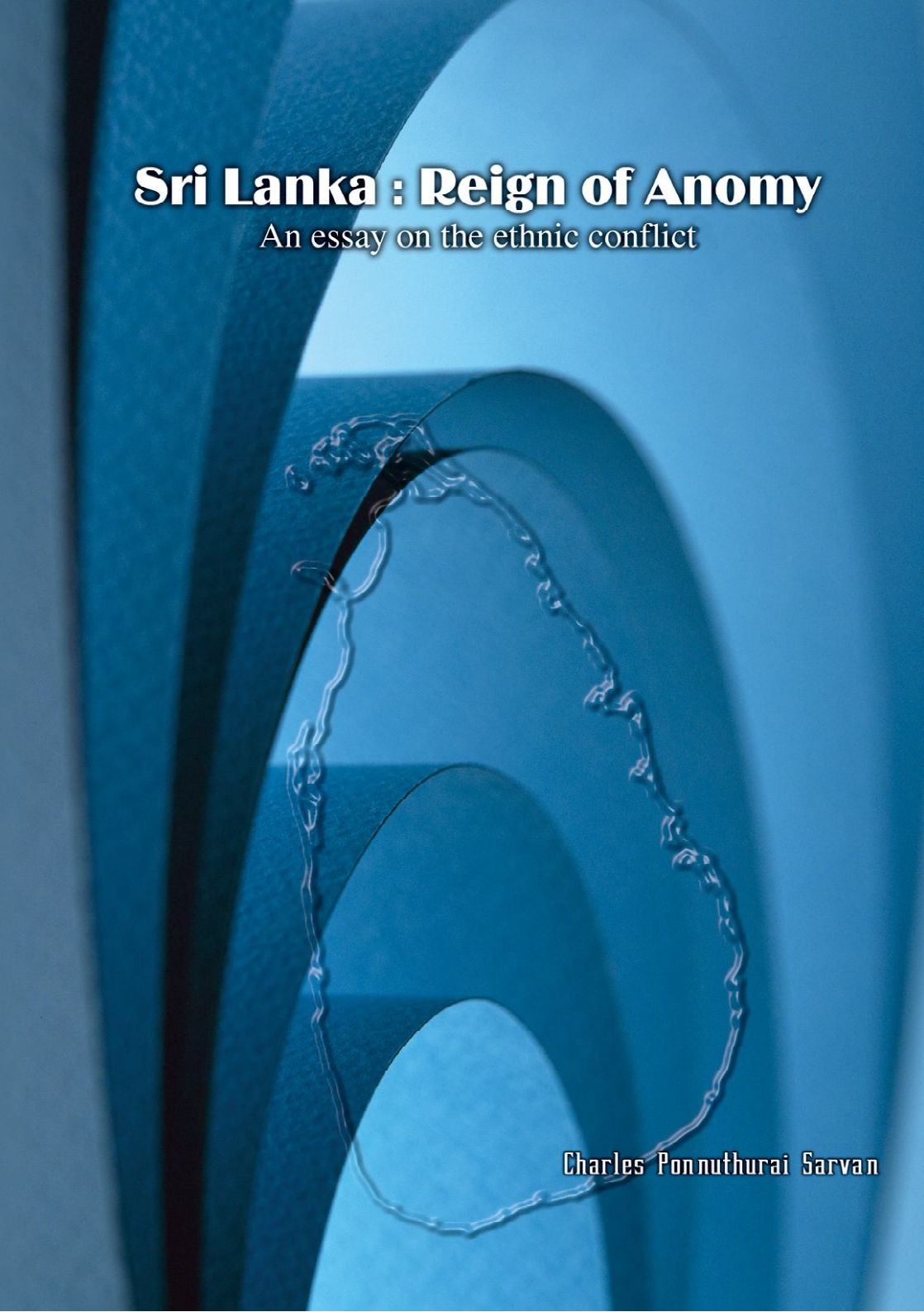
Sri Lanka : Reign of Anomy

An essay on the ethnic conflict



Charles Ponnuthurai Sarvan

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To the memory of

M. Shanmugan, Senior Superintendent of Police,

and

Dharmasiri de Zoysa, Public Health Inspector from Balapitiya.

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Preface

The things that impelled me into exile are also
the things that bind me to what was once home.
(Adapted from A Sivanandan's novel,
When Memory Dies.)

