardonable betrayal of Tamil demand for a merged and larger unit of devolution. In private conversations as well as in public statements, they expressed bitterness and anger about the fact that even the federalist proposal had not been unequivocally supported by the UNP and the SLFP leaderships. Hence their accusation that Sirinivasan's proposal was a ploy, secretly initiated by the UNP, to weaken the negotiating position of Tamil parties.

In an overall assessment of the present stage of the political debate on the ethnic question, one may thus observe distinctly positive as well as disheartening tendencies. What is remarkably positive is the acceptance by almost all that the framework of a political solution must now be extended beyond the parameters of the 13th Amendment which created the Provincial Councils. A consensus was clearly emerging within the Parliamentary Select Committee about federalism as the **conceptual** basis of a solution, and both the UNP and the SLFP had made public, though discreet, commitments to accept and honour such a consensus. The guarded and cautious response to federalism by the UNP and the SLFP

indicated the sheer strength of the unitarist argument which the Sinhalese political discourse had constantly privileged. While the Tamil parties saw the discreetness of the two main Sinhalese parties as reflecting their politics of deceit as well as lack of seriousness, the notion of federalism, at last, found some respectable place in the political discourse of Sinhalese political parties.

The federalistic optimism, however, could not last long. The endless bickering resorted to by spokespersons representing either side of the ethnic divide, coupled with a total absence of political communication and mutual confidence, led to a situation of near collapse of negotiations. This was particularly evident in the debate concerning the issue of merger. For eminently understandable reasons, Tamil parties had taken up the position that the merger was non-negotiable. Yet, the problem is that Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim political leaders have not yet faced each other directly at a negotiation table, even on an informal basis, to find out for themselves the actual crux of the merger issue. In the absence of such direct communication and dialogue, press statements issued by Tamil political leaders have tended to be exceedingly rhetorical, bordering on highly emotionalized sloganeering, sometimes intended to serve the goal of one-upmanship.

It would be tragic and unfortunate if the current consensus efforts are squashed by a lack of confidence and trust among political groups, preventing an agreement on the unit of devolution. Perhaps, such an unwelcome end to the peace initiative may not be totally ruled out, given the absence of well-thought out confidence building measures in the on going conflict-resolution process. An elementary principle in any conflict-resolution initiative is that there should be measures aimed at creating mutual trust among contending yet negotiating parties. Even at this late stage of Select Committee deliberations, re-building of confidence among Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim political leaders as well as among communities are of paramount importance.

In the meantime, Sinhalese hegemonic hysteria is being whipped up by the *Bhumiputra* elements who have secured

privileged access to the Sinhalese and English press. Old arguments against federalism are being revived, calling for opposition to the impending division of the 'Sinhalese land.' Incidentally they have a new argument; 'it is federalism that led Yugoslavia to its disintegration,' proclaim these *bhumiputra* unitarists.

The case of Yugoslavia is indeed an argument for greater federalism. Although its old form of federalism held the country together for nearly fifty years, Yugoslavia began to disintegrate because its political structures were not reformed to grant further autonomy to federal units. The experience in the Soviet Union too has been similar; while the Union was organized on the federal principle, that federalism was thoroughly undermined and negated by the deadly combination of the old model of central planning and the ultimate instrument of the Soviet centralized authority, the party. In both instances, an outdated federalism which had served its historical purpose had collapsed, precisely because of the intransigent reluctance of the state to update its federalist structures.

Detractors notwithstanding, what this denotes is that the sought-for end of a consensual settlement is yet to be reached. Even though the conceptual framework may be agreed upon, the concrete details of a reform package have to be evolved, taking into account the extremely delicate nature of the movement towards a final settlement. Optimistically assuming that everything goes well, there will still remain two crucial problems. Firstly, the question of the LTTE will continue to pose difficulties, and dealing with that needs domestic as well as international support. Secondly, the question of popular support and legitimacy for the new reform package cannot be disregarded. Indeed, a concrete federalist alternative for Sri Lanka will mean a re-writing of the terms of its social contract as well as a radical re-structuring of ethnic relations in Sri Lanka. That is precisely why an all party consensus on a political solution has to be carefully worked out so that this historical chance for peace should not fall victim to partisan electoral compulsions that are likely to emerge in 1993. **P**

# NOTES AND COMMENTS

## Kobbekaduwa: Man and Myth

The sudden death of Major General Denzil Kobbekaduwa, Northern Commander of the Sri Lankan army, in an explosion at the battlefield has led to a major political controversy. The Opposition and the tabloid press have been raising many questions about the circumstances under which the explosion occurred, suggesting what may be termed a conspiracy behind the incident.

In times of utter political confusion and a genuine credibility crisis faced by the government, official versions of events are seldom accepted; they are often treated by people with scorn and disdain. The enormity of the credibility gap is exemplified by the general reluctance to even accept LTTE claims that it was responsible for the explosion. Ever since General Kobbekaduwa and eight of his colleagues lost their lives, the Premadasa administration has thus been engaged in a massive damage-control operation.

While the controversy is fueled by claims and counter-claims about the explosion—a landmine buried by the LTTE or an explosive device attached to the vehicle—it has also laid bare some interesting dimensions of Sinhalese society's search for a national hero. Paradoxically, the ethnic war took almost ten years and thousands of military deaths before it produced a folk hero in the popular imagination.

It is quite revealing that the Sinhala language does not have an accepted or standard word for the concept of 'martyr.' Not even the JVP, thousands of whose members sacrificed their lives for a 'noble cause,' could invent a word to express the idea of martyrdom. *Mavu bima venuwen divi pidu viruwa*—'the hero who sacrificed his life for the Motherland'—was the expression popularized by the JVP rebels. To refer to Kobbekaduwa and the others who died in similar circumstances, the Sinhalese nationalist press invented a new expression, *rana viruwan*, meaning 'the war heroes.' The Tamil political vocabulary, in contrast, has a single-word expression for martyr, *tyaki*. So does Bengali; *Sahid* which is derived from Urdu.

To come back to the theme of hero myth, General Kobbekaduwa's martyrdom was imagined by the populace under a specific set of political circumstances. The non-acceptance of the official version of his death and the tendency to link it to a political conspiracy originating in the South, gave a particular political coloring to the General's new life after death. Rumors abound connect-

ing his name to a political career he was supposed to have considered. Some rumors even went to the extent of inventing in him a would-have-been Presidential candidate. It may very well be the case that Kobbekaduwa did not have any plans to enter politics; yet, the Sinhalese nationalist imagination certainly had ample space for a political leader, with unimpeachable military credentials.

The establishment of the social credentials of the 'national hero' was perhaps considered important by the Sinhalese nationalist press. *Divayina*, accordingly, carried a series of articles on General Kobbekaduwa, emphasizing primarily his and his wife's *Govigama* aristocratic pedigree. A newspaper under the ideological influence of Sinhalese Bhumiputras perhaps thought it necessary to tell its readers that their hero was not just a social climber who had come from nowhere, but an authentic 'son of the soil' with a correct and impeccable caste genealogy. To put in context this new nationalist emphasis on caste, family and birth-status, one should recall the social snobbery constantly demonstrated by critics of the Premadasa administration.

## LSSP and CP—Merger or non-Merger?

To merge or not to merge, is a theme being debated among the leaders of the oldest Left parties in Sri Lanka, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CPSL). Latest reports indicate that different approaches to the question of future political relations with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) are delaying their union.

Even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the two Left parties were talking about the unification of Left parties. LSSP's claim to be Trotskyite and the CP's pro-Moscow heritage are now things of the past, particularly in view of the events in the Soviet Union. However, the obstacle to unification is apparently political; the LSSP takes up the position that while the Left may enter into joint opposition alliances with the SLFP against the UNP, the 'common enemy,' there should not be future coalition governments. The CPSL, in contrast, appears to favor the old strategy of forming governments in collaboration with the SLFP.

Both the LSSP and CPSL are no longer the mass working class parties that they were until a couple of decades ago. The rapid decline of the Left occurred in the early and mid seventies when they were coalition partners in an



SLFP-led United Front government. Having lost their youth constituency to the JVP, and the working class membership to the SLFP and the UNP, these once militant Left parties had to contend with an ever-eroding trade union base and occasional representation in Parliament. An attempt to form a United Socialist Alliance, along with a few other Left formations, was made in 1987-88 with a considerable degree of popular support and expectations; but the JVP's assassination of Vijaya Kumaranatunga of the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party (SLMP), who had already emerged as the charismatic leader of the incipient Alliance, weakened the whole project. With the subsequent fragmentation of the SLMP, one faction supporting Mr. Premadasa's UNP and the other returning to where it originally came from—the SLFP—the socialist alliance was reduced to a mere party name registered with the Commissioner of Elections.

Even assuming that LSSP-CPSL unification does take place, it is highly unlikely that it would generate much public enthusiasm leading to a re-generation of Sri Lanka's Left. The Left has already damaged itself by being in a state of fragmentation for too long.

The Left does not seem capable of generating new ideas either, enabling it to re-gain the intellectual leadership which it earlier enjoyed in Sri Lanka's politics. Its lack of intellectual energy and interventionist capacity are mostly visible in the inability to articulate concrete reform projects concerning the ethnic question, democratic reforms and economic development. Tragically, Left political imagination too remains far behind the new imperatives of a socialist agenda today. And indeed, the need for a re-generated Left is acutely felt at a time when the demand for socialist ideas is steadily expanding among the youth, the young intelligentsia and the new layers of the working class. For a new socialist agenda,

there certainly exist the infra-structures of a powerful Left-socialist political culture, built by the traditional Left.

### Select Committee: a Footnote

As we go to press, we learn with dismay that the Parliamentary Select Committee has failed to arrive at a consensus. It has voted in favor of a political framework similar to that which exists in India. The Tamil parties have opposed it. So, for all practical purposes, consensus building between Sinhala and Tamil political forces has failed to produce anything substantial or lasting.

During the past year, Sinhalese politicians were heard proclaiming that the Select Committee was the last chance for peace in Sri Lanka. Tamil and Muslim parties who took part in the Select Committee process were also seen as firmly committed to the working out of a political solution. Yet, on the way to a final agreement, differences surfaced and resolution faltered.

The focal point of disagreement among Sinhala and Tamil parties concerned the question of merger. The position of Tamil parties that no solution that did not include the North-East merger was unacceptable was constantly resisted by others. And indeed, there was still some room for a compromise, perhaps synthesizing the federalist proposal with the framework of the previous option paper. No such final compromise attempt seems to have been made. And what we have now is a rather vague undertaking by Sinhalese parties to emulate the Indian system and angry denunciations of the entire Select Committee effort by Tamil parties. **P**

## Prophecy Forgotten

The Minorities looked with mistrust at one another. It was wrong to think that the differences were not fundamental. A hundred years ago, there were no such differences. They did not appear because the Englishman sat on the heads of the Tamils, the low-country Sinhalese and the Kandyan Sinhalese. The moment they began to speak of taking the government into their hands, then the differences that were lying dormant smoldered forth.

If they consider past history, they would see that these communities, the Tamils, the low country Sinhalese and the Kandyan Sinhalese have lived for over 1,000 years and have not shown any tendency to merge. They preserved their customs, their language and their religion. He would be a very rash man who would pin his faith on the gradual disappearance of these differences.

In a Federal Government each Federal unit had complete powers over themselves. Yet they united and had one or two assemblies to discuss matters affecting the whole country. That was the form of government in the U. S. A. All self-governing Dominions like Canada, Australia, and South Africa had the same system. Switzerland afforded a better example for Ceylon. It was a small country, but three races lived there, the French, the Germans and the Italians. Yet, Switzerland was a country where the Federal form of Government was very successful.

In Ceylon, each province should have complete autonomy. There should be one or two assemblies to deal with Special revenues of the Island. A thousand and one objections could be raised against this system, but when objections were dissipated, some form of Federal Government would be the only solution.

S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike on Federalism, reported in the *Ceylon Morning Leader*, July 17, 1926.

# SRI LANKA'S ETHNIC WAR: THE MUSLIM DIMENSION

Ameer Ali

**T**he massacre of nearly 160 innocent Muslim men, women and children in the Polonnaruwa District of Sri Lanka during the early hours of 15 October 1992, is the latest in a series of dastardly and horrific acts perpetrated by the warring factions in the island. Whether the latest butchery was masterminded by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as popularly attributed by the government and the public of Sri Lanka, but denied, though unconvincingly, by the LTTE high Command or by the Sri Lankan Army itself as counteraccused by the LTTE, the fact of the matter is that the Muslim community has now been compelled to devise its own means of self protection against any future aggression. The demand by certain Muslim groups for the creation of a Muslim unit within the Sri Lankan armed forces, and the cry for arms and ammunition by the Muslim youth, to confront the aggressors, are becoming increasingly louder and if the present circumstances remain static, it will make their demand even more irresistible to satisfy. It is easy for any group to take up arms, but difficult to put them down. Violence has its own momentum of growth, as history has demonstrated time and time again.

The current ethnic war in Sri Lanka and the issues involved in it have been discussed and decided in the past simply as a bipartite conflict between the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils. Although the origins of this conflict may validate such a stance, the nature of the civil war today and the extent of its escalation which has clearly spread beyond the Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic boundary and into the Muslim communal arena, has made the confrontation at least tripartite and the issues more complex. It is unfortunate that the Muslim dimension of this conflict has not received sufficient attention in the international media. Having been, until recently, a community of innocent bystanders who invariably got caught in the Sinhalese-Tamil crossfire, the Muslims, particularly those living in the northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka, are now forcibly dragged into the strife and are compelled to take a decisive stand and bear the consequences of their choice. Though not directly comparable to either the Bosnian or the Palestinian agony, the tragedy of the Sri Lankan Muslims is worsening day by day and may soon deteriorate to reach a parallel phenomenon.

The Muslims of Sri Lanka, known as the Moors since the days of Portuguese colonization in the 16th century, form

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nearly seven percent of the island's population and count over a million in number. Although they are an ubiquitous community, more than one-third of them live in the Tamil region and of this, an overwhelming majority is concentrated in the Eastern Province. Their presence is now viewed by the Tamil fighters as a hurdle to the Tamil cause of an independent Eelam but welcomed by the government as a blessing to its anti-Eelam propaganda and military manoeuvres.

Until the middle of the latter half of the eighties, the Tamil leadership, including the Tamil Tigers, accommodated Muslims into its ethnic group, under a broadly defined category of Tamil speaking people. In fact, the Tigers went a step further and called the Muslims Islamic Tamils, thereby emphasizing that the Muslims of Sri Lanka are ethnically of Tamil origins. The fact that a vast majority of the Muslims spoke Tamil as their mother-tongue and that a great proportion of them have historical patrilineal connections with Tamil Nadu, made it imperative for the Tamil leaders not to leave out the Muslims from the former's struggle for Tamil rights. The Federal Party in the fifties and sixties fielded Muslim candidates in all the parliamentary elections and even the militant Tamil groups in the eighties recruited Muslim youths to their armed brigades and promoted the dedicated amongst them to higher ranks.

The bulk of the Muslims however could not and did not place absolute trust on the Tamil leadership. Those who contested and won elections under the Federal Party ticket later crossed over to other national parties and a number of Muslim youth who were recruited by the Tamil militants, later deserted their leaders and severed their connections with the Tamil cause altogether.

This popular mistrust of the Muslims dates back to the early days of the present century. For instance, in the 1915 racial riots, when the Muslims were attacked and killed by the Sinhalese rabble, and when Muslim shops were looted and their property destroyed by Sinhalese thugs, the Tamil leader then, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan not only pulled his community to the side of the Sinhalese but even led a delegation to the British monarch on behalf of the Sinhalese and appeared in the court of law to plead against the Muslims. In the forties when the struggle for Pakistan was injecting communal bitterness in India, it had its parallel repercussions in the Tamil-Muslim relations in Sri Lanka too. And in the fifties at a time when the Tamils were dominating the country's senior administrative positions, the Muslims were systematically discriminated against in public



examinations and government appointments. Such episodes and other such, made the Muslims skeptical of the Tamil leaders and encouraged them to ally with the Sinhalese at moments of crisis .

There were other factors too which favored this alliance. The island-wide distribution of Muslim demography, the parliamentary system of government of the Westminster model- until its abolition in the late seventies - and the racial politics of the country provided the Muslim leaders with a golden opportunity to play politics with the so-called national parties and arrest thereby the socio-economic and cultural degradation of the Muslims. Using the religious banner of Islam as the rallying point, these leaders, who traditionally hailed from the affluent families of Colombo and its surroundings, became the unchallenged spokesmen of Muslim interests.

At times of momentous decisions in the national legislature, such as when, the Ceylon Citizenship Bill, which disenfranchised hundreds of thousands of Tamil plantation workers in the island; the Sinhala Only Act, which deprived the Tamil language of equal status in the country; and the University Entrance Examination Standardization Scheme, which removed the competitive edge hitherto enjoyed by the Tamil Colleges in the North; were introduced, the Muslim leaders rendered their total support to the governments of the time. In return for this support, the governments of the day bestowed upon the Muslim community certain favours and privileges which, in the eyes of the Tamil politicians, were deliberate attempts by the state to oppress the Tamil community. The Muslim leaders on the other hand claimed that these gains were their community's legitimate share of the nation's developmental benefits. " Divided they/we (the Sinhalese and Tamils) swim, and united they/we sink" was the theme of one of the Muslim leaders in the country in the sixties.