I write this personal statement on Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict with considerable misgiving. I am neither a trained historian nor a social scientist. I have neither their knowledge and analytic skill nor their phraseology and linguistic manner. Secondly, there is an element of scepticism in me, if not of pessimism**:** virulent rhetoric, repeated and repeated, has shut ears to other sounds; closed eyes to other perspectives. Words, written or spoken, express attitudes and ideas which, particularly if reiterated, take on a life of their own and are no longer examined, are assumed to be axiomatic. Thirdly, in a context where the middle-ground is all but eroded, I know I will antagonise both Sinhalese and Tamil. Some Sinhalese (vis-à-vis Tamils) refuse to recognise any fault and responsibility in Sinhalese attitude and conduct; some Tamils will hear no criticism of the LTTE (the "Tigers") and its actions, least from another Tamil. Fourthly, there's the misgiving that rather than stimulating thought and reasoned discussion, I will be met with personal abuse, even by those who don't know me personally**:** the tendency to substitute abuse and insult for discussion, and calm, reasoned, exchange. Fifthly, I write in English, though I have long held that far more important than talking about, or even for, the people, is to talk *with* them – and to do that, one must speak in their language. Yet another factor is that the "reality on the ground" changes constantly, often nullifying the validity of what is said today. And still I write, answering an inner compulsion; if I may say so, a sense of obligation.

I do not claim that what I write is *the* single truth**:** experience and perspective differ; truth is multiple and complex. As Heidegger wrote, "What is known remains inexact, what is [thought to be] mastered insecure" (*Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 53). Besides, it's foolish to claim objectivity for, as Heideggar also commented, even objectivity is judged by a subjective self. Nor do I pretend that I can be exhaustive**:** I merely present my personal understanding, in the hope that the ensuing discussion, even disagreement, will make a small, but positive, contribution. Someone (a Tamil, a retired Superintendent of Police living in Australia) once wrote to me with a sense of having superior social sensitivity and tact that he never spoke of the ethnic conflict with his Sinhalese friends because he did not wish to upset them. But surely part of the problem is that there isn't enough communication between the two groups, each trapped in its own history, experience and thinking?

Truth is not truth unless it is spoken gently**:** see, Forster's *A Passage to India*. Developing this, one can say that even if what is said is true, if it is expressed unkindly, the other will get angry; in anger, she or he will reject the speaker; in rejecting the speaker, the perspective s/he offers is dismissed, the case presented not considered. But, in some cases, it's almost impossible not to cause offence, provoke violent disagreement, anger, recrimination and insult. This is particularly true of politics. Thomas Mann said that in his time human destiny presents its meaning in political terms. So it has been, and is, in Sri Lanka. But, finally, the political translates into the personal, and is experienced, enjoyed or suffered, by individuals, often "lowly" but human**:** hence my sorrow and concern.

A class-based understanding of the conflict has been offered by several, respected, analysts, and their work has contributed much to an understanding of underlying causes. However, it must be

acknowledged that class is not *primarily* pertinent to some conflicts. For example, Mandela states (*Long Walk to Freedom*) that the African National Congress rejected the claim of socialists that Black South Africans were oppressed essentially as an economic class, and not as a people. Indeed, issues such as "race", religion and language are so powerfully emotive that many are willing to damage, even sacrifice, their economic interest for one or more of them.

Since I am unknown, I must introduce myself. I was born (surname: Ponnuthurai) in Jaffna but moved with my parents while still in my early teens to Colombo. I went to school at St Thomas', Gurutalawa; studied for two years at St Joseph's, Maradana, and entered the University of Peradeniya. I graduated and, two years later, left for London. Except for "Shun" (see dedication), almost all my friends were, and are, Sinhalese. Though it may appear paradoxical, I must also say that they were and are not "Sinhalese friends" but friends who (among other characteristics far more important to me) happen to be Sinhalese. In the same sense, I did not, about forty years ago, marry a German but a wonderful individual who happens to be German.

Berlin, 2006-2007

History: General

In Dr Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759), it is said that the present state of things being the consequence of the past, it's natural to ask what the causes are of the good we enjoy or of the evil we suffer. Some are ignorant through no fault of their own – for example, poverty, lack of educational facilities - but those who "voluntarily" remain uninterested in political (that is, in public) matters, unthinking and ignorant, may be accused of evil because they do not care to try to learn how "evil" and misfortune came about and, therefore, how these may be eradicated (Chapter 30).

Collective memory, fact or fiction, conscious or subconscious, is incredibly tenacious. The remembering of history unfortunately leads some to perpetuating that (constructed and contested) history. For example, the Orange Order of Northern Ireland deliberately parades through Roman Catholic districts of Belfast, celebrating the Protestant victory on 1 July 1690 at the Battle of the Boyne. Similarly, among the Sinhalese, stories from *The Mahavamsa*, particularly the triumph of Duttugemunu, are perpetuated. Battles fought in BCE (Before the Common Era; previously, BC, meaning Before Christ) influence thought and action in the present, breeding pride and triumphalism, bitterness and fear – or both. David Lowenthal in *Possessed By The Past* draws attention to a particular kind of history which simultaneously lauds and laments some fictional past; one which is mired in the obsolete, and breeds xenophobic hate. Driven by tribal demons, even victors persist in seeing themselves as threatened; as being perennial victims, thus justifying unjust policy and conduct. In order to highlight their own virtue, the vice and crime

of the Other is magnified. The story of the Black Hole of Calcutta (20 June 1756) has been questioned, challenged, even ridiculed but that has not stopped its enshrinement in British mythology (Jan Dalley, page 5).The eminent historian Eric Hosbawm, in an essay titled, "The new threat to history", warns that the study of history may not be an innocent activity. On the contrary, it can manufacture time-bombs. A people who are resentful of the past, disappointed with the present and uncertain about their future, turn to xenophobic nationalism and intolerance, and history then becomes the raw material for "racism". This brand of history is what a people learn from their family, priests and schoolmasters; from magazines, pamphlets, songs and television programmes. If we are to be saved from "racism", history must be separated from myth and ritual (p. 63). Paul Valery wrote in his *Reflections on the World Today* that history is the most dangerous product ever concocted. Mishandled, history can intoxicate, saddle people with false memories, keep old wounds – real or imagined – festering and produce "the mania of persecution". Friedrich Nietzsche, in his essay, 'On the Use and Abuse of History for Life', warned that History is beneficial only if used in the right manner, and in the right proportion. He felt that the Germany of his time suffered from an excess of history - and so it seems to be with Sri Lanka.

Romila Thapar's *Somanatha***:** *The Many Voices of a History* is a remarkable study, combining patient scholarship, clarity of thought, the calm weighing of contrary evidence, honesty and moral courage. Professor Thapar investigates the history surrounding a single event**:** the raiding of the temple of Somanatha in 1026 by Mahmud of Ghazni. (Ghazni is not far from Kabul.) Thapar uses this one event to scrutinise how history is made, remembered and transmitted. Who remembers? What is remembered? How is it remembered? *Why* is it remembered? What function does the past

play in the present? Thapar shows that what is now remembered and transmitted as a Moslem depredation of a Hindu religious site is not accurate. The early Islamic rulers were not seen as being *primarily* Moslem, and there were Indians "of standing" in Mahmud's army – one may add, even as there were Sinhalese soldiers in Tamil Elara's army. Hindu princes and rulers too raided temples if there was loot to capture and take away, but only raids and destruction wrought by Moslems are remembered, diffused in story and song, and passed on.

With these general statements on the writing and remembering of history, I move to the specific experience of Sri Lanka.

> Modern conflicts, including that involving Tamils and Sinhalese, are reinterpreted in lofty historical terms, seeing in them something that is much grander than the shabbiness of contemporary politics. They are interpreted as ancient feuds which allegedly place today's players in preordained roles in an allegedly ancestry play. (Amartya Sen, p. 43.)

The Sinhalese and the Tamils, the Moslems and the Burghers, have now lived on the same small island for centuries**:** after hundreds of years, does it matter that ethnic Group A arrived on Monday, Group B on Wednesday and C on Friday? Whether it was Group A or Group B which first sailed, walked or waded across from India can be disputed at length but, proving it one way or another will not change feelings and behaviour; will not affect present realities. To me, the significance of "Who is the indigenous Sri Lankan?" lies not in the answer but in the question itself - that hundreds of years later, the question should be asked, should be thought important. It matters

because *we make it matter*.