Every thing looked rosy to the Muslims until the end of the seventies after which two changes shattered the political calculations of the community. One was the system of proportional representation introduced by the Jayawardena constitution and, the other was the cry for an independent Tamil Eelam backed by the armed struggle of the Tamil youth.

The all-powerful Presidential system introduced by the former President J.R.Jayewardene and his proportional representation scheme, put an end to the past Muslim strategy of "divide and swim" and instead compelled their leaders to become the virtual slaves of a political party if they were to be counted as deserving nominees to the national legislature. The armed struggle of the Tamils on the other hand forced the Muslims of the North and East to look for a new stratagem to protect their interests but without isolating themselves from their counterparts in other provinces. The decision to establish Muslim political party, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress

(S.L.M.C), and the recruitment of Muslims to the National Home Guards, a paramilitary force equipped with light weaponry supplied by the government, were two devices born to meet the changed circumstances of the community. In retrospect however, these moves appear shortsighted and blameworthy for much of the present tragedy.

The philosophy behind the formation of the S.L.M.C. was to rally the Muslim voters under its umbrella, enter the legislature as the sole representative of the Muslim community and then to bargain with the rival Sinhalese parties for more favours and privileges. Just like Mr.Thondaman, the leader of the Ceylon Workers Congress, who speaks for the Indian Tamils because of the majority support he commands amongst them, the leader of the S.L.M.C. Mr.Ashraff assumed that he and his party would also emerge as the sole voice of the Muslim community. On the contrary, the appearance of the S.L.M.C. in the political horizon, exposed for the first time that the so called unity of the Muslims under the religious banner is only a superficial image and beneath that banner there are real issues which encourage centrifugalism. For one thing, the traditional Muslim leadership from Colombo was not prepared to surrender its hegemony to Mr.Ashraff, a political upstart from the Eastern Province. And in addition, the interests of the Muslims who are living in the Sinhalese areas are fundamentally different from those of the Northern and Eastern province Muslims. While the vast majority of the Tamil district Muslims are farmers and landless peasants, those living in the Sinhalese areas are mostly petty businessmen, artisans and urban workers. Linguistically too the cleavage between the two groups is widening. In the past, all or a vast majority of the Muslims spoke Tamil as their mother tongue. Now, after the government's language policy came into operation, the younger generation of Muslims in the Sinhalese districts has lost its roots in the Tamil language and adopted Sinhalese as their main tongue. At the same time the Muslims of the North and East hardly have any fluency in Sinhala and consequently the Muslims have become a divided community linguistically. This sad trend is certain to increase in the future.

Although the S.L.M.C. registered a substantial number of Muslim votes in the General Elections of 1989 it won only four seats and entered parliament with a strength far below its expectations. Given the economic and linguistic divisions within the Muslims [the S.L.M.C.], it will be far-fetched for the S.L.M.C. to become the spokesman for the entire community. Even as a regionally based, ethnic party, some of its policies have deepened the discord between the Tamils and Muslims and have contributed significantly to the present cycle of violence between the two communities in the North and East.

The S.L.M.C's political platform in the Tamil areas, was originally structured on the demand for a separate



Regional Council for the Muslims in the East. While the Tamil Eelamists were demanding a permanent merger of the North and East the S.L.M.C. demanded the status quo to remain permanently. Without studying the operational logistics of a separate Muslim Regional Council and (without) understanding the demographic difficulties which such a council administration would encounter, the S.L.M.C. demand became an additional propaganda weapon to the government's anti-Eelam policy. Through systematic manipulation of the Muslim position, the government had determined to drive the Muslims on a collision course with the Tamils. On the spot reports by independent observers confirm that the government had a hand in the Tamil-Muslim riots which broke out in the late eighties in the Eastern Province. The outcome of all this is that the Muslims, from being a community of innocent bystanders in the historical Sinhala-Tamil rivalry, have now become on the one hand, an obstacle to the Tamil cause - which the Tamil militants are determined to remove at any cost - and on the other, a convenient pawn in the hands of the government which is prepared to sacrifice them to achieve a final victory. Under the guise of Home Guards, Muslim youths have been recruited and armed by the government and (have been) allowed to confront the Tamil army whenever the latter enter Muslim villages.

The consequences of these politically shortsighted measures are too painful to recount. A whole community of innocent Muslims from Jaffna and Mannar in the North have been driven out by the Tamil army - as the Palestinians were by the Israeli's- and are now living as refugees in Colombo and other adjacent towns. Their houses and property have been looted and ransacked and their mosques desecrated. In the East surprise attacks on the Muslims are a common occurrence. Tens and hundreds are massacred at a time. Muslims are being killed in trains and buses, in mosques and schools and in markets and fields. Against an organized highly trained and well-equipped Tamil army, unorganized, hurriedly trained and ill-equipped Home Guards are not an even match. The Home Guards have also retaliated now and then with equal ferocity and venom. Yet the losses are

heavier on the Muslim side. Ironically, the regular armed forces of the government have now become bystanders, only ready to clear up the mess once the massacre has taken place.

The Tamil army's attempt to physically wipe out or drive away the Muslims from the Tamil districts is a senseless move and equally insane is the Muslim decision to confront the Tamils militarily. Some have described the massacre October 15 as a measure of ethnic cleansing by the LTTE. If that is so, it makes nonsense of its original claim that the Muslims are 'Islamic Tamils'. Factual convictions should not be sacrificed for political expediency. Have the Tamil fighters become a bunch of desperados? The Muslims (at the same time) must realize that to arm themselves to fight the Tamils will only worsen and not better matters. A farsighted leadership is the immediate need amongst the Muslims. The Tamil Muslims who are now squatting in other areas as refugees are misfits in the new environment and along with the declining economy of the country may become the unwanted guests in those localities. Furthermore the Muslims of the East cannot be driven out from their traditional homeland; [the sheer magnitude of their number is a deterrent]. The Muslims of the North and East have to live with the Tamils and the future of the two communities is irretrievably inter-linked.

The current trend of intercommunal vendetta between the two must be stopped. The Muslims should negotiate not with the government in Colombo which is not seriously interested in solving the ethnic issue but with the Tamil command which seems to be calling all the shots now. The Tamil command on the other hand must provide clear assurance to the Muslims that the latter's economic and cultural interests will be protected and the community will be guaranteed of its legitimate share in the regional administration, whatever the form the eventual solution would be to the country's ethnic problem. To enable this peace effort to materialise the Muslim leaders in Colombo should refrain from their traditional pastime of making statements on behalf of the Tamil Muslims.

Training people to sacrifice themselves results not in altruism but in a kind of fascination that makes them jump off a cliff, not to help but merely to follow those who have already leapt to their deaths. Especially when they foresee, not through thought but through fear, the annihilation to come.

Jean Genet



# CIVIL WAR AND WOMEN OF JAFFNA

## Tales of Many Widows

Stanley J. Tambiah

The source for this article on the widows of Jaffna is a study done by a non-government organization called the Tamil Refugee Relief Organization (TRRO).<sup>1</sup> This organization, one of many NGOs in the North, had its birth in 1977 in Colombo after the 1977 riots in that city. The founders were some concerned Tamils. Then the organization moved to Vavuniya, where it also tried to aid Indian Tamils from the tea estates who fled there as refugees. In 1983 it was reactivated, and established its office in Jaffna.

One of its activities was giving immediate assistance to the families of those killed or injured, and further assistance to widows and destitute mothers. It had other projects concerning health and medical care, housing, and community upliftment.

The actual scale of killing in Jaffna dramatically increased from 1983 onwards with escalating confrontation between the Tamil militants and the security forces of the Sri Lankan government. The TRRO report on widows only deals with a fraction of the total number of widows who sought aid from the TRRO. Since the most likely victims were males, usually young adults, who were also the main breadwinners of their families, their deaths resulted in a number of widows now burdened not only with the care of their children, but also with the task of finding gainful employment. Since many of these widows were poor, the TRRO tried to meet their needs on an individual basis, first by giving guidance and assistance to initiate some income generating activity such as keeping milch cows, or working on home crafts or engaging in small scale shopkeeping, and so on.

During the later stages of the occupation of Jaffna by the Sri Lankan army, the soldiers were mostly confined to their camps, and civilian deaths occurred mostly through indiscriminate shelling. There was occasional strafing of houses and vehicles by helicopters. But the Sri Lanka Navy in following its so-called surveillance of the northern coastline had frequently shot fishermen in boats.

The TRRO report was based on information collected with regard to 477 widows in the Jaffna District who during the period 1983-86 reported their circumstances to the organization. About 70% or more of the civil war widows in the sample were in the age range 18-40 years. About 27% were between 41-60. "Altogether 70% of the widows did not have any income at all, as most of their husbands were engaged in occupations like fishing, farming, toddy tapping, wage labour, and small scale

business." At the time the report was composed, most of these widows were being temporarily maintained by their close kinsmen—parents, siblings, and others. Only 17% had some kind of stable income through pensions (mostly elderly widows) or through their own employment, and another 13 had unstable incomes through self-employment as street vendors, fish sellers, or cultivators.

The Jaffna District had the reputation in the past as having a higher ownership of houses (over half of them stone built) than the national average. A certain number of these houses was damaged or destroyed by army operations and had to be vacated. With regard to housing once again it is the young widows, who ended up the most deprived. About 40% of the young widows, the largest category in the sample, had no shelter of their own. In the entire sample, 38% of the war widows did not possess any shelter and 82% were found to be living with relatives. The placing of older widows was less problematic because they were taken as dependents by their children. Again, among 37% of the widows who had no land of their own on which houses could be built, more than three fourths were young widows. (There is no information on the ownership of arable land.)

The number and ages of the dependents of the civil war widows, mainly of course in the form of children, once again places the burden on the young widows. The 477 widows had a total of 1349 dependents to support. Only 10% of the widows, mostly the elderly, had no dependents to support. About 25% of the widows had children ranging from four to six in number, and 57% had three children or less.

About 36% of the dependents were infants below 6 years of age, and 40% were school-going children ranging in age from 7-14. Adolescents and young adults (14-18 years) constituted 9% of the total number of dependents. Dependents above 18 years composed 14% of the total (and 27% of this number were still students, the majority enrolled in the university). Those not in school were reported as unemployed.

It is noteworthy that 35% of the widows preferred financial aid in the form of a fixed bank deposit, that would give them a monthly interest, to any other alternative use of money, such as investing in an income generating enterprise. However, 49% of the widows preferred to have the money put into enterprises such as animal husbandry, vending and shopkeeping, home craft, and fishing.





## Re-Marriage of Widows

To be a widow, specially a young one, is to be in an inauspicious condition. Even in normal times in Jaffna, the remarriage of widows is difficult to accomplish, even if there are no taboos against it. But given the conditions of civil war, when young adults are the prime victims, the chances for remarriage of young widows are much less.

Here is an example of a tangled situation: The marriage had been an inter-caste union, between a man from Udupitti of goldsmith caste and a woman of *karaiya* (fisherman) caste from Point Pedro. The respective parents had accepted the marriage and the couple lived virilocally (with the husband's parents). The young husband was killed, leaving his wife and a young son. A non governmental organisation gave her some 3 or 4 thousand rupees in aid. But her husband's parents appropriated the money, leaving her in the lurch.

The local community then suggested that the widow be given in marriage to the unmarried older brother of the deceased man, but the parents refused. So the girl was forced to return to her own family together with the child. The widow knew how to type and was requesting the aid organisations for a job rather than monetary assistance.

Among the more affluent upper ranges of Tamil society, widows whose husbands had been killed are sought to be sent abroad, say to Canada and Australia, to join relatives there. Their immediate crisis is to some degree mitigated in this way; it is worth inquiring into their subsequent fate.

## Predicament of Young Wives and Widows

There are cases of young men married to young girls who because of fear of being apprehended (every young man is from the other side's point of view a Tiger, a sympathizer, or a potential sympathizer) have left the country to seek asylum abroad. They have not been able to take their wives with them. (It is a costly, uncertain and perilous venture to enter and live in another country illegally).

Some of these young wives, married a year or two, have formed liaisons, and have asked for contraceptive devices (including injections). But given the strict norms and closely supervised family life, these liaisons must remain few, hidden and secret for fear of public opinion and sanctions.

Married women with young children, with husbands who have been killed, bear the double burden of seeking a job, engaging in new transactions such as dealing with banks and aid agencies, and also of attending to domestic tasks, even if they are fortunate to live with relatives.

But such increased entry into the public realm necessarily also affects such a woman's role and activities in it, and also allows her to acquire new technical, commercial, even professional skills, and thus in an unexpected way the civil war and the deaths of men may actually help to "emancipate" women and empower them while at the same time increasing their burdens.

Women nowadays have to deal with the authorities ranging from the Assistant Government Agent to lesser officers of the local *grama sevaka*: they must file documents, plead their cases, and implement decisions. When relief agencies invite requests it is more frequently women than men (even in the case of husbands locally present) who turn up to negotiate.

When a woman's husband has been killed during military action (which is usually explained as necessitated by the actions of terrorists), she has to file an affidavit and a report with the Police, the *vidan* (headman) and with the *grama sevaka*, and they have to be ratified by the Assistant Government Agent before she can have an official death certificate and thereafter can claim a compensation of 25000 rupees from the Ministry of Rehabilitation.

These negotiations place her in a vulnerable exploitable position. Ordinarily she will need to be accompanied by a senior male when she moves around from office to office. And since the Ministry of Rehabilitation is located in Colombo, negotiations for claiming the compensation can be speeded up if an agent personally visits the ministry there, presents the properly documented claims, and receives the money. In Jaffna there has emerged a certain number of professional middlemen, who perform these duties for widows and collect a commission of 500 rupees from each widow. They represent a number of widows on each visit, and collect a fair total sum as commission. They remind us, an informant told me, of the *ur appukatu* of old, the 'village lawyer' or intermediary who would act as a link man between a village client and the town advocate who argues his case in court. Finally, since a widow is held to be responsible for all the debts and other monetary obligations contracted by her husband, a variable amount of the compensation she receives may have to be parted with in fulfillment of these claims.

In Sri Lanka, as in many a third world country, and in contrast to the industrialized West, even clerical and secretarial positions are occupied primarily by males. But in Jaffna, with a dearth of young male clerks, women are increasingly being employed to fill clerical positions in government offices. Women more frequently in the past entered teaching and nursing professions, but I was told in the late eighties that in Jaffna there were two women serving as Assistant Government Agents, three or four as staff officers, and one as a cultural officer in the provincial administration (*kachcheri*). The Social Serv-



ices Officer was a widow. Indeed I was told there are some instances in public life where the women have a superior education and/or a better job than their husbands, a reversal, that would be highly 'visible' in Jaffna among the middle class caused by the increasing unavailability of eligible young men in the present circumstances.

There are also many more women than before working in the retail sector, for example, in grocery shops and in the marketing of rice.

## Orphans

Where army and militants have engaged in heavy action, and civilian homes have been shelled or simply levelled in the cross fire, deliberately or otherwise, the likelihood of orphans who have lost both parents becomes an inevitability. For instance, I was told in 1988 that the informant knew the existence of some 25-30 orphaned children in the vicinity of Urumpirai in Jaffna which had seen heavy action.

If the family of the orphans had some property and other resources, and if there were other relatives present, they may be taken care of by them. Grandparents in particular are the first volunteers. And there are some interests at stake: if both parents have died, the orphans become their heirs, and the adopting parents or foster parents would be in a position to act as trustees.

But orphans without anyone able to look after them can only go to orphanages. And in Jaffna (as elsewhere in Sri Lanka) there is some shame attached to being relegated to an orphanage.

But orphanages are also the focus of an explosive religious issue. In Sri Lanka, leaving aside the few government run orphanages, the majority of orphanages are run by the Christian missions. Both Hindus and Buddhists, and their organizations, have not sponsored this form of philanthropy to any significant extent, or at least to the extent achieved by Christian missions and congregations.

Now, since Christian orphanages would try to convert non-Christians to the Christian faith, there has been some concern among Buddhist and Hindu circles about this possible loss of Buddhists and Hindus to the 'alien' religion. There have been some attempts to remedy this: I am told that Dr. Parameshwaran, Professor of Philosophy in the University of Jaffna, had been made chairman of a committee composed of members from Hindu NGOs.<sup>2</sup>

## Women as Freedom Fighters

There are young women who have joined the insurgents. The LTTE is said to have a unit called *Sutantiran Paravai* (Freedom Birds), about one hundred

in number (in the late eighties). Some educated young women, with feminist and other 'progressive' ideological commitments are said to have joined the EPRLF and EROS.

Rajini Thiraganama, who was assassinated by an unknown gunman, is the author of these lines which cryptically speak of the situation of women in Jaffna:

The community's families are headed by women; the old, the sick and the weary die without even the family to mourn or the sons to bury the dead.

Women militants during discussions "confessed to much confusion within the movement regarding the women's question..."

Even in the community, women have come out strong during this war. In many instances of confrontation with the Indian army, they have stood out as individuals or as small groups, exposing the atrocities and violations of dignity. On the other hand it was mainly women who, in the midst of war, pleaded and argued with militants for their families and for the whole nation. Again it is women who have braved the guns and sat in a fast to save others in Batticaloa. Thus when one appraises the political bleakness that confronts this community and this land, the women's history does have a triumph. There is powerlessness, disappointment and disillusionment, but also hope. We have done it... a little bit.<sup>3</sup>

These cryptic references have been elaborated and deepened by the rich documentation provided by the courageous authors of *The Broken Palmyra*,<sup>4</sup> of whom one was the martyred Rajini Thiraganam herself.

To what extent the civil war and the domination of the 'freedom struggle' by youthful militants have caused significant changes in the 'traditional' pattern of marriages, or segregation of castes is difficult to gauge. It seems that on the whole the militant groups such as the LTTE, the EROS, EPRLF, and so on, have not taken as one of their stated causes the transformation and 'liberalization' of pre-existing 'orthodox' practices. The militants have more or less accepted the extant family values, and although some of the young folk may have a greater freedom to choose their partners, the flouting of caste or sub-caste or even more circumscribed kin-circle preferences and restrictions are not a matter of ideological contest. But perhaps more than ever before some inter-caste marriages have taken place. And ideas centering on women's liberation may relate more to women's role in choosing their mates, and even to matters of dowry, rather than to the social equality of castes or their homogenization.

As stated before, a minority of girls have actually joined the militant groups. And they have had to face the



sex-based discriminatory evaluations of their parents and kin as a result of taking this 'revolutionary' action of leaving home, and consorting with male militants. For example, after the Indo-Sri Lanka peace accord was signed, parents had no problem welcoming home their (briefly) returning sons; but the return to the family of the young women who have joined the movement was more difficult and fraught, because of the 'stigma' of their flouting 'domestic surveillance' and strict control of interaction with males, and 'suspicions' of their possible sexual 'transgressions.'

### Young Women and the Problem of Marriage

It has been surmised that there is a vastly disproportionate sex ratio of five women to one man among those of marriageable age in Jaffna. One of the immediate results of this situation is the postponement of marriage, and the increased age of marriage for women, up to 33, 34 and 35 years.

It is in this context that one sees the intensification of a ritual called *Sumangali Vilakku* which is performed so that a woman might soon find a marriage partner, and/or be able to marry a man of her choice. I was told that this ceremony for example is performed every Tuesday at the Durga Amman Temple in Tellipallai, Jaffna. This ritual is performed as a collective rite—a number of women may get together and have it performed for them.

### Young Women Abroad

The diaspora of youth abroad, though it has largely been the fate of young men, has also been experienced by women. Many young women and girls from Jaffna have gone abroad, some to study if their families could afford it, and some even to the Middle East seeking domestic service.

Apparently there is a collection of them in Scandinavia, working as shop assistants, studying at folk high schools and so on. They live in 'chummeries,' observe traditional festivals like *thai pongal*, send remittances home if they can; they have decided to or have recognized that they will have to postpone their marriages. Consorting with Scandinavian males is not favoured.

### Civil War and Inter-caste Relations

It has been remarked in certain circles that some if not all the militant groups had been led by youth of the Vellalah caste or *Karaiyar* caste: thus the LTTE are said to be led by the *Karaiyars* of Valvettithurai, and that the TELO, wiped out by the former, was a *Vellalah* organization. But it is generally agreed that in the course of time, youth of all castes joined the same militant groups.

Although the militant groups did have multi-caste membership, there is an important sense in which 'radical politics' (the fight for the separate Tamil state of Eelam and the attendant organization and common life of resistance fighters) seemed to have co-existed with a 'social orthodoxy' in matters of caste.

The issue of free temple entry for all castes has been a divisive one in Jaffna politics. The case of the Maviddapuram Temple entry dispute has been discussed recently.<sup>5</sup> Another related issue is the free access of lower castes to wells under high caste control or ownership. On these matters the militants have more or less not wanted to rock the boat, but let circumstances loosen up the traditional restrictions and attitudes.

Today it can be said that the vast majority of the major and famous temples of the north are firmly open to the public, and are so in practice, in attendance and worship. But privately owned temples with restrictive entry to exist, and there are present in Jaffna *saiiva* 'revivalists,' usually drawn from the upper castes, who resist changes.

In an ironic twist, certain actions taken by the occupying armies—Sri Lankan and Indian—have actually loosened up caste avoidances and prejudices. For example, frequently when the two armies have declared a curfew, they have ordered civilians to gather in specified Hindu temples allegedly for their collective protection. This means that all castes will have to enter and occupy the temple, and frequently do so. But there are sticky episodes. On one occasion a temple nominated for occupation was the Karaveddy Pillayar Temple, whose annual festival was to take place in a month's time. The trustees of the temple closed it giving admission to no one. Young men of the area who could not take refuge were arrested.

A more subtle play of caste aversion was witnessed in the Vellani Pillayar Temple, which was made available for the occupation of refugees. Apparently, the *Pallars* (of low caste) circulated the joke that while "our boys are inside the temple, their (high caste) boys are outside." This inversion of traditional inclusion-exclusion was brought about by the high caste refugees keeping away from their social 'inferiors.'

### Notes

1. The TRRO report is entitled *Widows of Ethnic Violence in the Jaffna District. A review of the Available Data (1983-86)*. Compiled by the Project Division, T.R.R.O March 1988. I am grateful to Professor K. Sivathamby for providing me with this report.
2. I was told in this regard to read the Buddhist Congress Report on the *Role of Church Organisations in Rehabilitation* where the issue of proselytization and conversion of orphans and derelict children has been discussed.
3. *The Thatched Patio*, Vol. 2, No. 6, Dec. 1989. "Under the Shadow of the Gun," pp. 7-8.
4. Claremont, California: Harvey Mudd Press, 1988.
5. See Brian Pfaffenberger, *Journal of Asian Studies* 49.1 (1990).



Fifty one years ago Leopold Kohr, an Austrian-born economist, published an article in *The Commonwealth* (vol.34, September 26, 1941) calling for the disintegration of the large and powerful European nations as a pre-condition for a federal Europe. With today's developments in Europe, Kohr looks more and more like a prophet; the prophet of a federal Europe. In 1957, Professor Kohr expanded this article into a book, *The Breakdown of Nations*. His central argument in the book is that small cells such as Swiss cantons are preconditions of true democracy and successful federation.

We reproduce Kohr's 1941 essay, as it is eminently relevant to Sri Lanka's political realities today.

Professor Kohr, who was awarded the 'Alternative Nobel Prize' in 1983 is at present an advisor to Baltic states.

## DISUNION NOW: A PLEA FOR A SOCIETY BASED UPON SMALL AUTONOMOUS UNITS

Leopold Kohr

**W**e like to believe that the misery into which the world has come is due to the fact that humanity is split into too many countries. And we like to believe that all the evils of our globe could be eliminated by simply doing away with the variety of states through uniting - the democracies now, the continents later, the world in the end. The usually cited examples for the feasibility of such unions are the United States of America and Switzerland.

As far as the United States is concerned, it is not a model after which Europe could be reshaped because it is not a union of different entities. There is no real differentiation between the peoples, languages, customs and races living in the various states. There is only one people, the American, living in the United States, which is plural in its name but not in fact. The United States *are* not a country, it *is* a country. The only lesson which can be drawn from its constitutional picture is that in spite of the uniformity of type it has produced, it was found more practicable to subdivide it into 48 states instead of trying to govern the entire continent through delegates from Washington. Thus *differentiations* were artificially created because this proved to be an easier way to achieve union than *unification*.

But more than the United States, it is Switzerland which is regarded as the proof of the feasibility of the unionist dreams even for the continent of Europe where they have neither a uniform type of continental man, nor a common language, nor a common cultural and historical background. There, in a tiny spot in the Alps, three arch-enemies - Italians, Germans and French - have united for the common purpose of freedom, peace and economic happiness. Switzerland, to the unionist, is the eternal example of the practicability of the living together of different nations, and for this reason, he praises her as his holy land.

But in reality Switzerland, too, proves something quite different from what she is meant to prove. The percentage of her three national groups (not speaking of the Romanche, her fourth nationality) is roughly 70% for the German, 20% for the French and 10% for the Italian speaking population. If these three national groups as such were the basis of her much-famed union, it would inevitably result in the domination of the large German speaking block over the other two nationalities, who would be degraded to the logical status of minorities representing only 30% of the total population. Indeed, the rules of democracy would favor this development, and the reason for the French and Italian speaking communities remaining in a chiefly German enterprise would be gone. No sense could be found in their keeping away from the more logical reunion with their own blood-relatives, who through their number, have formed the powerful nations of Italy and France. No more sense could there be for the Germanic block to stay outside the Reich.

In fact the basis of the existence of Switzerland and the principle of living together of various national groups is not the federation of her three nationalities but the federation of her 22 states, which represent a *division* of her nationalities and thus create the essential precondition for any democratic federation; the physical balance of the participants, the approximate equality of numbers. The greatness of the Swiss idea, therefore, is the smallness of its cells from which it derives its guaranties. The Swiss from Geneva does not confront the Swiss from Zurich as a German to a French confederate, but as a confederate from the Republic of Geneva to a confederate from the Republic of Zurich. The citizen of the German-speaking Uri is as much a foreigner to the citizen of the German-speaking Unterwalden as he is to the citizen of the Italian-speaking Tessin. Between the canton of St.Gallen and the Swiss federation there is no intermediary organization in the form of "German-speaking



cantons." The power delegated to Berne derives from the small member republic and not from the nationality, because Switzerland is a union of states, not of nations. It is important to realize that in Switzerland there live (in rough numbers) 700,000 Bernese, 650,000 Zurichois, 160,000 Genevese, etc., and not 2,500,000 Germans, 1,000,000 French and 500,000 Italians. The great number of proud, democratic and almost sovereign cantons, and the small number of the individual cantonal populations eliminates all possible imperialist ambitions on the part of any one canton, because it would always be outnumbered by even a very small combination of the others. If ever, in the course of contemporary simplification and rationalization, an attempt to reorganize Switzerland on the basis of its nationalities should succeed, the 22 "superfluous" states with all their separate parliaments and governments would become three provinces: not of Switzerland, however, but of Germany, Italy and France.

### Cantonal Sovereignty

People who argue for a union of nations in Europe because they believe that *this* kind of union has been realized and thus proved its practicability in Switzerland, have never based their wonderful schemes on the principle of cantonal or small-state sovereignty. The *national* idea has so much troubled the minds of the political thinkers that, in contrast, the notion of *state*, which is so much more flexible adaptable and multipliable than that of *nation*, has almost completely gone out of use. For virtue has been seen only in great and greater entities, while smaller entities have been thought and taught to be the source of all mischief and evil. WE have been educated in the worship of the bulk, of the large, of the universal, of the colossal, and have come away from the minuscule, the completeness and universality on the smallest scale - the individual, which is the protoplasm of all social life. WE have learned to praise the unification of France, Britain, Italy and Germany in the belief that they would give birth to a unified humanity. But they created only Great Powers.

If the Swiss experience should be applied to Europe, also the Swiss technique - not merely the appearance of its result - will have to be employed. This consists in the dividing of three or any number of unequal blocks into as many smaller parts as is necessary to eliminate any sizable numerical preponderance. That is to say that one should create 40 or 50 equally small states instead of 4 or 5 unequally large ones. Otherwise even a federated Europe will always contain 80 million Germans, 45 million French, 45 million Italians, etc., which means that any European federation would end up in a German hegemony with just the same inevitability as the German federation, in which 24 small states were linked to the one 40-million power of Prussia ended up in Prussian hegemony.

The suggestion, therefore, is to split Germany into a number of states of seven to ten million inhabitants. This could be easily done since the former German states (or a number of them) could be reconstructed, and even Prussia could be divided on a natural and historical basis. The splitting up of Germany alone, however, would have no permanent effect. With the natural tendency of all growing things, Germany would reunite unless the whole of Europe were to be cantonized at the same time. France, Italy and Russia must be divided too. Also in their cases their historical backgrounds would make the task easy: we shall again have a Venezia, a Lombardy, a Burgundy, a Savoy, an Estonia, a White Russia, etc. But as with the German states, here also the new (or old) entities would again grow together on racial lines unless they be brought together in *new combinations* making the creation of national states impossible. That is to say, the true meaning of Switzerland or the Austro-Hungarian empire will have to be realized in many new instances: the small states would be federated, but not with their nearest relative, so that the new map of Europe might show a Pomerania-West Poland, and East-Prussia-Baltica, an Austro-Hungary-Czechoslovakia, a Baden-Burgundy, a Lombardy-Savoy, etc. Then the Great Powers, which are the womb of all modern wars, because they alone are strong enough to give to war its modern frightfulness, shall have disappeared. But only through splitting up the entire continent of Europe will it be possible to eliminate honorably Germany or any other Great Power without having to inflict on any the odium of a new Versailles. Once Europe is divided into small enough parcels, we shall have the Swiss foundation of a Pan European Union, based not on the collaboration of powerful nations but on the smallness of *all* the states.

### Glorifying the Small

All this is a defense of a much ridiculed principle which glorifies the sovereignty of the smallest and not of the largest state-entity - *Kleinstaaterei*, as the Germans say. The theorist of our time who seem to be able to see only the large and get emotional over words like "humanity" (no one knows what it really means and why one should *die* for it) call the very idea of creating more instead of fewer states medieval backwardness. They are all out for unionism and colossalism, though unionism is nothing really but another expression for totalitarianism, even if it is thought to be a guarantee for peace. It is the one-party system transplanted into the international field. Against the scorn of our theorists I would like to point out only a very few of the advantages of this "medieval" scheme. The unionist will say that the time when hundreds of states existed was dark and that wars were waged almost continuously. That is true. But what were these wars like? The Duke of Tyrol declared war on the Margrave of Bavaria for a stolen horse. The

war lasted two weeks. There was one dead and six wounded. A village was captured and all the wine drunk which was in the cellar of the inn. Peace was made and \$35 paid for reparations. The adjoining Duchy of Liechtenstein and the Archbishopric of Salzburg never learned that there had been a war on at all. There was war in some corner of Europe almost every day, but they were wars with little effects. Today we have relatively few wars, and they are for no better reason than a stolen horse. But the effects are tremendous.

Also economically the advantages of the coexistence of many little states were enormous, although the modern synchronizers and economists will not agree with this since they have got accustomed to see the world standing on their heads. Instead of one administration we had twenty, instead of two hundred parliamentarians we had two thousand, and thus, instead of the ambitions of only a few the ambitions of many could be satisfied. There were no unemployed because there were too many identical professions which competed less because they were exercised in more countries. There was no necessity for socialism (another totalitarian notion), because the economic life of a small country could be supervised from any church tower without the interpretations (brilliant though they be) of a Marx or Schacht. There was the development of the arts in the many capitals which excelled in the creation of universities, theater and in the production of poets, philosophers and architects. And there were no more taxes than we have now, in the age of rationalization, where people and enterprises have been "economized" for economic reasons and the phenomenon of unemployment has come into existence.

We have done away with what we thought was the waste of courts and kings and have created thereby the splendor of the dictators' marching millions. We have ridiculed the many little states; now we are terrorized by their few successors.

Not only history but also our own experience has taught us that true democracy in Europe can only be achieved in little states. Only there the individual can retain his place and dignity. And if democracy is a worthwhile idea, we have to create again the conditions for its development, the small state, and give the glory of sovereignty (instead of curtailing an institution from which no one wants to depart) to the smallest community and to as many people as possible. It will be easy to unite *small* states under one continental federal system and thus also satisfy, secondarily, those who want to live on universal terms. Such a Europe is like a fertile inspiration and a grandiose picture, although not a modern one which you paint in one dull line. It will be like a mosaic with fascinating variations and diversity, but also with the harmony of the organic and living whole.

This is a ridiculous scheme, conceived for man as a witty, vivacious and individualistic reality. Unionism, on the other hand, is a deadly serious scheme without humor, meant for men as a collectivity and as social animals of lower order, and it reminds me constantly, in all its earnest elaborateness of the German professor who submitted to Satan a new plan for organizing Hell. Whereupon Satan answered with rock-shaking laughter: "Organize Hell? My dear Professor, organization, that *is* Hell."

### From The Dove Messenger

In recent months  
Many a man-between eighteen  
And twenty five most-  
Many a woman and even  
Child, has disappeared there

In water fire or sand  
'who knows'-  
The whereabouts we must  
Some how find  
Oh, I am glad of the look in your eyes  
Saying 'that's right'  
Even Amnesty International  
Has been told  
'Not to come yet'  
There's surely to be very many  
More deaths  
Your task is to go

In a bird's way  
To remember everything  
coming in your way  
And let the world know  
What you have found.

First go to Fort  
Hang round a little  
And your kind you'll  
Find many. Tell your task  
They'll tell you  
'Everything,' as from roof  
and tree tops they would  
Have seen things that have not  
Left any trace of evidence ...