S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike was the Prime Minister under whom the "Sinhala only" act was passed, and he is "credited", among other things, with having championed the "Sinhala only" cause. (His widow, the world's first female Prime Minister followed his path, and his daughter, Chandrika Kumaratunga, later became President under the changed presidential system of government.) However, Professor Yasmine Gooneratne (born Bandarnaike; a niece of S W R D Bandaranaike) suggests in her *Relative Merits: A Personal Memoir of the Bandaranaike Family of Sri Lanka* that the family name may have come from a Tamil officer, Neela Perumal. He was made high priest of the Temple of the god Saman, and in 1454 ordered to take the name of Nayaka Pandaram, that is, Chief Record Keeper. With time, the name changed to Pandara Nayaka, and thence to the present Bandaranaike. Similarly, there is evidence that the Salagama, Durava and Karava castes were originally Tamil, from South India, and that "Hettiarachige" derives from "chief of the Chettis". (The chettis are described as "a Tamil trading caste".) Again, one wonders, "So what? Is it important?" Yes, it is important because we make it important. It is not the fact, but the value we attach to it**:** we are the source of significance. (How long have Westerners been in America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand? Even if they came after the Sinhalese, how long have the Tamils been in Sri Lanka?) Some Sri Lankans emigrate, acquire citizenship after a few years, then expect and demand equal rights and treatment, object to being seen as "alien", advocate an inclusive, multi-ethnic, multicultural society, but they urge inequality and intolerance back home. Irrespective of who came first to the Island, both groups have inhabited that space for hundreds and hundreds of years. Yet one encounters reference to "an alien Tamil speaking group with little or no history in the island" (*Sunday Island*, Colombo. 25 January, 2004, p. 7). Tamils are condemned to

being for ever *para* ("foreign"). As I wrote in my "Letter to a Sinhalese friend", I imagine a *Veddha* child (descendant of the autochthonous) wistfully asking, "Mummy, when will the Sinhalese go back to [India] where they came from?" (*Sunday Island*, Colombo, 29 October 2006.)

"The collapse of the ancient Sinhalese Kingdom of the dry zone is one of the major turning points in Sri Lanka's history" (K M De Silva, *A History Of Sri Lanka*, p. 81). The periodic invasions from South India which caused this "collapse" have left not only resentment, but have made the Sinhalese, the majority (70% and more of the Island), harbour the fears, insecurities and complexes of a minority**:** fear and insecurity breed anger and hate; these, in turn, violence. The fear is that the millions and millions of Tamils in the South of India, almost all Hindu, will flow into and submerge the Sinhalese, their "race", language (spoken only in Sri Lanka) and religion. But this, it seems to me, is to see ancient history through modern, "racist" spectacles. That the attacks were by Tamil rulers on Sinhalese kings was accidental, the point being that any ruler who felt he could expand or attack and ravage, happily did so**:** see, Romila Thapar above. Unfortunately, ancient attacks from the mainland are seen, and worse, taught in schools, told in story and song, as invasions by (Indian) Tamils of the Sinhalese. The invasions, the killing and the pillaging, are not placed in the wider context of those times. It's not made clear that even if the whole of Sri Lanka had been Tamil and Hindu, it would not have stopped the attacks - as the internal history of India clearly demonstrates. Nor was Sri Lanka passive. I again quote from Professor De Silva**:** As long as the Cholas were the dominant power, Sri Lanka allied itself with the Pandyas (p. 64); King Nissanka Malla of Sri Lanka not only sent an expeditionary force to India, but accompanied the army himself (p. 65). When, by the middle of the thirteenth century, the Pandyas had established themselves as the dominant power in South India, they

were inclined to *support the Sinhalese kings against the* [presumably Tamil] *kingdom in the north of the island* (p. 67. Emphasis added). The major portion of John Keay's *India: A History* deals with pre British-rule India, and one is struck by the many wars that raged**:** invasions from the North by peoples who were either ambitious or were themselves being driven out by other peoples; principalities and kingdoms against one another; rivalry between brothers; usurpation, even of fathers. Indeed, Britain could not have conquered what we today know as "India" (those beyond the Indus) if its many rulers had not been more afraid of, and hostile towards, each other than of the British. As with the Native Americans, as with Africa, by the time the real enemy – Western colonialism and imperialism - and danger were recognised, it was too late. Sinhalese soldiers joined and helped the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British in their attacks on the Kandyan kingdom, and later Kandyan chiefs, unaware or heedless of imperial policy and action in India, helped the British to secure Kandy. Africans facilitated the slave trade, and yet it is said that Africans did not barter or sell Africans - because the concept and identity "African" did not then exist. In modern Sri Lanka (as elsewhere), a collective identity that did not exist in the past is constructed, and then present generations are held responsible, reproached and penalised, for the past when those who acted had no sense of such a collective identity.