**Basil Fernando**  
1989 October



# MESSENGERS OF PEACE OR CREATORS OF CHAOS?

## The Role of Teachers in the Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict<sup>1</sup>

[Part One]

Sasanka Perera

*"The student will be what the teacher is."  
- Sinhala Proverb*

The Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, a 20th century phenomenon involving the country's Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority is mostly the result of post independence politics of ethnicity and discrimination; however some roots reach back into Sri Lanka's ancient history — or what is thought of as history. The problem reached civil war proportions in the 1980s and later led to the military intervention of Indian armed forces in the late 1980s. Today, this conflict still continues unabated. It is estimated that it has claimed over 50,000 lives. The purpose of this paper is to assess the role played by teachers in creating attitudes which contributed to or justified the ethnic conflict. I shall primarily focus my attention on Sinhalese school teachers. However, in a less systematic manner I shall also assess the role played by Tamil teachers.

In the preface of a 1960 study entitled *Education for Racial Integration in Ceylon*, Siriwardena stated that in the context of increasing ethnic conflict, all aspects of education must be utilized to foster national unity and better relations among various ethnic groups. He also hoped that the suggestions made in the study would catch the attention of teachers who ultimately have to play a major role in achieving the desired goal of national unity (Siriwardena 1960:11).

However, over the last thirty years Siriwardena's anxious hopes mostly remained restricted within the pages of his thesis in the main library at the university of Peradeniya. Similar anxieties voiced by other writers were also never heeded, or used to form practical politics by any of the post-independence governments. Perhaps, the contents of this paper will share the pitiful fate of those earlier discourses!

It must be borne in mind that issues associated with education is only one aspect of the multi faceted ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. However, education plays a

consistent role in aggravating the conflict. In a voluntarily segregated society such as Sri Lanka, schools are the most effective line of battle in the direction of potential integration. Desegregated schools alone cannot achieve this goal because segregation *per se* is not necessarily the cause of heightened ethnic conflict. While it clearly increases the chances of conflict, the role of teachers and the contents of textbooks also play positive or negative roles, minimizing or maximizing chances of conflict. In Sri Lanka schoolteachers have helped create and maintain the rift between Sinhalese and Tamils (and between other ethnic and religious groups). I suggest that this negative tendency is the direct result of segregated education.

In Sri Lanka, as in any other society, the role of a teacher in formal or informal education is to communicate knowledge and be a model for students. While in a broad sense the role of teachers may be similar in most societies, certain values and norms unique to the cultural traditions of each society are internalized by teachers and society at large so that the role teachers play is different in different societies. In Sri Lanka a teacher is always to be followed and respected, and her knowledge, wisdom and commands must be accepted unconditionally. It is usually discouraged to question a teacher, even at the university level. The overall position of teachers must be understood within the context of how Sri Lankans (especially the Sinhalese) relate to all authority figures. All authority figures (from bureaucrats to police officers) are treated with fear and respect. These attitudes are related to such typical Sinhalese concepts like *lejja*, *baya*, *gauravaya*, *nambuwa*, and *tatwaya*, all of which are ultimately associated with ideas of shame and status.

The values supporting these views have ancient roots going back to medieval Sri Lankan cultural traditions, and are generally accepted even though they are contrary to the Buddhist doctrinal ethic of questioning before accepting. This stereotypical status of teachers is idealized and internalized through societal and school socialization from a very early age. Even school textbooks promote this exalted position of teachers. For example, textbooks refer to teachers regularly as *gurutuma* (a reverential version of teacher) as opposed to *gurubaraya* and *etuma* or *etumiya*

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(a reverential version of "he" or "she") as opposed to *ohu* or *eya* (*Sinhala 5* 1982: 1). The Sinhala Reader for grade five (this is the 1982 version of many such texts published over the years), describes a social service organization initiated by a group of schoolchildren who want to ensure the participation of the entire village student population in their venture (*Sinhala 5* 1982:32). They expect that Mrs. Jayasundera, a schoolteacher, will assure full student participation, since she is "respected and feared" by the students. The ability to scare students is another typical characteristic attributed to Sinhalese schoolteachers. Throughout the lesson she occupies an exalted position and is described as a source of undisputed knowledge and respect:

They are somewhat scared of her. If she tells the students to come, they will definitely come. No one has ever disobeyed the orders of Mrs. Jayasundera.

Such descriptions instill in the child a sense of broad respect (mixed with fear) towards the teacher. When such ideas are strongly implanted in schoolchildren, teachers are in a position to influence them in a profound manner, for better or for worse. In this sense, within the school system, teachers form an extremely influential component. This is more important when one considers that teachers are the agents of change and therefore creators of attitudes, values and perceptions and transmitters of messages and symbols. Considering the influence teachers can wield, their specific roles have to be clearly defined, compatible with the needs of the country.

### Dynamics of Recruiting and Training Teachers

**D**espite many irregularities ("political" appointments) in the assignment of teachers to Sri Lankan schools, it is generally accepted that teachers must be a specially trained group of people. Teachers for the most part are recruited from two sources:

1. **Graduate Teachers:** These are graduates from Sri Lankan universities who are given teaching appointments upon completion of their education. They receive no particular training in teaching but are hired mostly for subject knowledge. In recent times however, even this has been overlooked and graduates in history, Sinhala and political science have been appointed as kindergarten teachers. Some of these teachers get in-service teacher training in diploma courses conducted by the Ministry of Education and University of Colombo.
2. **Trained Teachers:** These are graduates of Sri Lankan high schools who undergo further training in government teacher training schools where some are specially trained to teach one or more subjects

to primary and secondary schoolchildren. They are also supposed to be trained in methods and the psychology of teaching.

Most teachers in Sri Lankan schools today have been through the segregated school system themselves, including university education. Moreover, all teacher training schools are also ethno-linguistically segregated. Training colleges in Sinhalese areas teach exclusively in Sinhala while those in Tamil areas teach in Tamil. English is used only to teach English language trainees. These training schools perpetuate the social organization of the larger society and the segregated school system. In contemporary Sri Lanka, younger teachers (whether trained or graduate teachers) are raw products of segregation with all its negative inheritances: they live in a segregated society, they study in segregated schools and gain their professional qualifications in segregated training colleges or universities. If segregated society and schools are an obstacles to better inter-ethnic relations, it is reasonable to assume that those obstacles are internalized in teachers' attitudes and perceptions.

Graduate teachers obtain professional qualifications from one of eight universities. They gain no competence in methods of teaching unless they undergo the non-mandatory diploma course. In comparison, student-teachers at training colleges receive such instruction along with loosely constructed and vaguely articulated classes of educational psychology.

Once teachers are trained or selected, their respective assignments to various schools are based on principles of segregation and ethnicity. Sinhalese teachers are sent to Sinhala schools and Tamil teachers to Tamil schools. Teacher assignments also occur on a religious basis where Christian, Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu schools prefer teachers who are co-religionists. If teachers are assigned to schools with a different religious orientation than their own, it does not usually become a major problem as long as teachers teach subjects unassociated with religion.

When discussing the contribution of teachers in increasing ethnic conflict, a theme that will constantly arise is the failure of training colleges to introduce special programs to train teacher trainees to handle the challenges of plural Sri Lanka. Without specific training, teachers cannot be expected to offer programs on their own.

In 1960 Siriwardena expressed the following sentiments:

The different ways and means of teaching both academic and practical subjects with a view to integrate the diverse races in our community must be made familiar to the teacher trainees. It is the responsibility of the training colleges, which train the teachers who mould the young, to initiate experiments in inter-group education. The fact of segregating training colleges on the



basis of language is not sound from this point of view. If on the other hand, we have cosmopolitan training colleges where trainees of all communities can live together under the same roof, they would be better adjusted and less prejudiced teachers who can undertake the task of educating for national consciousness. Conditions as they are at present do not facilitate free mixing between teacher trainees belonging to different races (Siriwardena 1960: 77).

Sri Lankan education authorities have yet to pay proper attention to such warnings. Before and immediately after independence some attention was given to such ideas, apparent from a number of reports and academic articles published. Such enthusiasm steadily declined as Sri Lanka adopted a path towards ethnic politics, Within such a climate Sinhalese hegemony became a way of life and notions of a plural society were dismissed. Hence there was no political or social impetus to train teachers for a plural society. Lacking proper training and a cohesive policy to guide them, teachers are not capable of building a systematic and accurate understanding of the ethnic diversity in Sri Lanka.

**The Teachers' Role in the Ethnic Conflict: Creation of Ethnic Attitudes and Perceptions through the Transmission of Messages, Symbols and Interpretations.<sup>2</sup>**

When students come to school, they have already absorbed a variety of values and prejudices as a result of socialisation. These are reinforced in peer groups within and outside the school environment. School textbooks also play a significant role in this process. The teacher can relate to all these different sources of information and weld them together into an integrated whole for each student. In doing so the teacher's teaching ability as well as personality exerts considerable influence. By focussing on how teachers and education contribute to inter-ethnic conflict, it is not my intent to denigrate the truly positive contributions that teachers otherwise make to society. Nonetheless, my concern in what follows is with the role that teachers play, which contributes to ethnic conflict. This role is primarily as creators of ethnic attitudes and perceptions. They also give such perceptions legitimacy because of their exalted position as teachers. In teaching some subjects (religion, language, social science) certain exclusive stressed. This is achieved through one of the following methods:

1. Direct negative portrayal of groups other than one's own.
2. Avoidance of mentioning groups other than one's own, thereby establishing the superiority of one group over all others.

In Sri Lanka the second approach is most widely favoured although in many cases a combination of both is used. This shortcoming in the educational process is

largely the result of a failure in curriculum development. Teachers can diffuse biased subject matter by discussing the contents of texts and curricula in a rational manner. Alternatively, they can strictly adhere to the syllabus and perpetuate the negative images of the course. Given their lack of training and will the latter is the more usual outcome.

This problem is most apparent in the teaching of religion. Sri Lankan schools usually teach only one religion depending on the religious orientation of the school. Religions are taught from a list of four which include Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Organisations representing all these religions accept that they should be taught in schools (Hewege in *Ceylon Daily News*, December 20, 1981). But it is rare for more than one religion to be taught in a single school. Even though a number of committees have been recommended that there should be an attempt to foster inter-religious understanding and bring about unity among all religions, these recommendations have not been implemented.<sup>3</sup> This has mostly resulted from the lack of interest of educationists as well as petty differences between various religious interests.

What has happened is a further isolation of religious groups in religiously-exclusive schools where religious education is conducted by teachers who belong to the same faiths as their students. Within such a context it is not surprising if one's own religion is idealised to the rejection of other faiths. Between 1976 and 1979 religious textbooks contained a section on the festivals and observances of all religions practised in Sri Lanka. However, these themes made up the last portion of the course, and invariably, get only marginal attention by teachers and students. Discussion with Christian students who had used these texts indicated that they "had a lot of fun reading about Buddhist festivals." They considered that the idea of the "Buddha running around on lotuses was silly and quite funny".<sup>4</sup> Questioning the teacher who had taught these (grade 7) students seemed to substantiate their statement. According to them, when one is conducting a difficult lesson (eg., about other religious festivals) it is easier for students to grasp and remember it if it is conducted in a light-hearted manner. However, the last-ling lesson these students learned was not to respect other religions but to consider these religions as '*pissu agam*' and their believers as '*pisso*'.<sup>5</sup> A number of Buddhist students[grade 7] also remarked that the re-awakening of Christ was quite a good 'ghost story'.<sup>6</sup> However, it was not always common to get such candid answers.

Based on these types of revelations I do not suggest that 'religious education' always takes this form. However considering the exclusive surroundings in which religions are taught, such occurrences are not surprising. Moreover, Sri Lankan religious education courses are not designed to foster inter-religious or inter ethnic understanding. Their Primary aim is to project the virtues of





the particular group to whom the course is directed. This shortcoming is contrary to the state's declared goal of religious education<sup>7</sup> Under such circumstances only teachers can be expected to moderate the situation, but given the lack of breadth in their training and lack of will, it is difficult to expect such an outcome.

In Sinhala-medium schools the material most damaging to harmonious inter-ethnic relations is transmitted, while teaching Buddhism Sinhala and Social studies. In teaching Buddhism, the education authorities have always thought it pertinent to include lessons on aspects of Sri Lankan history. For example, the 1976 Buddhist text-book for grade 7, (*Buddha Dharmaya* 7), includes two chapters on the historical development of the Polonnaruwa Period.<sup>8</sup> In these lessons Sri Lankan history is discussed in terms of Sinhalese confrontations with Tamils. I believe that religious education (if it has to be included as a school subject) should be set in a contemporary Sri Lankan context, and should discuss the doctrinal and ritual aspects of the religions concerned within that context. This way it will be easier for students to relate what they learn (hopefully something positive) to the society in which they live. Episodes of national history when taken out of context can be a dangerous inclusion. Of all the texts on religion such inclusions are found only in Buddhist texts, giving teachers and students an opportunity to discuss historical (or mythical) episodes. These lessons are more popular among students than lessons dealing with mundane aspects of religious doctrine. The teacher could discuss these lessons without arousing ethnic antagonisms. But given the limitations of teacher-training as noted earlier it is at present difficult to expect them to do so.

All the teachers of Buddhism<sup>9</sup> interviewed were of the opinion that religious education should contain lessons on Sri Lanka's past. The students, they argued, must be told of the struggles that the leaders of the country undertook to preserve the faith. While discussing these topics the untrained Sinhalese Buddhist teacher rouses anti-Tamil feelings among her students. The texts play a collaborative role in this regard. The Buddhism teachers (from grades 1-8) of one Sinhalese Buddhist school in Colombo mutually agreed on the sentiment expressed by one teacher: "these *demalas*<sup>10</sup> have always tried to put us (Sinhalese) and our faith (Buddhism) down. Our younger generation must understand our history, if they are to safeguard the faith and the nation in the future."

It is true that South Indian invasions did have a negative effect on Buddhism, as invaders like Kalinga Maga (12th century) destroyed Buddhist temples, burnt libraries, killed priests and so on. However, to consider these South Indian attacks as proof of the fact that Tamils have been predisposed to commit evil since ancient times is too simplistic. South Indians, most of whom speak Tamil, have a long history of statehood that extended its influences throughout insular South East Asia. Consequently, from

time to time South Indian kings invaded and occupied parts of Sri Lanka. These invasions and occupations were wars of dominance fought between regional rulers. These wars were not defined in either ethnic or linguistic terms until they became too frequent and destructive. Even then, they were not ethnic conflicts. The Sinhalese and Tamil labels were used only in times of constant external aggressions and not during the long periods free of conflict. Therefore, the destruction of Buddhist monasteries and temples was the result of invading and occupying foreign armies and not the result of race riots or ethnic conflict as is popularly portrayed.

The fact that most of these invaders spoke Dravidian languages does not make these wars, wars of ethnicity or race. But to teachers the invaders were simply Tamils, who attempted to subjugate the Sinhalese and their land as they do today. This is the message most teachers transmit to students. Students internalize this faulty information and form wrong perceptions. They do not realise that the resident Sri Lankan Tamils at the time probably had little or no role in this destruction. They also do not learn about the contributions Tamil kings and chieftains (eg., Elara) made to Buddhism, the association Sri Lanka had with Buddhist centers in Tamil South India or of South Indians (or people with a Tamil or South Indian ancestry) who fought with the Sinhalese against invading South Indian forces (eg. Alakeshwara).

History lessons in Buddhism courses are poorly designed and generate highly ethnocentric feelings. Positive lessons from Sri Lankan history are excluded. The manner in which anti-Tamil feelings are internalized is exemplified in the following incident. After helping a grade 5 male student with his homework, which included Buddhism, I asked him what he knew about the Anuradhapura period (4th century B.C. to 10th century A.D.). Among the things he said in Sinhala was (Even in those days, tigers<sup>11</sup> had attacked).

Discussions of particular lessons in social studies also allow this scenario. Of the 28 grade 9 students interviewed,<sup>12</sup> 26 claimed that the most interesting lessons were the ones dealing with Sri Lanka's ancient history. Of these, 24 also claimed that teachers took more interest in discussing these lessons, which added to the students' own enjoyment. This shows that nearly all grade 9 students enjoyed ancient Sri Lankan history lessons in their social studies course because of the contents of the lesson as well as the teacher's enthusiasm. For the students the most interesting and memorable aspects of these lessons were the battles between Sinhalese and Tamil kings. This interest was consistent among both Sinhalese Buddhist and Christian students despite the fact that in some of the most popular stories (eg., the battle between Dutta Gaminia Abaya and Elara between 167 and 137 (B.C.) the allegedly declared goal of the Sinhalese leader was the protection of Buddha Sasana (Buddhist Order). This interest was similar among teachers as well. Of the 20



grade 9 social studies teachers interviewed (both Christian and Buddhist), 18 claimed that they enjoyed teaching lessons dealing with history and spent more time preparing and teaching such lessons.<sup>13</sup>

Although my original intention was to observe the actual teaching process of these lessons, this was not possible because schools were closed intermittently throughout most of 1988 as a result of the J.V.P.-led insurrection. Besides, school authorities were also unwilling to let me into their schools because of the unprecedented political and social unrest in the country.

However, I was able to observe this process in two private 'tutories'<sup>14</sup> (one in Kandy and one in Nugegoda, Colombo). Both were taught by different teachers who were regular social science teachers in schools. Both classes together had a total enrollment of 33 male and female students who were Buddhist and Christian. I requested both teachers to teach the history lessons prescribed for grade 9, as a review session for potential end-of-year examinations. I also requested permission to question the students after each class—ostensibly to test their subject knowledge. As far as teaching abilities were concerned, both teachers were above average, and managed to keep the interest of the students for the entire duration of each one-and-a-half hour session.<sup>15</sup> The two teachers were typical in the way they conceptualized and presented the material.

### Class Presentation of Teacher # 1:

The class in Kandy began with a description of the origins of Tamils and Sinhalese. In a map of India and Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese, referred to as Aryans, were described as coming from the eastern and western coasts of North India. The Tamils, described as Dravidians, were claimed to be invaders from the Chola (Soli), Pandya (Pandi) and Kerala kingdoms in South India. The teacher made no departure from the traditional and incomplete, if not faulty, description of the origins of the two ethnic groups. In the early 20th-century tradition of Buddhist revivalists, the terms Aryan and Dravidian were used in a racial sense, and not in the normally accepted linguistic sense. The racial or ethnic interpretation of these linguistic terms is quite common in the collective discourses of both Sinhalese and Tamil educational, literary and historical circles.

While talking about the rise of the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa kingdoms, the teacher made special mention of the destruction of these and other kingdoms. According to him, the destruction of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa was engineered by Tamils, the forefathers of contemporary Tamils. Examples were given where temples, libraries and entire cities were destroyed by rulers like Kalinga Maga and Elara. No attempts were made to explain that these destructions were the result of foreign invasions and occupations. This is consistent

with the contents of Buddhist texts and Sinhala-language readers. Social studies texts are better written than these but are too vague in the description of many important concepts and aspects of history, which leads teachers to interpret events in their own biased ways. The downfall of Sinhalese kingdoms was shown exclusively as the result of Tamil attacks.

In this instance, the teacher drew the attention of students to contemporary Sri Lanka and said (in Sinhala) that "they are continuing this destruction even today." The statement was followed by an extensive half-hour discussion of the "atrocities" allegedly committed by Tamils or Tigers. These included actual and purported massacres of Sinhalese in Tamil areas and destruction of sacred Buddhist sites. In an interview later the teacher said that the information regarding the destruction of Buddhist archaeological sites was obtained from Cyril Mathew's publication *Sinhaluni Budu Sasuna Beraganu* ("Sinhalese, Rescue the Buddhist Religion"). Following this discussion, the students earnestly repeated stories that they had supposedly learnt about Tamil atrocities against Sinhalese. These outbursts were emotional in nature and the general consensus among the students and the teacher was that the military and the government were not taking adequate steps to protect the Sinhalese. One of the students suggested that all the Tamils should be rounded up and sent to their homeland in Tamil Nadu. The teacher agreed by saying in Sinhala "*ekanam eththa thamai*" ("that is of course, quite true"). This earnest discussion marked the end of the one-and-a-half hour review session.

### Interview with Students of Teacher # 1:

The end of the session marked the beginning of my group interview with the students while the teacher was absent. My first question was that if the Tamils can be sent to Tamil Nadu based on the claim that they originated there, then the Sinhalese also can be sent to the parts of India where they are supposed to have originated. I also suggested that if the Tamils have no rights in Sri Lanka as they are considered the descendants of destructive invaders, then so are the Sinhalese. I mentioned that the *Mahawamsa* itself describes how Vijaya became king of Lanka after defeating (killing) the original inhabitants of Lanka.

The students countered by saying that the Sinhalese were the first to come to Sri Lanka and that they had a "duty" to civilize the Veddas<sup>16</sup> as the Sinhalese were the more advanced people. They also said that the Sinhala language had died out in North India and thus they could not go there even if they wanted, whereas Tamil was still spoken in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lankan Tamils could easily be repatriated.



My argument that Tamils have been in Sri Lanka as long as the Sinhalese, if not longer, was treated as Tamil propaganda. One student suggested that I must have talked to some 'Koti' (Tigers) before coming to talk to them. With peals of laughter the others showed their approval. I also suggested that except perhaps for the first few waves of Sinhalese, all others came from South India and even in the 15th century South Indians from Kerala came to Sri Lanka<sup>17</sup> and became assimilated into the Sinhalese Buddhist mainstream, and currently constitute caste groups like Karawa, Navandanna and Salagama. While this too was considered 'bogus history,' some students from the Navandanna caste insisted that according to their parents all their ancestors have been Sinhalese Buddhists and that they did not have a drop of Tamil blood in their veins.

What surprised me most was their total lack of moderation and the inability to view other interpretations of history in an impartial way. The facts summarized below also transpired at the interviews:

1. Before coming to this class, they had learned certain aspects of Sri Lankan history from other teachers, their parents and kin.
2. The most interesting history lessons have been the ones learnt under the present teacher, mainly because he relates the past to the present.
3. Their most interesting lessons were the ones on Sri Lanka's ancient history because they showed the sacrifices Sinhalese leaders had made to safeguard the land and the nation.
4. Tamils were the cause of problems in ancient Sri Lanka as they are today.

### Interview with Teacher # 1:

I considered it best to interview the teacher in the absence of students to give him a better opportunity to express himself without restraint. I reproduce below in translation the relevant portions of the questions I asked and the answers given:

- Q: Do you accept the history lessons you teach as reasonably accurate?
- A: No doubt about it. The texts were written and the curriculum was set up by very eminent people. Besides, I have read the *Mahawamsa*<sup>18</sup> myself which is the most reliable source of our history.<sup>19</sup>
- Q: Do you realize that modern research has shown that Tamils could have been in Sri Lanka as long as the Sinhalese and that the most numerous Sinhalese migrations were from South India and not from the north as commonly accepted? Do you know that some Sinhalese caste groups like Navandanna and Salagama came to Sri Lanka in the 15th century from Kerala in South India?

A: Sir, in my 18 years as a teacher and in all my years as a student and as an undergraduate I have never heard such a fairy tale. Sinhalese were the first to come to Sri Lanka; the Tamils came much later, the *Mahawamsa* is quite clear on that point, as are many historians. Sinhalese migrants always came from North India and never from the south. There may have been some intermarriages but no mass migration as you claim. I should know; I have been a history teacher before I started teaching social studies. These theories which you have just put forward are Tamil propaganda and people with a Western-educational background readily accept them (the last statement was a direct attack on myself as well as most contemporary Western-educated social scientists who are commonly referred to as 'thuppahiyas' (derogatory term which usually means "those without a culture"). These scholars have been the vicious targets of Sinhala-educated nationalists for a number of years because their scholarly work has offended Sinhalese chauvinistic sentiments).

Q: Don't you think that the teaching of history as a constant conflict between the Sinhalese and Tamils would harm contemporary inter-ethnic relations?

A: We have always had trouble with the Tamils and it will continue until we get rid of them. After all, we have no place else to go and they have Tamil Nadu. Besides whatever the consequences, we have to teach our young people the sacrifices their forefathers made. We have to show them that the sacrifices our police and armed forces are making now are similar to the sacrifices made by the kings Dutugemunu and Vijayabahu I.

Q: Don't you think political negotiations will be better than military action to solve the ethnic conflict?

A: as I always tell my students, it is politics that has ruined us. We must militarily eliminate the Tamil problem. Once they are defeated we can look into their grievances. The problem is they always wanted more than their share. After all we are the majority and we came to this land first.

Q: In addition to history lessons in social studies, do you talk about your views on the ethnic conflict to your students in school and tuition classes?

A: Always. As a teacher it is my duty.

Q: What about other teachers?

A: Of course. As I said before it is their duty.

Q: Some local residents have claimed that you and other teachers incited students to riot against Tamils in 1983 and that some teachers are racist. What do you think?

A: All lies. Marxists and Western-educated *thuppahi* scholars have labeled all patriots as racists. They even call King Dutugemunu and Anagarika Dharmapala racists. I never told students to kill or





harm anybody. We are Buddhists. But if necessary they must fight for their country valiantly as did our great leaders.

Q: So do you think it is alright to influence students the way you want?

A: Yes. It is the duty of a true teacher.

### Notes

1. I would like to thank Mattison Mines, Donald Brown, David Brokensha, Margaret Dodd, Gananath Obeyesekere and Anoli Perera for their comments on various versions of this draft.
2. Unless otherwise noted, the proceeding analysis is exclusively based on field research conducted in Lanka during 1988-1989.
3. See the recommendations of the 1981 Special Commission on Religious Education and selected documents of the Centre for Society and Religion.
4. Buddhists believe that soon after his birth the Buddha walked seven steps and on each step a lotus sprang up.
5. Interview conducted in Kandy, Sri Lanka. The Sinhala term *pissu agam* can be translated as 'crazy religions' and the closest translation for *pisso* is 'loonies.'
6. Interview conducted in Kandy, Sri Lanka.
7. See "Justice and Religion in Education", *Logos Publication*, Vol.21,#2, 1982 and the report of the E.L. Wijemanne Religious Committee, *CDN* Jan 14 1982.
8. Lesson 29: p. 92, Polonnaruwa Period (historical background I)/Lesson 30: p. 94, Polonnaruwa Period (historical background II).
9. Sample of 25 teachers from Kandy, Colombo and Matara.
10. Derogatory term for Tamils.

11. Tiger is a term commonly used to describe Tamil guerrillas even though in reality Tigers constitute only one guerilla group, the ultra nationalist LTTE. But the word is now increasingly used to refer to Tamils in general.
12. Sinhalese Buddhist and Christian students in Colombo and Kandy.
13. Of the remaining two, one preferred lessons dealing with geography and the other preferred discussions on economics.
14. 'Tutories' are private classes organised mostly by regular school teachers to coach students in their studies. These classes function during weekends and after regular school hours on weekdays. They have become a major industry in Sri Lanka. Soon after the interviews were conducted these two private tutories also had to close down as a result of JVP intimidation.
15. Altogether, there were two of these sessions per week even when schools were functioning normally. Most secondary school students attend private tutories after school hours whether they need additional help or not. It has become a norm among the school-going population.
16. Indigenous people of Sri Lanka.
17. See Gananath Obeyesekere, 1984, 'Political Violence and the Future of Democracy in Sri Lanka,' in *Sri Lanka, the Ethnic Conflict: Myths, Realities and Perspectives*, Colombo: Committee for Rational Development, Micheal Roberts 1979, *Collective Identities, Nationalisms and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Marga Institute, and L.S. Dewaraja, 1988, *The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka 1707-1782*. Colombo: Lake House Investments Ltd.
18. *Mahawamsa* is a 12th-century document. It intermixes history, myth and legend and has a strong Sinhalese-Buddhist bias.
19. "Our history" means Sinhalese history.

# GLOBALIZATION: A WORLD WITHOUT ALTERNATIVES

Upendra Baxi

**W**e live in times marked by a profound disorientation, and a perplexed reorientation towards the world and its, our future. Many a fighting faith of yesteryear seems to us deeply incoherent or problematic. Many a leading thinker renegotiates her cognitive counters: whether they be the end of ideology, the end of history, the end of politics. The more valiant amongst us have moved suddenly and swiftly from a worship of a plural, heterogeneous world to an obscene sycophancy of a unipolar world and encouraging the process whereby the dreams of a solitary superpower threaten to become the nightmare for the world of nations, especially the South. How else do we understand the possibility of near universalization of MacCarthyism even in the land of Lenin? How is it that our languages, and with these those, our visions of the world, seem to have been so irrecoverably transformed?

Perhaps, this change, all of it, may be located in the notion of "globalization" comprising all those processes "by which the people of the world are incorporated in a single world society" (Albrow & King, 1990-8). In this sense, the processes of globalisation are not new. But one may distinguish at least three historic phases or stages of "globalization." The first long phase of "globalization" accomplished colonial imperialism, over long stretches of time and space throughout the world. The contemporary, second one, is marked by an international efflorescence of concern for human rights and standards of international justice which will chasten the arrogance of sovereign power everywhere. The third stage of "globalisation", running concurrent with the second, has been marked by a steady rise of forces of late capitalism, so actively foreseen by Karl Marx in *Grundrisse*, manifesting multinational hegemony and the dominance of international financial institutions both emerging as suprastatal centres of authority.

The second phase of "globalisation" was indeed dramatically different from the colonial/imperial phase. In the heady days of decolonisation and self-determination of most peoples of the Third World and the emergence of the United Nations system as a prime weapon of the weak, "globalisation" signifies a new vision of the human

future. This vision was concretised steadily in the sixties and seventies by epochal enunciations of human rights. Thus, "globalisation" in the second phase signified the articulation of a new culture and ethics of power, both nationally and internationally. Or should we call this second phase 'globalism'?

Since the inaugural Universal Declaration of Human Rights, developments in recognition of individual human beings against and over state power are, indeed, remarkable. Not merely do they protect and promote basic human rights, categorised as civic, political, economic and cultural rights of individual human beings but we see a steady expansion of conferment of basic human rights so specific human collectives or groups such as women, indigenous peoples, racially discriminated, physically disabled, mentally ill and dispossessed peoples, migrants and most recently, children. Equally remarkable are articulations of rights to self-determination, economic and cultural rights of individual human beings, right against apartheid, right to environment, immunity from genocide, right to peace and the most recent declaration of the right to development of people and states. These enunciations truly mark the advent of a new culture of collective democratic rights of people.

The new culture of globalism also saw that human rights were not directed only against state power; increasingly, they were addressed to formations in civil society, wielding power over people. The little known UN Declaration of 1975 concerning **Scientific and Technological Progress in the Interest of Peace and for the Benefit of Mankind** urges states to so deploy science and technology or to avoid "flagrant violations of the Charter of the United Nations" and eliminate "inadmissible distortion of the purposes that should guide technological developments for the benefit of mankind." Similar in spirit are the Tokyo Declaration of 1971 addressed to the medical profession in dealing with situations of torture, cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment, and the 1982 General Assembly Proclamation of the Code of Medical Ethics, the UN Committee on Crime Prevention, Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, Lawyers and Judges, the 1986 Ottawa Declaration of Health for All, and the movement for a new international information order. All these measures address and involve autonomous professional groups as bearers of basic duties to the peoples of each nation and of the world.

As if this was not enough, the culture of globalism addressed itself to the task of enunciating visions of

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social progress, imbued with standards of international justice in relations and among states. For example, the 1969 UN Declaration of Social Progress and Development in addition to enshrining and enriching the principles of *Panchashila* (known in international law literature as the Nehru Doctrine) proclaimed the duty for developed countries to provide for "greater assistance on better terms," requiring specific dedication of one per cent of the GNP as minimal "aid volume target" as well as "the general easing of terms of lending to the developing countries through low-interest on loans and long grace periods for the repayment of loans" and the assurance that the allocation of such loans will be based on "strictly socio-economic criteria, free of any political considerations."

We understood, till recently, by globalisation, a realisation of the culture of "globalism." In the spirit of globalism in the mid-eighties globalisation appeared as a description of those values which take the real world of five billion people as an object of concern, the whole earth as the physical environment, everyone living as citizens of the world, consumers and producers, and with a common interest in collective action to solve global problems (Albrow & King, 1990:8). "Globalism" seems to be thus a very concrete universalism, moved by the actual sight of starving children in Ethiopia or by the data on malnutrition in Bangladesh (*Ibid*).

But "globalism" in this sense has suffered a massive setback ever since the incoherence of the American economy, with billions of dollars deficit, has come to full view. The humane languages of globalism stand eroded by languages of Super-301, structural adjustment programs (cruelly emerging in an acronym as SAP), trade retaliation, debt problem; gone are the languages of the New International Economic Order, Sustainable Development, Right to Development so prominent in collective United Nations enunciations.

The passage from "globalism" is marked by discursive practices where collective interdependence becomes collective dependence of South on North; where consumption needs of industrialised societies begin to enjoy ontological priority over the minimum basic needs of the wretched of the earth in the Third World; where resilient-market friendly liberal ideologies provide the dominant visions of human futures on the eve of the twenty-first century.

If practices of power account for this shift from 'globalism' to 'globalisation,' practices of knowledge too have been

complicitous. The variety of shifts in discursive formations or traditions of thought have also, I believe, created the ground for the shift. Even at the risk of a reductive narrative, it is important to highlight how the power of modern thought has profoundly transformed the very thought of power. And all this has also transformed the idea of the resistance of power.

Thus, at the very time of efflorescence of standards of international justice, promulgated by the United Nations system, philosophical critique of rights and justice has reached its highest potential. Rights remain a moral good among many other moral goods, defying the logic of hierarchic prioritization. The explosion of rights enunciation in the last half of the twentieth century is paradoxically accompanied by a philosophic universalization of young Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, at a time curiously when the very idea of 'revolution' has lost its historic title to legitimacy. The down of an Age of Rights is also marked by the twilight of philosophic

thought which made it possible in the first place. Among the more eminent moral philosophers today exists a rights-weariness.

This word-weariness, with rights discourse would not have been practically problematic had not the varieties of post-modernisms/post-structuralisms tried to shake the very foundations by interrogating the notion of being "human." Any discourse

on 'human rights' must, ineluctably, adhere to a foundationist notion of 'human' beings who are entitled to rights. But if that very notion is periclitated by philosophic contingencies, the notion of 'right,' too, becomes anguishingly problematic. In the earlier philosophic lineage what was at stake was: who will count as a human being or the criteria of individuation as regards sentient bearers of rights howsoever problematic, and actually horrid (witness the exclusion from the realm of rights of slaves, aliens, women, "barbarians," "heathens," colonized peoples), the moral baseline privileged whoever was to count as 'human' as a bearer of certain rights and freedoms. The subsequent rights revolution was made possible by a rich expansion of criteria of individuation (B.Parekh, 1990). And this expansion thus made possible by adherence to the idea of being and remaining human.