No doubt, there are several factors that explain why Sinhalese soldiers fought Sinhalese in the service of Western, Christian, powers but perhaps the case made by Professor R. A. L. H. Gunawardana (see *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, edited by Jonathan Spencer) is of help here. Gunawardana argues that the term Sinhala applied only to the ruling class and, by extension, to those closely associated with it: Sinhala identity did not include all those who spoke Sinhala. *The Mahavamsa* version sought to present the

Ksatriya status of the ruling family, and did not include most of those considered Sinhalese today. Even in the 19th Century, some authors of texts in Sinhala refer to the last Nayakkar king as the *Sinhala maharajatuwa,* the great king of the Sinhala (p. 68). In other words, according to Gunawardana, the term still had a political – and not an ethnic - reference. This claim, one that will fundamentally and positively alter understanding, perception and attitude, is not brought to public attention and discussed. That several kings and rulers from Sri Lanka married Tamil women from Indian royal families seems to indicate that (unlike at present), what mattered then was high caste and not "race". Does this help to explain why Sinhalese soldiers helped foreigners to attack (what are *now* seen as fellow) Sinhalese?

The fall of the Kandyan Kingdom at the beginning of the 19th Century is popularly projected as the result of *Sinhalese* nobles rising up against the *Tamil* king, the brother-in-law of the deceased Sinhalese king. But K M De Silva (a Sinhalese and a Professor of History) states that the Nayakkar dynasty had "identified itself with the Kandyan national interest and blended the Nayakkar personality with the Kandyan background" (p. 222). It is significant that the people did not rise against the king "in support of either Pilima Talauve (in 1810 -11) or Ahalepola (in 1814)." And this, adds De Silva, in a region where "the record of resistance to unpopular rulers was almost as significant as the long tradition of resistance to foreign invaders" (p. 230). A pretender to the Kandyan throne appeared in 1817, "in the guise of a Nayakkar prince. This was Vilbave, an ex-*bhikku* posing as Doraisami, a member of the deposed royal family. That the pretender claimed to be a Nayakkar prince is a point worth noting, both as evidence of the Nayakkar dynasty's continuing popularity among the Kandyans and as an acknowledgement of their status as indigenous rulers" (pp. 232-3). The struggle was for power, status

and influence**:** it was neither "racial" nor religious. Looking elsewhere, we read in Mani Shankar Aiyar's *Confessions of a Secular Fundamentalist* (p. 49) that the Hindu soldiers who marched on Delhi (mid-19th century) did so not to establish a Hindu India but to restore the last Mughal (Moslem) emperor to the throne.

The Uva Rebellion, 1817-1818, is presented, taught and disseminated as a Sinhalese uprising against the British, but it was essentially a Kandyan, and not a Sinhalese, struggle. For example, Solomon Dias Bandaranaike received a grant of one hundred and eighty acres of land and a medal from Governor Brownrigg as a "reward for eminent service during the Kandian Rebellion A. D. 1818": Translated, it means "reward for collaborating with imperial Britain against the Kandyan chiefs". Even as late as the beginning of the 20th Century when talks were in progress to grant Ceylon independence, Kandyan leaders asked for a federal system, with a degree of autonomy for what had once been the Kandyan kingdom, referring to themselves as the Kandyan nation. From colonial times up to and including the 1971 census, Kandyan and Low-Country Sinhalese were classified as distinct ethnic groups. Now the Tamil having been made into the Other, history is either adjusted or forgotten and a Sinhalese identity proclaimed which did not then exist. The history that is popularly subscribed to is one that perpetuates resentment and deepens divisions. For example, it is not mentioned that some of the Kandyan chiefs who were signatories to the Kandyan Convention of 1815 signed their names in Tamil script, rather than in the Sinhala (Spencer**:** 24). Evidently, it did not matter then, but now we make it matter to suit a divisive and destructive agenda.