But this very idea now trembles before philosophical critiques deprivileging the notion of being human. M.Foucault's *The Death of Man* sounded the deathknell in the sixties and the lamenting voices in the dirge include as diverse a range from Louis Althusser to Derek

Rights can no longer be conceded the status of self-evident, inalienable truths, and the labour of justifying rights only yields to staid semi-utilitarian rationales, which forbid any level of cogency higher than that of narrative pragmatism.





Parfitt. The problematization of 'subject' and 'agency' survived even the valiant polemics of E.P. Thompson and may outlive the monumental labours of subaltern historians.

'Globalism', in all its languages, was tinged by the notion of an ethical state: politics was constructed as an instrumentality of pursuit of a good society. The state was presupposed, *a la* Hegel to be an ethical entity or *a la* Gramsci as a custodian of values, a moral pedagogue despite the acknowledged contingencies of the Nietzschean will to power. The empirical diversity of versions and visions of good society apart, the new orthodoxy, in a variety of ways, interrogates profoundly the ethicality of the state. Much of the contemporary western theory is marked by the return of the repressed; the Nietzschean turn in political theory, more clearly perhaps than Marxism, addressed the problem of nihilistic practices of power, informed only by transvaluation of values in the march of will to power. Much like Matthew Arnold's *Empodocles on Etna* the world of power represents an arena "where ignorant armies clash by night." In such a vision of power, rights became contingencies of power, and not a discourse on its ethic. And state power, measured by the yardstick of human rights, begins to appear as an institutionalized order of insurgency.

It is in this milieu that Michel Foucault speaks towards the end of his bewildering corpus, of the very end of politics. If politics is the Other of Revolution, and if condition of possibility of revolution have ended, politics too must meet its end. All, legitimation of power, from now on, as Jean Francis Lyotard reminds us, should be performative, knowing no push and prod from the realm of supposed values as Max Weber mistakenly believed. And the logic of performativity ordains the end of what he calls metanarratives. He counsels to us all: "Destroy narrative monopolies;" "Take away the privileges the narrator has granted himself," Globalism's metanarrative of rights - its endless chain novel about human rights - trying to "face the truth and save the world" must be

replaced by little stories of rights and violations and resistance. Decontextualizing Lyotard thus, his counsel would be justice lies in an act of will to destroy metanarratives of power, rights and resistance. All that remains as our estate from now on is what he calls "justice of multiplicities." The hermeneutics of human rights will thus be antifoundational. As Stanley Fish is apt to remind us, antifoundationalism does not signify absence of any foundations. All it signifies is that the foundations have to be rhetorically negotiated. Theories about rights are negotiable genre of discursive totalities of power. How they are negotiated does not depend on 'theory' which has, in a real sense, no consequences. This is how pluralism and diversity avenge themselves.

The hardest task today is how to stop the state thinking through us in the direction of globalization, away from globalism. The rehabilitation of the culture of globalism, the reclamation of the lost languages of social justice, and dependent upon it the construction of practices of solidarity - as a fellowship of suffering - is the very agenda of human rights today.

This synoptic detour to the heart of post-modernist darkness, despite its rich radioactivity, was not designed to proclaim the end of rights thesis! Nor was it an exercise in the discourse of sociology of knowledge, which calls for a rigorous analysis. My effort was undoubtedly, to suggest the arena of cohabitation of knowledge with power and the somewhat uncanny ability of power to conscript unselfconscious epistemic recruits. In this direction, our prime task would be to recover from the debris of enlightenment,

thought-elements in post-modernisms which energize, rather than enervate, a vision of human emancipation.

It is this vision which globalisation threatens. The space for plurality shrinks a point where the whole world becomes an endless chain of shopping arcades or department stores, where all of us become potential Gremlins, lustfully mutated micro-organisms, in pursuit of instant, technologically mediated pleasures, stranger to the very idea of joy. The vision of globalisation threatens to take away local spaces. "Think globally, act locally" is a maxim confiscated of its meaning in an era when the "local" becomes the ghetto of the 'global.' A new world imperialism is in the making of globalisation. If we are to combat it, the historically available repertoire of strategies is furnished by globalism, which repudiates the maxim: "The North Knows the Best."

In a previous issue of *Pravada*, we initiated a critique of populism in politics and scholarship. The re-generation of Right-wing populism in European politics has menacing implications for the Non-European world as well, particularly in the context of immigration to Europe of people from Asia, Africa and of late from the former Soviet Union. The following article, reproduced from *TELOS*, No. 90, Winter 1991-92, provides a critical account of the recent rise of Right-wing populism in France and Italy.

## RE-BIRTH OF POPULISM IN ITALY AND FRANCE

Roberto Biorcio

The crisis of political forms of representation seems to have been accelerated by the impact of international events such as the collapse of "really existing socialism," the end of the Cold War, growing migratory pressures, and disruptions in various industrial sectors resulting from competition from areas with lower labor costs. As a result, there has been a "rebirth of populism" both in Western and Eastern Europe. Despite national differences, a series of populist movements have developed over the last decade. Characterised by anxieties, uncertainties and widespread fear, they seem to exhibit important common features: the destruction of traditional symbolic codes, the appeal to "common sense" against politicians and intellectuals, the return to "authentic" communitarian traditions and reliance on charismatic personalities.

### The Populist Model

Populist movements have been characterised by their reference to the "people" as an homogeneous social unit and the exclusive locus of positive and permanent values.<sup>1</sup> They usually lack an organic theoretical elaboration, and ideology plays a secondary role. This is why different political movements such as fascism and National Socialism, Stalinism and Castroism can all be labelled "populist." Recent comparative studies of typical cases of populist movements have identified several constants collectively defining a specific "model" or "populist syndrome."<sup>2</sup>

- A) Populism contraposes the "people" to those who are not part of the people.<sup>3</sup> In historical and territorial terms, those who are not part of the people usually include political, intellectual and economic elites and the forces advocating ideologies "foreign to the people."
- B) Historical heritage and authentic popular will cannot be expressed rationally (by means of the rules and procedures of formal democracy). They are generally intuited and articulated by a leader. Populism is constituted by a bond between "the

supremacy of the will of the people and the direct relation between the people and the leadership."<sup>4</sup> As such, populism rejects the political representation typical of parliamentary democracy in favor of referenda, direct democracy and the presidential system with an emphasis on strong leadership.

- C) In defining popular interests and sensitivities, populist movements usually emphasize territoriality and nationality. The "nation" in question need not necessarily coincide with any particular state: it can simply be defined as a regional area seeking autonomy. Populism is thus contraposed both to cosmopolitanism (often attributed to elites) and localist closures.
- D) Often populism also exhibits racist elements.<sup>5</sup> Even if not openly articulated, hostility towards those who are not part of the "people" (or who cannot be easily integrated), is fed by the suspicion of the presence of parasitic or corrupting entities or, more broadly, that "diversity" breaks up the unity of the community.

Since the end of the 1980s there has been a resurgence of populism in the more industrialised European countries. Various new political forces have elaborated traditional populist themes successfully in terms of present conditions and different national contexts. Thus "neo-populism" is increasingly seen as a viable alternative political model. It can also be seen as the result of the crisis of traditional forms of political representation, which has created the *potential political space* within which populist politics can thrive. As articulated by *various new political subjects*, populist activities condition and transform both the contents and the contours of the potential political space created by the growing crisis of existing institutions.

The new populist political organisations come from many ideological directions. Some of them, such as the French National Front and a few German organisations, have emerged from various extreme right wing groups; in other cases, such as the Lombard League, the Northern League, or the Flemish Vlaams Block, from movements



seeking regional autonomy. Jorg Helder's Austrian Freedom Party (FPO) was originally a small centrist party; the German *Republikaner* party was originally a splinter group of the Bavarian Christian Socialist Union (CSU); while in north European countries the anti-tax revolt has been the new populist parties' point of departure. These organisations began as small groups on the political margins, where they remained for a long time. Unlike most other active minorities, however, they have succeeded in gaining considerable influence because of the intensification of the social and political crises in many advanced European countries in the second half of the 1980s.

The following focus is on two national contexts in which the phenomenon has become significant and may result in the destabilization of the entire political framework. Yet in many respects the French and the Italian political situations are entirely different. One need only consider the French electoral system and other political institutions of the Fifth Republic (typically presidential and majoritarian) and the Italian situation (characterised after WW II by parliamentarianism and proportional representation) as well as the traditional distinction between the French and the Italian sense of national identity: the first very strong; the second weak and aloof. Even more telling is the impact of extra-communitarian immigrants in the two countries.<sup>6</sup>

### Crisis of the Italian and French Systems of Representation

Since the 1970s, transformations in social stratification, education and modes of communication have significantly altered relations between citizens and political parties. Traditional cleavages defining various social groups have become blurred. Increasingly, complex social organisations involve individuals in numerous situations generating various types of loyalties. At the same time, there is a weakening of the ability of political parties to represent their traditional constituencies because of the general tendency to become "catch-all parties," increasingly more independent of particular social interests. This evolution is mirrored by the better informed citizen's tendency to privilege "issue-oriented" over "ideology-oriented" forms of political participation.

The anomaly of Italian political culture *vis a vis* other Western democracies often has been characterised in terms of "political alienation," "social isolation," and the "absence of a civic culture."<sup>7</sup> In the mid-1970s cultural particularism was still prevalent in Italy. Italian culture was still characterised by loyalty to restricted domains such as family, clan, village or neighbourhood, lacking altogether a national consciousness.

Political integration based on partisan political cultures and on the major political parties' direct and indirect associational networks substituted for a national civic

culture and individual public commitment. The typical project pursued by the major mass political parties (especially the Christian Democrats and the Communists) has been to broaden their support by means of a network of subsidiary organisations (unions, enterprises, student and cultural groups, recreational associations etc.) in which individuals could be integrated "from cradle to grave."

The influence of these traditional political subcultures in Italy has been determined for the most part by their ability to establish "vital" relations with the most important subcultural organisations based on region or class by assimilating and transforming them. Thus it has become a commonplace to designate "white" and "red" zones to refer to territorial areas in which the predominant political tradition has been strongly integrated with local subcultures. An analogous relation has developed with various class-based subcultures. One need only recall the relation between the workers' subculture and socialist-communist institutions and those diversified within regional contexts - between the traditional middle classes (small entrepreneurs, artisans, farmers) and the two main political subcultures. This is why these typically Italian particularisms have not been superseded by any national political cultures (with liberal-democratic orientations).

Over the years this state of affairs generated such a stable political framework that it had no problems withstanding the crisis of the 1970s. Since WWII, elections have been characterised by the constant presence of some 7 or 8 parties (the Christian Democrats, the Communists, the Socialists, the Neo-Fascists, the Republicans, the Social Democrats, the Liberals and - up to the 1970s - the Monarchists).

In the last ten years, however, large sectors of the electorate have shown dissatisfaction and restlessness. One indication of this state of affairs is a growing abstentionism, up from 8.4% in 1976 to 19.1% in 1990. Similarly, electoral mobility has increased, reflecting not any particular shift to the "Right" or the "Left", but merely a vague search for alternatives. This also indicates a growing erosion of the long-standing practice of voting on the basis of subcultural belonging, documented by the fall of the sum of the votes received by the two main political parties (the Christian Democrats and the Communists), from 67.8% in 1975 to 46.4% in 1990. The strength of the two main governing parties (the Christian Democrats and the Socialists) became increasingly dependent (especially in the South) on their control of the flow of state funds and the means of mass communication. Although successful *vis a vis* the traditional opposition parties (the Communists and Neo-Fascists), this way of maintaining the dominant governing positions has led to an erosion of the citizens faith in the party-system—especially in the northern regions. Consequently, during the 1980's, along with



abstentionism, the electoral strength of parties outside traditional ideological oppositions has grown from 2.5% in 1976 to 12% in 1990.

In France there is a long tradition of distrust of political parties going back to the 19th century. This impatience with the *partitocracy* reached the breaking point during the crisis of the Fourth Republic. Criticism was focused primarily on the excessive number of parties in parliament, and on the government's chronic instability. At that time, little more than half the citizens identified with one of the existing parties.

This picture changed radically in 1958 with the Fifth Republic. The number of Parliamentary groups fell from 14 (in April 1958) to 4 (in 1982). Party identification grew significantly to 66% of the votes in 1963 to 85% in 1978. The government shift which took place with Mitterand's further increased faith in the system of representation. The old distrust of parties, however, progressively re-emerged in the second half of the 1980's as a result of disillusionment with the politics of the two main poles of the French political system.

The Right (the RPR; *Rassemblement pour la Republique* and the UDF: *Union Democratique Francaise*) was no longer able to represent effectively the 'conservative bloc,' especially after Jaques Chirac's defeat in the 1988 presidential elections. The success of the National Front further contributed to intensifying the crisis of the moderate Right. The governing politics of the Socialist Party disappointed the Left and the Center-Left electorate *vis a vis* the expectations raised after Mitterand's victories in 1981 and 1988. In 1989 the number of French citizens claiming to be "very close" or "close enough" to a political party reached extremely low levels in comparison to other European countries. In the last two years, the parties' credibility has collapsed even more. According to a recent study, only 20% of the French identify with a party, 19% with a political leader, and 15% with a union. A similar study conducted by the same institute in 1989 measured party identification as high as 39% for parties, 35% for political leaders and 23% for unions.

The crisis of the system of representation can also be measured by other means. Electoral support for parties that have hitherto managed the institutions of the Fifth Republic has rapidly declined during the last 15 years. In the 1976 legislative elections the Socialist party, the UDF and the RPR received together 73.6% of the votes. In a march 1992 opinion poll only half of the people seemed inclined to vote for these parties (18% for the Socialists and 33% for RPR-UDF. The same opinion poll also showed that, along with distrust of the "historical" political parties of the Fifth Republic, support for the new parties grew: with 15.5% of the vote going to the National Front and 14% to the Greens. At the beginning of the 1990s the crisis of the Italian and French systems of representation seemed to have reached a crucial turning

point. Traditional political organisations seemed to have been delegitimated, raising once again questions concerning the existing rules and procedures for voting.

## National-Populism of the National Front

**T**he National Front was founded in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen, after a long period of collaboration with groups and movements associated with the extreme Right. In the 1950s he was elected to Parliament as a member of the *Poujadiste* movement.<sup>8</sup> With the founding of the National Front he sought to regroup the "national, social and popular" Right<sup>9</sup> - a variety of different people, from those nostalgic of the Vichy regime, to those opposed to Algerian independence, to the youth of the New Right born in 1968, to the national Catholic fundamentalists still identifying with Charles Maurras' *Action Francaise*.

At the beginning, the Front underwent various splits, losing in the process its most extreme right-wing elements. For many years its electoral results were insignificant. In the 1978 legislative elections the Front received only .76% of the vote and in 1981 Le Pen even failed to gather the 500 signatures needed to sponsor his own presidential candidacy. In the legislative election that same year he received only 0.18% of the vote. The qualitative leap came in March 1983, when he received 11.3% of the vote in Paris' 20th *arrondissement*. In September the National Front obtained 16.7% of the vote in Dreux, finally attracting national attention. From then on its success spread over the whole country. In the 1984 European elections its average support was 11.1%, with a maximum of 16.9% in the South. By the 1988 presidential election Le Pen was able to garner 14% of the vote nationally, and 22.9% in the South.

Where did these votes come from? According to a study of those who voted for Le Pen in 1984, 18% were people who had hitherto voted for Chirac's RPR, 12% from ex-supporters of Giscard D'Estaing's UDF, 6% from Mitterand's Socialist Party and 2% from Marchais' Communist Party. It was an electorate coming predominantly from Centre-Right parties, but also including former members of the Left.

After 1984 the National Front's electorate changed. A study conducted in the Parisian area to establish its source of support showed that the party had altered its profile after initial electoral successes: "Between 1984 and 1988 support for Jean-Marie Le Pen changed. From bourgeois, it became popular, from 'extreme Right' it became a protest electorate."<sup>10</sup> A series of national studies have confirmed this evolution. In 1987 only 12% of Le Pen's potential electorate indicated sympathy for the UDR-RPR, against 39% in 1984. Similarly, support for the National Front among the working class went from 9% in 1984 to 19% in 1988. During the same period, the





support of the petty bourgeois (i.e., businessmen and artisans) increased from 15% to 27%. As Jaffre put it: "The all too real facade of immigration hides the drama of unemployment and the consequences of the crisis that exacerbate the reactions of part of the popular electorate disoriented by the politicians' impotence, from both the Left and the Right, to deal with its problems."<sup>11</sup>

The kernel of Le Pen's political message was immigration, which he connected to unemployment and lack of safety: "The National Front relates these three terms (immigration, unemployment and lack of safety) and at the same time presents itself as the only entity able to solve the problem."<sup>12</sup> Of course, Le Pen condemned all forms of racism "including French racism."<sup>13</sup> Allegedly, it was simply a matter of preventing immigration from penalising the poorest Frenchmen and from "threatening national cultural identity." It only means a privileging of French nationals in employment and social security (*les Français d'abord*), and of sending immigrants back to their countries of origin. Accordingly, "Le Pen's account is essentially a spoken one, impoverished and often negative. He does not analyze, but only asserts and denounces."<sup>14</sup> The message is systematically and repetitively aimed at what are considered to be the cornerstones of the system of French representation: 1) the institutions of the Fifth Republic; 2) the "gang of four" (the four main French parties: the Socialist, the Communist, the RPR and the UDF); and 3) the "four superpowers governing France" (the Jews, the Masons, the Protestants and the Marxists). Le Pen's other main themes concern the reduction of the state's role to social control and defense, the "de-statisation" of France, support for free enterprise, and the reestablishment of the traditional moral order, emphasising the family and condemning abortion and homosexuality.

What allowed the broadening of Le Pen's support was the ability to combine rigidity and repetitiveness (with respect to the key stereotypes and in opposition to traditional parties and political institution) with a relative flexibility and pragmatic sense in addressing the "common people." This shift was facilitated by the sympathy shown for the National Front by some entertainment and sport figures and by the "conversion" of some former officials of the traditional parties. The media also unwittingly contributed to the National Front's success: by attacking Le Pen they inflated his relevance and cast him as an important political figure. Thus, after 1984, the themes forcefully emphasized by the National Front (immigration, safety, the defence of the traditional moral order) have been taken up by other political forces, broadening the acceptability of Le Pen's message within otherwise apolitical sectors.

## The Lombard League-Northern League's Regional Populism

The political and cultural origins of the Lombard Leagues are completely different from those of the National Front. For the Lombard League's founding members the initial objective was regional federalism. The small group of "Lombard autonomists" sought to transform the geographical-administrative referent (the Lombard region) into a political locus defining particular interests. The kernel of the League's official doctrine was clearly stated in the very first issue of *Lombardia Autonomista* (March 1982): "Your age does not matter, nor does your occupation, nor your political preferences: what is important is that you, or rather we, are all Lombard." To the interchangeability and increasing meaninglessness of the traditional parties' programs the League contraposed defense of specific regional interests.

At least up to 1987 the League developed according to a pattern very similar to that of other federal-regionalist movements that have emerged elsewhere in Northern Italy.<sup>15</sup> The outlook was clearly federal autonomism. The League came into being, gathered strength, and became "visible" for the first time within such a context. During this phase, support did not rise above a certain threshold. It was even weaker than that of the other Italian regional Leagues. In 1987 the Lombard League only managed to reach 3%, mostly in some of Lombardy's peripheral provinces, with little support in Milan's metropolitan area, compared to 4.3% for the Piedmont regionalist movements.

During the first half of the 1980's in Lombardy, "regional belonging" was not sufficient to constitute "spontaneously" a base for a new political movement. There was no autonomous Lombard culture grounded on a specific language and particular traditions. Local dialects were spoken only in peripheral areas, and varied from place to place. Often they were closer to the dialects of bordering regions than to those of other areas of Lombardy. Similarly, ancient local traditions had survived only in few sub-alpine valleys. The attempt to constitute a collective identity initially led the Lombard autonomists to emphasize the Lombard dialect by means of "provocatory interventions in representative institutions. This strategy, however, tended to degrade autonomism to an expression of "local folklore" and, most of all, seemed irrelevant to most Lombards.

As a result, Umberto Bossi and his collaborators began to emphasize *another type of break* with the official national language. In opposition to the convoluted jargon with



which politicians and intellectuals describe social and political events, they pointed to a *second language* informally elaborated in various subcultural contexts. This made it possible to exploit popular resentment against the political and intellectual castes' expropriation of power and language, thus paving the way for the "populist" turn. Autonomist vindications became broadened and transformed so as to express the "common people's" resentment against the political caste. The anti-tax rebellion - something felt particularly by the autonomous petty bourgeoisie and typical of most populist movements - became one of the trademarks of the protest against the central government in Rome. As such, the League reappropriated a tendency that had emerged already after WW II during various clashes between the party-system and "the common people": a tendency privileging private activity and social order against the debilitating impact of politics.

Subsequently, the League deployed another typical populist theme: hostility towards "those who are different," i.e., towards those who threaten the people's homogeneity, and therefore its very identity. It encouraged regional belonging within the context of already existing latent antagonisms. In fact, the League's first successful mobilising efforts were in connection with clashes between Lombards and immigrants (first Southerners and subsequently the extra-communitarians). By the late 1980s the visibility of Third World immigrants in Italy had grown considerably and traditional anti-Southern hostility gradually gave way to hostility towards extra-communitarian immigrants.<sup>16</sup>

Various studies conducted in Lombardy during the 1980s have documented the extent to which latent hostilities were widespread, but relatively undifferentiated among the population: the tension between "the common people" and deviants (from criminals to anyone failing to become integrated within "popular" norms and customs), the tension between citizens and the political caste, and between citizens and the new immigrants. The League succeeded in presenting these three conflicting scenarios as at least partially overlapping and itself as the agency able to deal with them. Consequently, its political model was a combination of regionalism and populism - a very effective model which, within the Italian context, vindicated the values of hard work and efficiency identified with the Lombards' private initiative, in contraposition to the notorious shortcomings of the state apparatus. This resulted in a general assumption that a vote for the League expressed a revolt by the "healthy" parts of society against the political system.

The originality of the League's "regionalist populism" consists in combining common people's representational needs, no longer met by traditional political institutions, and a community defined in historical and territorial terms. The need for political identification is partially filled by the "Lombard nation" as a "strong" community

aware of its interests and able to defend them. The League interprets the political crisis through the contraposition of Lombardy to Rome, which effectively symbolises existing tensions between the common people and the party system. Thus a vote for the League comes to represent an immediate punitive popular pronouncement against the *partitocracy*.

The Lombard League's first Congress in 1989 prefigured the shift from federal autonomism to regional populism: the abandonment of the emphasis on dialects; the shift from the anti-Southern polemic to that against extra-communitarians; and the broadening concept of the Lombard people to encompass all sub-alpine regions of Northern Italy as a "multi-regional community sharing the same culture." As a result of this populist turn, support for the League grew rapidly, well beyond that for other regional formations, reaching 8% of the vote in the 1989 European elections and 19% in the 1990 regional elections.

On the strength of this success, the Lombard League has been able to "export" its own regional populism to other Italian regions. With the founding of the Northern League in 1991, it is no longer concerned with the autonomy of individual regions, but with a "Northern Republic" comprising Tuscany and other Italian regions.<sup>17</sup> Thus the Northern League has promoted other Leagues in the Centre and South of Italy. The main objective has changed: the movement's focus is no longer primarily regional autonomy but political hegemony at a notional level. The division of Italy into three great autonomous sub-nations is meant to ratify - under the auspices of the "powerful" League - the inevitable centrality of Northern Italy, not only economically and culturally but also politically. In the April 5, 1992 elections the Northern League was represented in all Italian regions.

### Two Neo-Populist Models?

**T**oday the French National Front and the Italian Northern League constitute, respectively, the most clear-cut expressions of national-populism and populist regionalism in Europe. Because of different national contexts and outlook, there are profound differences between them. Their initial successes were recorded in areas most responsive to their respective original doctrines: for the National Front, among those voters dissatisfied with the politics of the moderate Right, and for the League, among the electorate of some peripheral provinces of Lombardy. In the course of their growth, however, both movements have rediscovered and reinterpreted all the fundamental elements of the populist model by adapting them to their respective contexts.

A) Both movements present themselves as the defenders of the "common people" against various elites (big politics, big government, big business, journalists



and intellectuals). The cultural model advocated is that of small industrial and artisan enterprises embodying the virtues of hard work, frugality, honesty and the entrepreneurship of the common people. Existing political parties are criticised for lacking any effective programs to tackle the various problems worrying the population. Worse yet, the suspicion lingers that in many cases the dominant elites are in collusion with the very sources of the problem. Here undifferentiated fear tends to translate into a "conspiratorial theory": the collusion of various "enemies" at the expense of the overwhelming majority of the population and their representatives.<sup>18</sup>

- B) There is nothing subversive about the critique of the existing systems of representation (the traditional parties as well as other political institutions). Accordingly, the alternative to the existing system can be developed through the electoral process.<sup>19</sup> This alternative is thus prefigured in the new political organisation and the leader. Thus it is Le Pen who promises to return "France to the French," while League militants are asked to swear loyalty to and defend the interests of the people of the "Po Valley", the League, and its leaders. Disagreement with the leader is inadmissible: where it develops, it immediately turns into an organisational break, with the expulsion of dissidents invariably accused of being part of a plot and in the "enemy's pay." The League tries to relate to the electorate by allowing a form of "belonging without participation" with a maximum delegation of power to the leaders on the basis of their identification with the "people" (French or North Italian) and a minimum of input of personal opinions. The only thing the League requests is material adherence and/or support: everything else follows. The emphasis is on the role of "militants as loyal executors." Its current self-definition is "a party of *attacchini* (those who hang announcements on walls)." Similarly, the National Front claims that "militants owe everything to the party while the party owes nothing to them." Although federalism has historically advocated decentralisation, within the Northern League all local decisions are always inspired and carefully monitored by Bossi himself.<sup>20</sup>
- C) In both the League and the Front the "people" has a national-territorial reference. In both they combine particular issues (usually systemic problems) with possible solutions in terms of a strong, territorially based community. Thus Le Pen combines the "return of France to the French" with problems of immigration, lack of safety and unemployment. For the League the national-territorial dimension (the "Lombard people" and, subsequently, the "people of the Po Valley") is the most important social and political identity.<sup>21</sup> The founding of the "Northern Republic" and the

threat to call a "constituent assembly" of League parliamentarians elected in the northern regions prefigures the historical joining of nation and state. The League's sub-nationalism seems to substitute for the nationalist ideology which, in other countries, is an essential component of populist politics. The success of the Front and the League shows how the delegitimation of the welfare state leads broad sectors of the population to emphasize a strong community defined in national territorial terms as the indispensable basis for a concrete alternative.

- D) Hostility towards "immigrants" has played an essential role for both the League and the Front, even if managed differently because of national and ideological differences. Obviously there is no racism based on traditional biological theories. Instead, this hostility takes the form of a kind of common sense xenophobia predicated mainly on the "negative practical consequences" resulting from the presence of a large number of immigrants: rising criminality and unemployment, social degradation and the spread of new diseases. This renders the League's and the Front's political analyses all the more convincing: the presence of "foreigners" threatens the people's internal unity and identity<sup>22</sup> understood not solely as a past to be reactivated but as "an idealized community to be defended."<sup>23</sup> At any rate, although rather different, national-populism and regional populism are two variants of a political model gaining increasing currency in Europe.<sup>24</sup>

#### Notes

1. Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, eds., *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970).
2. Peter Worseley, "The Concept of Populism", in Ionescu and Gellner, *op. cit.*
3. Margaret Canovan, *Populism* (New York and London: Harcourt and Brace Jovanovic, 1980).
4. Edward Shils, *The Torment of Secrecy: The Background and Consequences of American Security Politics* (London: Heineman, 1954).
5. According to Ionescu and Gellner, *op. cit.*, "Populism exhibits a strong tendency towards the racial myth."
6. Slightly more than one million in Italy, compared to five millions in France.
7. Gabriel A. Almond and Steven Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).
8. Organised by the shop-keeper Pierre Poujade, this movement became part of the anti-tax revolt (supported especially by small businessmen and artisans), fought public corruption, and developed an anti-parliament critique while exhibiting, directly or indirectly, anti-Semitic tendencies. The Poujadiste movement, within the context of the crisis of the Fourth Republic, anticipated the neo-populism of the 1980s. After receiving over two-million votes (9.26%) in the 1956 elections, it dissipated shortly afterwards because of internal conflicts.

# SRI LANKA .....FROM NEW YORK

Judy Waters

**I**t is only because people outside Sri Lanka have accepted racist interpretations of what is going on in our country and have allowed their governments to contribute to the holocaust that the agony has gone on for so long (L.Piyadasa, *Sri Lanka, The Unfinished Quest for Peace*, 1988).

In the past month, several people have made comments to me which point to the image being created of Sri Lanka here in the U.S.A. One US citizen asked, "what's happening in Sri Lanka?; there's so little news, things must be better now" A Sri Lankan asked, "Is it true that both (President) Bush and (Governor) Clinton have mentioned Sri Lanka in the course of the election campaign?" These comments may seem to indicate some contradiction, but in fact they hit on the two main characteristics of the image being created. There is a dearth of news coverage

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of events in Sri Lanka - a trend which has taken hold in the past two years. The US press seems to have adopted an editorial policy which promotes, by omission, the image of a good investment climate in Sri Lanka's quickly liberalizing economy. At the same time, and especially in the past few months, Sri Lanka has been referred to in ways that trivialise, and thus denigrate, the country and its people. The presidential candidates, mirrored by the ad masters of Madison Avenue, have inserted the name "Sri Lanka" in their campaign promotions.

After the suppression of the 'JVP' in late 1989, it was clear to many that a concerted effort had to be made to improve the international image of the country. The government recognized this need, and in mid-1991 appointed a 15-member National Information Strategy and Coordinating Committee; one of its tasks would be to work on 'external public relations'. This effort, however, had been under way for over a year. In April 1990, it was

Contd. from p. 30

9. The symbol of the National Front is similar to that of the MSI (Movimento Sociale Italiano - the rightist party which succeeded fascism); many of its themes are reminiscent of those of the old *Parti Populiste Francaise* of Jacques Doriot (an ex-communist worker who, during the Nazi occupation, embraced National-Socialist positions).
10. N. Mayer, "De Passy a Barbes: deux Visage du Vote Le Pen a Paris", in *Revue Francaise de Science Politique*, No. 37, 1987.
11. In *Le Monde*, (May 26, 1987).
12. Brigitta Orfali, *L'Adhesion au Front National* (Paris Editions Kime, 1990).
13. Interview in "Europe I" (February 3, 1987).
14. Charlot, M. "L'emergence du Front National," in *Revue Francaise de Science Politique*, No 36, 1986.
15. Other Leagues founded in Veneto or Piedmont were characterised by their defense of various aspects of culture, traditions and regional dialects, and have received a considerable number of votes without, however, ever becoming politically significant at a national level.
16. Vimercati points out that "with 1990 the Lombard League unleashed what has now become its battlecry: the rejection of uncontrolled immigration. As time goes on, the number of those who turn to the 'Lumbard' for help against the 'Black invasion' is growing." *Daniele Vimercati, I Lombardi alla Nuova Crociata* (Milan: Mursia, 1990).
17. According to Bossi, the projected autonomy should be predicated on three great "Republics," and not on individual regions. The coexistence of the original League project (federal regionalism) within the Northern League raises a number of problems.
18. There are many examples: Bossi claims that the "head" of the Mafia operates within the Christian Democratic Party: both the Front and the League accuse industrial and political sectors of favoring immigration for electoral and speculative reasons.
19. On the occasion of the referendum concerning the modification of the system of preferences of June 1991, Bossi asked the electors to abstain, arguing that the only meaningful vote was for the League.
20. Even in local elections there have been many clashes concerning candidates between local representatives and the League's national leadership. The latter's positions have always prevailed, even at the cost of serious breaks.
21. Many commentators have erroneously underestimated the League's vindication of the "nation," first to Lombardy and then to other regions, as well as the efforts to emphasize its historical, linguistic and cultural bases, i.e., the "mentality" of the Lombards and of "the people of the Po Valley."
22. To justify proposals to slow down immigration, Roberto Ronchi, the League's expert on the matter, claims that "a multi-racial society produces a break of the equilibria necessary to human beings, compromises its natural need for collective identity thus resulting in social disintegration," Quoted in Vimercati (See Note 16).
23. M.A. Confalonieri, "L'Altra Faccia dell'Europa: Varieta di Populismi Xenofobi," in *Ulisse*, No 6, 1991.
24. During this past year the existence of this political space has led the MSI (*Moviment Sociale Italiano*), in the wake of its decline in the 1990 elections, to follow the national-populist path. Under Fini's leadership, and within the context of the attacks that the President of the Republic, Cossiga, has unleashed against the traditional parties, the MSI is attempting to follow the populist model. Notwithstanding profound differences with the Northern League concerning national unity, the two parties have often found themselves together, especially in the mobilisation of the base against the presence of immigrants and in the violent polemic against the partitocracy. Yet the MSI is unlikely to succeed in this project because of the lingering connection in Italian public opinion with the defeated fascist regime.



reported that US House Representative Robert G. Torricelli (Democrat, New Jersey), at a meeting with Sri Lankan expatriates, had urged Sri Lanka to mount "an intense public relations campaign" on Sri Lanka in the US (*Daily News*, 16 April 1990) [Mr. Toricelli, by the way, is on the committee headed by former Rep. Stephen Solarz.] In the same month, it was reported that CNN would begin airing a three minute weekly program, featuring Rupavahini pieces on such topics as: cultural traditions, independence day celebrations, making Mickey Mouse toys in the FTZ, the departure of the IPKF, and the presidential mobile service in Puttalam (*Island*, 19 April 1990).