Returning briefly to India and ancient fears, a Kandyan friend (like me, retired and living in Germany) and I talk frequently on the phone. Off and on, he laments that "the Sinhalese race" (deep down,

emotionally, he continues to subscribe to the notion of "race") is finished. Asked why, he replies that the Tamils will soon take over the whole island. I patiently explain it's most unlikely that 18% of the population would or could control the entire Island. In numerical and in practical terms, it's an impossibility; nor will India, the US and the UN permit it. He is temporarily reassured and comforted but, after a while, I hear again the same anxious sounds. The point I'm trying to make is that certain fears are deep-seated and hard to extirpate with fact and reason. If my friend, living abroad, having access to the media and the internet, still harbours anachronistic beliefs and irrational fear, what of the rural masses in the Paradise Isle? The fear is fostered, in the face of evidence to the contrary, that India will help the Tamils**:** it's the "Tamil Tigers" (and not the JVP) who fought and expelled the Indian army from Sri Lanka; it is the Tigers who stand accused of assassinating Rajiv Gandhi; it is India which has objected to the Tamils in Sri Lanka being accorded anything that smacked of autonomy. On the one hand, there is fear of the horde, running into millions, massed just across the Palk Strait, waiting to settle in little Sri Lanka; on the other, appeals are made to India to assume its "regional responsibility", intervene and sort out matters in Sri Lanka which we are incapable of doing ourselves. (The plea is not addressed to the proximate South of India but to Delhi and the North**:** see Aryan-ness below.)

The Mahavamsa is regarded as a foundational work, and it powerfully influences both the Sinhalese collective conscious and, even more powerfully, the Sinhalese unconscious**:** Carl Jung noted that the collective unconscious consists of mythological motifs. *The Mahavamsa* is generally attributed to the monk Mahanama, brother of king Datusena. This last is significant in that it brings together two sources of power, political and religious, the one strengthening the other. Written in the 6th century, CE (Common Era, previously

referred to as AD), it relates the story of the Sinhala kingdom from its foundation in the 6th century BCE to the reign of King Mahasena, 274-301 CE. In other words, it records a "history" starting about *a thousand years earlier than the time it was written.* I quote Professor Carlo Fonseka (*The Island*, 22 October 1995)**:**

> I do not find that reading the Mahavamsa enhances my self-esteem as a Sinhalese. On the contrary I feel greatly embarrassed and deeply humiliated when I learn that we the Sinhalese are the descendants of Vijaya, the banished profligate son of an incestuous marriage between (Sihabahu) and sister (Sihasivali) whose mother was so exceedingly lustful that only a real lion could satisfy her sexually. [The princess sexually stimulating a lion to mate with her has been attributed by some to the sexual fantasy of celibate monks.] Moreover, Sihabahu killed his leonine father, the king of the brutes […] Thus, according to the Mahavamsa, brutishness, bestiality, incest, patricide and profligacy, were the stuff of our genesis […] of the 54 rulers recounted in the Mahavamsa, 22 were murdered by their successors; 11 were overthrown; 13 killed were killed in battle and 6 were assassinated.

Fonseka also comments that the admiration for royalty (compare the fatuous adulation accorded to Princess Diana) is misguided: "My heroes are among those who discovered how to harness the forces of nature to promote human welfare; diminished the load of human suffering caused by disease; created things of beauty in music, literature and art." Emperor Marcus Aurelius

(*Meditations*, written in the 170s of the Common Era) asked himself how one could estimate the true value of another person, and concluded it was by looking for the things to which that person gave value and importance. To Fonseka, real heroes are not kings who extended territory at the expense of others or warriors who slaughtered a great many human beings, but those who have made a positive contribution to humanity; those who have brought some beauty to life**:** one cannot but admire and applaud Fonseka's values.

The Mahavamsa records that King Dutugemunu, having caused the destruction of a great many lives, was concerned he would not attain *nirvana*. Thereupon, Buddhist monks comforted him, saying he had killed only one and a half men**:** the one was a Buddhist and the other only on the path to becoming a Buddhist. The others who died, being non-Buddhist, were but animals. "But as for thee, thou wilt bring glory to the doctrine of the Buddha" (*The Mahavamsa*, end of Chapter XXV). One is appalled that human beings can be seen and treated as if they were animals; incredulous that such an inhumane attitude could be proudly espoused in the name of the gentlest of religions. The Buddha in his sermon on loving kindness (the *Karaneeya metha Sutra*) urged the cultivation of loving thoughts towards all: May all beings be well and happy. May we cultivate boundless love for all beings. Let these thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world, without any hatred, without any enmity.