Also in the spring of 1990, a variety of foreigners added their two bits in criticism of the current publicity. The *Daily News* (17th March 1990) published a letter from Ms. Karen Krauss, the daughter of a US Senator, who had been in the country for three weeks. Krauss extolled this "exotic land of yours," further adding that "nowhere have I seen such friendly people, wonderful landscapes, unspoiled beaches, sunsets and unforgettable monuments." Getting to the crux of the matter she stated:

I may have come here sooner if not for the bad press you have abroad, the exaggerated nonsense propagated by bodies like Amnesty International... and the false picture of the situation here drawn I suppose by one or two of your disgruntled politicians who shamelessly pretend that mothers are living in mortal fear.

In April 1990, the Production Manager of a French TV crew, doing filming in Sri Lanka for the 'Sirocco' program, stated: "We heard there were problems in Sri Lanka before we arrived but we did not encounter any on our trips here" (*Island*: 15 April 1990). In May, the Chinese and Soviet delegates who had come to Sri Lanka to participate in May Day festivities similarly stated that before their arrival they heard many, mostly adverse, reports, but that now the situation was different:

Your people are now happy, they smile, they talk freely and specially after the IPKF has pulled out, peace has returned to your country (*Sun*, 15 May 1990)

In the same month, a young West German woman who was finishing off a six-month stay in Sri Lanka stated: "It is a pity that Sri Lanka is so badly projected in Germany... It is a pity that no efforts are made to counteract bad publicity." Many people in Germany, it seemed, still thought that a war was going on, but she herself had "found peace here." She concluded:

I have only pleasant memories to take back with me. Knowing a country is understanding a country, and I have now come to understand Sri Lanka (*Island*, 5 May 1990).

A British travel writer for the Singapore magazine *Tourism Asia*, after twelve days in the country, determined that Sri Lanka was an ideal place for a family holiday, especially since children were treated so very well in the hotels (*Daily News*, 12 May 1990).

During 1991 and 1992, there were several more such references. A retired high school principal from Connecticut concluded after a visit to that turbulent country" (*West Hartford News*, 14 March 1991).

Be that as it may, from my vantage point, there has been a noticeable decline in news coverage on Sri Lanka. The editors of the *New York Times*, for example, have evidently decided that events in Sri Lanka do not constitute news that is (as printed on the masthead) "fit to print." I may have missed one or two articles, but so far in 1992 count just six:

- photo with caption, Sinhalese women in Colombo protesting human rights abuses (17 March)
- 1 small paragraph, clash in Mannar (20 April)
- 7 killed in northeast bombing of Hindu temple (21 May)
- 13 small paragraphs, deaths of Major General Kobbekaduwa et. al. (9 August)
- 1 small paragraph, massacre of Muslims in Polonnaruwa district (16 October)

Anecdotal information points to a decline in coverage in other regional daily papers, such as the *Baltimore Sun*.

The articles listed above are noteworthy on two counts: the subject matter and the lack of information provided. Almost all deal with incidents of killing which are essentially viewed as isolated events. Just another ethnic conflict, folks. The captioned photo gives the only indication that something is going on in areas to the south of this conflict, and the caption refers only to abuses committed during the crackdown against the JVP.

That this type of coverage is a product of editorial policy is shown by the large quantity of wire service reports available, many of which are quite lengthy. In the first six months of 1992 alone, a quick count shows the following number of filings:

Reuter	more than 200
Xinhua	at least 45
DPA	at least 45
AP	at least 25
UPI	at least 20

(This is not to mention the reports and analyses which have been issued by more specialized viewers.)

The references to Sri Lanka that have filled this gap would be absurdly amusing if one could forget the real



goings on. Yes, candidate Bill Clinton did make a reference to Sri Lanka. The *New York Times* quotes him as stating in his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention:

Now, under President Bush, America has an unpleasant economy stuck somewhere between Germany and Sri Lanka (17 July, 1992).

I missed George Bush's reference, but according to a person who listens to National Public Radio, in several speeches Bush has chided all those who think that the US economy is somewhere between X country and Sri Lanka.

Bush, intelligence man that he is, and one who has held high office for a while, can be assumed to know a fair amount about the political and economic situation in the country. It may even be that Bush picked up the Sri Lanka idea from Clinton. It is highly doubtful that Clinton has his extent of knowledge. Regardless of either's level of knowledge, both candidates made clear the image of a Sri Lanka at the bottom of the bottom. And both probably hold quite similar views on the advantages to the US of Sri Lanka's present economic course.

There have been enough of this type of comment in recent months. The *New York Times*, in an editorial refuting popular fears that the US/Canada/Mexico free trade pact will cause US companies to depart for low wage Mexico, tellingly stated: "If low wages siphoned away businesses, Sri Lanka would rule the international economy" (9 August 1992).

The advertising world, too, has inserted its particular spin; witness these two quite recent examples:

A Burger King/Coke TV ad highlights a new promotion: buy a coke at Burger King and get a glass for free. An older married couple is shown who are amassing a collection of free glasses. The woman picks up one and says, "We got this one when we met that nice couple from Sri Lanka" (NBC, 16 August 1992).

A sprint telephone company TV ad promotes a new overseas phoning service. Three or four 'average' citizens say whom they will call. A young, friendly-looking Sri Lankan man says, "I'll call my sister in Sri Lanka" (CBS, 13 October 1992).

Another example of how its almost hip now to mention Sri Lanka can be found in the *New York Times* daily crossword puzzle, where the following clue to a three-letter word is given often enough,—" Lanka."

It seems that the art world has also fixed some more attention on Sri Lanka. A recent report tells of a comedian on TV referring to Sri Lanka. And one can only marvel at the timing of a new exhibit at the Smithsonian's Sackler Gallery in Washington DC. The 52-piece exhibit on "The Golden Age of Sculpture from Sri Lanka" will run for eleven months, and according to one announcement shows "ancient Buddhist works" from the country with the "longest continuous history of Buddhist worship of any nation in the world." (*Amtrak Express*, November/December 1992, first item on the "Et Cetera, Et Cetera" Page).

Perhaps in the politician's references, the point is to convince the audience of some broader knowledge; if the candidate knows about Sri Lanka, it may be assumed that he is well-informed and /or intelligent in general. In the advertising references, the point may be to increase the name recognition of Sri Lanka in order to promote a positive image for investment and tourism purposes. After all, just five and a half years ago, CBS nightly news anchorman Dan Rather reported to the nation that a massive number of "Sinhalese tribesmen" [sic] had been killed in attacks on three buses near Trincomalee (CBS News, 20 April 1987). For the next few years, the news image could only be one of increasing carnage, and shocking carnage at that.

Now, again - just as in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when organized thuggery was ignored - we here are being fed with images of nice and friendly Sri Lankans - from a country that is a Third World basket case, but which has its cultural heritage nonetheless. What is actually happening in the country is of no significance, including the circumstances of Sri Lanka's entry as a functioning cog in investment portfolios. By omission, support is being given. In the meantime, if the name of Sri Lanka is denigrated, that's business, here in the land of slick politicians, mediamegaliths and advertisers (and it's hard to separate the three). And actually, you cant have it both ways; all is trivialised and support for business as usual is covert.

Such references, should not be taken as stemming from any serious thoughts about Sri Lanka.

They can only be described as flippant and trivialising, and self-serving.

# IN PRINT

*Socialist Register 1992*, Edited by Ralph Miliband and Leo Panitch, London: Merlin Press, pp.285.

The theme of this twenty eighth volume of *Socialist Register*, containing fifteen essays is the so-called new world order. The *SR* is a major publication in Marxist/Socialist theory and ideas, as are the *New Left Review* and *Monthly Review*.

The transformation of the world in the context of the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the impending unification of Europe and further globalisation of capital are themes of intense ideological debates. Fukuyama's 'end of history' thesis heralded the sense of ultimate victory for liberal capitalism, while President Bush's call during the Gulf War for a 'new world order' indicated the American pre-occupation with its own role in shaping a post-Cold War world order under U.S. hegemony. Meanwhile, in socialist and radical circles, a feeling of gloom and despair set in, particularly due to the apparent triumph of capitalism over socialism as it existed. And indeed, the collapse of the Soviet Union is no less important to modern history than was the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. However, the present transformation of the world cannot and should not be seen as a triumph for capitalism. The further penetration and expansion of capital on an almost global scale is very unlikely to lessen and lighten contradictions inherent in the global capitalist order.

This volume of *Socialist Register* focusses, from many perspectives on the immense changes that have occurred in the world since the eighties. While the general themes are on nature, constitution, the extent and the impact of the globalisation of capital, other major concerns include the decline of the United States in terms of its economic hegemony and its multiple internal crises, the emergence of Germany as the predominant power in Europe and of Japan in Asia, the impact of globalisation on the 'third world', and the shift of ex-socialist countries towards peripheral capitalism.

Among the contributors are Ralph Miliband, Harry Magdoff, Bob Sutcliffe, Immanuel Wallerstein, Basil Davidson, Stephen Gill and Makoto Ito. Socialists will find their essays extremely useful for the task of re-thinking alternatives for capitalism. As Ralph Miliband and Leo Panitch note in their essay "The New World Order and the Socialist Agenda,

The economic crisis that currently envelopes global capitalism, even at the very moment of the ignominious collapse of its communist nemesis,

makes it possible that a different political climate entailing very different currents of thought will come to prevail against the bourgeois bravado we have grown used to over the past decade. As the shortcomings and contradictions of an unregulated market economy even in the 'affluent' societies become more and more manifest in the current crisis, the need for a comprehensive programme of radical economic change will again come to be felt keenly in labour and socialist movements, and indeed beyond.... In such a climate, there is an opportunity for the Left to think creatively about, and work constructively towards, the new forms and strategies that enhance its capacities to put a democratic socialism back on the agenda for the twenty-first century (p. 16).

The current and previous issues of *Socialist Register* are available for sale at Suriya Books, Wellawatte.

*TELOS*, No. 91, Spring 1992, *Special Issue on Federalism*, pp. 192, \$ 8.50.

*Telos* describes itself as 'a quarterly journal of critical thought' and those who are familiar with it know that this journal has consistently been a forum for unorthodox views, even within academic radicalism. Of late, *Telos* under the editorship of Paul Piccone has become a major link between intellectual movements in continental Europe and the English speaking world.

This special issue on federalism comes out in the context of political debates on the evolving patterns of European political integration. While Europe is rapidly moving towards economic and political integration, the federalist theme has emerged as the projected form of Europe in the next century. If an European federation is the political form of a unified Europe, then the post-Westphalian notion of sovereign state/nation state too will undergo a radical transformation. All this will in turn have profound implications on political theory, constitutional jurisprudence, international relations and historical analysis.

As Robert D'Amico and Paul Piccone note in their 'Introduction,' "[t]oday federalism is not accorded the *theoretical* attention it deserves largely because it has been relegated by Enlightenment ideology to the limbo of pre-modern politics or to the *de facto* logistics of highly centralized states such as the present US government"



(p.9). This is perhaps partly due to the absence, in the recent body of literature on political and legal philosophy, of any significant treatment of federalism as a theoretical problem. In fact, the vast body of literature on federalism has primarily treated the subject from functionalist perspectives. Ironically, federalism, though practised so widely in the modern world, is a concept without a Plato or an Aristotle.

What *Telos* does in this volume is bring back to the debate the theoretical ideas on federalism, evolved in the first half of this century in the context of German constitutional developments and of the League of Nations. These theoretical formulations are then examined in the light of contemporary European developments—the unification of Germany and the projected integration of Europe.

Two key essays by Carl Schmitt and Leopold Kohr on federalism are reproduced in this volume. A brilliant legal philosopher and political thinker of the twenties and thirties, Carl Schmitt was long considered a theoretician of Nazism. Interestingly, it was *Telos* that initiated the radical resurrection of Schmitt, devoting an entire volume to this controversially original critic of liberal democracy. Reproduced here is his 1928 treatise

on 'The Constitutional Theory of Federation,' a long forgotten essay which, according to the editors, "provides a detailed examination of federations in terms of which a theory and history of federalism can be reconstructed." Incidentally, Schmitt was not a defender of federalism as it existed in the US and Europe; however his theoretical treatment of federalism is outstanding: he identifies what he calls "the legal and political antinomies of federation" and then proposes solutions to them.

If Schmitt is skeptical about conventional forms of federalism (to him federalism and democracy have opposing philosophical bases), Leopold Kohr is the visionary of small-state federalism. Deeply suspicious of big states ('there is only one cause behind all forms of social misery: bigness,' Kohr argued in his 1957 book, *The Breakdown of Nations*), and taking Switzerland as the model, he proposed that small cells such as Swiss Cantons are preconditions of true democracy and successful federation. *Telos* has re-produced Kohr's seminal essay of 1941, 'Disunion Now: A Plea for a Society Based upon Small Autonomous Units.'

J. U.

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*Pravada* thanks Vivimarie Van Der Poorten and Lakmali Gunawardena  
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# BLASPHEMY AND PERSECUTION

**P**akistan's Movement for Social Justice and Tolerance (JUST) has made a worldwide appeal for solidarity in the protest against the persecution of Dr. Akhtar Hameed Khan, internationally known social activist, charged with blasphemy.

Dr. Akhtar is charged under Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code on Blasphemy. According to this law, "whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) shall be punished by death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine" — a very serious charge, leading to capital punishment.

Human rights groups in Pakistan have repeatedly and correctly been agitating for the repeal of this blasphemy law. As the activist group Women Living Under Muslim Laws has pointed out, this law "is inherently unjust since it has failed to define the boundaries of law within which citizens are expected to live. Therefore, anything can be construed as derogatory and the accused can be punished."

The case against Dr. Akhtar Khan, who is eighty years old and bed-ridden, illustrates the dangerously bizarre extent to which the blasphemy law could be made use of to persecute otherwise innocent people.

The blasphemy case is centered around a nursery rhyme written by Dr. Akhtar Khan and included in a book published by the Oxford University Press. The rhyme, written in Urdu, is entitled 'The Lion and Ahmaq.' It is about a man who brings up a lion cub called 'Brave Lion' and spoils it. The lion later devours the master because it can not be bothered to go out into the jungle to hunt for food. A former colleague of Dr. Akhtar has brought charges against him, alleging that the rhyme refers to the Holy Prophet and the Fourth Caliph and is therefore blasphemous. Interestingly, the poem was written as far back as 1982.

"The tale is perfectly innocuous, unless one were to go about specially looking for an objectionable construction to it," says the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. Eqbal Ahmad, renowned Pakistani scholar, states in an article published in *Dawn* that this poem "may be read as a parable on Bhutto and Zia." Only the sickest of minds, concludes Eqbal Ahmad, would read a reference to the Holy Prophet into it.

He continues "religious bigotry, especially when the law is distorted in the name of religion, does allow the 'sickest of minds' to take the law unto their own hands."

Dr. Akhtar Khan is a legendary social activist who, for nearly five decades worked tirelessly for the service of the poor. His life has been totally committed to social activism and reform. This commitment began in the early forties, when he was a young ICS officer, fresh from Cambridge, in the early forties. While serving in Barisal and Mymensingh, young Akhtar Khan saw the devastation brought on the poor during the Bengali Famine. He soon quit the colonial civil service and became an itinerant lock-smith in an effort to declass himself. In the fifties he laid the foundation for the Comilla program in East Pakistan, one of the most original rural development projects initiated in the Third World.

At Comilla, Akhtar Khan initiated a two-pronged program of rural work and credit-cum-training for the rural poor. When this remarkably effective program for rural development was launched by 'Khan Sahib,' the developmentalist jargon had not yet invented terms like 'empowerment of the poor' and 'poverty alleviation'. In recent years, he was involved in a program for nearly a million slum dwellers in Orangi, Karachi.

Persecution on religious grounds runs parallel to the recent resurgence of Right wing fundamentalism in Pakistan. Dr. Khan's is one of many similar cases of alleged insult to the Holy Prophet. Currently, there are three Christian men facing trial for blasphemy. According to human rights groups in Pakistan, local *maulavis* have been exerting pressure on the law enforcing agencies and the courts to impose the death penalty on the accused. Rights activists also note that 'ulterior, material motives' rather than 'genuine religious fervor' are the motivating factors for blasphemy law suits.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan is of the view that ulterior motives had played a vital role in the persecution of Dr. Akhtar Khan too. Dr. Khan's Orangi Pilot project had helped craftspeople with community loan facilities, popularised family planning, and brought the idea of self-help to slum people. This hurt certain vested interests and weakened the hold of traditional social and religious authority.

What is draconian about Pakistan's blasphemy law is that any individual can bring a law suit under Section 295, alleging 'deliberate intent to outrage religious feelings' and a whole series of other charges. Section 295 has a history of being amended frequently to suit right wing groups who have seized religion for political purposes. Martial Law governments and right wing politicians have repeatedly widened the scope of the blasphemy law to make it what it is today. Prior to Zia's martial law, the only crimes falling under section 295 related to insult to religions in general, and carried relatively lenient penalties. In 1982 during General Zia's martial law, defiling or damaging a copy of the Holy Quran was made an offence, carrying a mandatory life sentence. In 1986, the Jamaat-i-Islami party brought an amendment so as to include the charge of insulting the Holy Prophet, and adding the death sentence to the punishment.

**P**