And yet *The Mahavamsa* seems not to be scrutinised, reflected upon and questioned. Dr Mithra Fernando (Australia) comments that the "Sinhala Buddhist mindset has been nurtured in isolation, far away from the scientific historical facts." (In a message to me dated 22 May 2007, Dr Fenando says his article, though available on the web, has not been published as yet.) I do not know to what extent *The Mahavamsa* is actually read today, but material from it is

transmitted orally, in Sinhala, by monks, teachers, parents, relations and journalists – material that fosters hatred, justifies inhumane violence; elevates cruelty and force to the level of patriotism, of virtue, even of spirituality. Returning to Dr Fernando's comment about the lack of facts, the Indian government wishes to deepen the waters between it and Sri Lanka, so that it could function as a shipping canal. However, Hindu groups protest because it would damage the bridge, now lying under the sea, built (according to the *Ramayana*) by god Ram and his monkeys. The suggestion by the government that there was no real evidence for this claim caused outrage among some Hindu groups in India, and there was vociferous protest (September 2007).

As Professor K. Indrapala observes, present-day nations and regimes have a strong inclination to believe that they and their forebears have 'possessed' their present territory since time immemorial. Belief in the bond between 'blood' and 'soil' was one of the most powerful psychological motors of nineteenth century "racist" nationalism. This kind of "nationalism" dresses up myth as history. Nations are (historically) recent entities pretending to have existed for a very long time. Identity-history can lead to anachronism, omission, de-contextualization and, in extreme cases, lies (pp. 12-13).

Even among those who recognise the work as myth, there are some who continue to emotionally believe in it. One is tempted to view *The Mahavamsa* as a pernicious work, one that has wreaked horrendous damage. Sirima Kiribamune (1985), states that *The Mahavamsa* has superimposed on the conflict between Elara and Duttgamani attitudes and feelings not present at the time. The Tamil king Elara, defeated by Dutthagamani, was a patron of Buddhism; he was not fighting a Tamil war, and there was no conceivable difference between the troops on the two sides. (The earlier chronicle,

The Dipavamsa, does not make any reference to Elara's racial identity.)

Herodotus (circa 480-425 BCE) in his *Histories* wrote about a period about a hundred years before his time**:** *The Mahavamsa* relates stories, some as distant as a thousand years prior to the time of writing. Herodotus is known as the father of Western History because he is credited with being the first to undertake research and verification; compare authorities and attempt to estimate probabilities. No such attempt is made in *The Mahavamsa*. But while I dare say that *The Histories* are read today more for "story" than history (his story), *The Mahavamsa* is regarded as embodying literal truth because it is a written text. Some of those who believe it do so because they are simple-minded; others because *wish* to accept it – there is no historic or archaeological evidence to support the Vijaya myth. As Michael Roberts comments with wry irony, there is as much objective, verifiable, evidence for the Vijaya story as there is for that of Adam and Eve. (It must be noted that the absence of fact and objective evidence, rather than demolishing a myth can help in its perpetuation.) Apart from all the supernatural (non-rational, non-scientific) happenings recorded in *The Mahavamsa*, there is absolutely no corroboration, either in the Buddhist Canon or its major ancillary works, that the Buddha visited the Island even once - let alone three times. (For Emperor Asoka being a Buddhist, see Appendix 1.) Peoples and tribes have what are known as originary myths – twins suckled by a wolf and going on to found what became the Roman Empire – tales that are fascinating but not taken literally.

According to *The Mahavamsa* (Chapter V11), the Buddha selected Sri Lanka as the place where his religion would be preserved in its purest form. Dying, he spoke to Sakka (Indra, king of the gods) and asked him to protect Vijaya who had just landed on the Island.

Sakka, being otherwise busy, handed over the responsibility to Visnu (also from the Hindu pantheon) the god who, according to *The Mahavamsa*, is like the blue lotus in colour. The Jews believe that Jehovah has given them 'the Promised Land', Calvinists believe they have been divinely chosen for salvation, and Western Europe thought it had a sacred mission to civilise and Christianise the rest of the world, and so they conquered, expropriated and exploited.. The idea of divine election is extremely dangerous because it sanctions injustice and cruelty, the group believing that it is acting in a great, divine, cause. Such belief is used to justify – even compel - behaviour which, otherwise, would be ethically reprehensible**:** what greater cause than that of God himself? Richard Congreve, Bishop of Oxford, said that God Himself had entrusted India to Britain and, therefore, Britain had no choice but to hold on to its possession! (See, Ashis Nandy, page 34.) Richard Dawkins, in *The Selfish Gene*, shows that seemingly altruistic action can be traced to a selfish end**:** religious fervour, the readiness to carry out the most ungodly of acts in the name of god, the sacred or divine, can be similarly understood.

Etymologically, the word "education" comes from "to lead out". But the broadening of horizons is also to better understand the starting place. As T. S. Eliot wrote in 'Little Gidding', "We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time." And so, looking elsewhere in order to understand the here and now, one notes that the Bush administration of the USA believes it has a manifest destiny, a divine license; that the West has been chosen by Christ and entrusted with a mission**:** see, *New York Review of Books*, 15 February 2007, p. 54. Once again, I quote from Amartya Sen (winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics, formerly Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, and presently Lamont University Professor at Harvard):

> The illusion of destiny nurtures violence in the world (p. X1V). With instigation, a fostered sense of identity with one group of people can be made into a powerful weapon to brutalise another. "Indeed, many of the conflicts and barbarities in the world are sustained through the illusion of a unique and choiceless identity. The art of constructing hatred takes the form of invoking the magical power of some allegedly predominant identity that drowns other affiliations [and overpowers] any human sympathy or natural kindness". (op. cit., p. XV).

Professor David Little states in his work**:** "It is a central conclusion of this study that the claim to pre-eminence, tinted with notions of racial and religious superiority, must bear considerable responsibility for ethnic strife in Sri Lanka" (*Sri Lanka: The Invention of Enmity*, p. 158).

The Mahavamsa does have interesting and instructive stories, and should continue to be read**:** what needs to be altered is how the text is presented and interpreted. To cite an instance, Chapter V1 describes an act of patricide, the slaying by Sihabahu of his lion-father.

The lion sees Sihabahu and "for love toward his son", comes out of the cave, thus making himself vulnerable. Sihabahu shoots an arrow at him. It "struck the lion's forehead but because of his tenderness toward his son, it rebounded and fell on the earth at the youth's feet. And so it fell out three times, then did the king of the beasts grow wrathful and the arrow sent at him struck him and pierced his body." The story should not be taken literally but *figuratively*, as

a tale that simply tries to teach wisdom and moral conduct; the Buddhist ideal of self-control and compassion**:** love forgives and protects. As long as there was love in the lion for his son, it was not "touched". It is only when love is replaced by self and anger that we can be wounded. How we react to what happens to us is finally more important than what happens, etc.

Texts and their influence bring me to a modern work, D C Wijewardena's *Dharma-Vijaya* (*Triumph of Righteousness*), better known by its alternate title, *The Revolt in the Temple*, 1953. Professor Kumari Jayawardena, in her perceptive and penetrating study of ethnic and class conflict in Sri Lanka, describes *The Revolt in the Temple* as "rambling" and "openly chauvinistic" – descriptive terms that have also been applied to Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*). It puts forward legend as historical fact, and is a "totally romanticized and unhistorical view of the past, based on mythology, fantasy and racial 'destiny'" (Jayawardena, p. 69). An unfortunate inheritance can be traced from *The Mahavamsa* through the virulently "racist" Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933. See, among other works, Lawrence Zwier's, *Sri Lanka***:** *a War-Torn Nation*, 1998) to *The Revolt in the Temple.* I recall that the book was widely read and lauded for its "plain speaking". Even those who hadn't read the work, had an outline of its argument, and went along with it. Again, what is symptomatic and significant is the ready willingness of so many to be carried along, thoughtlessly and heedlessly, by the text. Like other such inflammatory works, it pandered to a virulently "racist" political and social climate, and hence its immediate acceptance and popularity**:** it was published in Sinhala and English. Perhaps, the aura of scholarship and erudition, the exuding of righteousness and reason, even piety and virtue, helped to create this 'reception'. (One is reminded of Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* who wrote in lofty, compassionate, caring terms about the African, and suddenly

ended with "Exterminate the brutes".)

Vijaya was a Hindu, Buddhist conversion of the Island being reputed to have taken place about three hundred years later, thanks to the effort of Mahinda but, identifying "race" and religion, Wijewardena states that Vijaya and his followers were Sinhalese in heart and mind even before they left India (p. 31). What it is that made them already Sinhalese is not explained, nor any evidence offered for the claim**:** the book seeks not to provoke thought but to arouse emotion and sweep readers along, unthinkingly. The birth of the Sinhalese "race" was not accidental but predestined – see Amartya Sen above - and the Sinhalese-Buddhist nation is divinely designed to carry "the Torch of Buddhism" for another 2,500 years, making a total of 50 centuries**:** Hitler, another Aryan supremacist, settled for a more modest thousand-year Reich. The attraction of numbers to individuals and groups with such a mind-set; the use of certain numbers in incantation, spells and magic, is a subject in itself. Why not 49 or 51 centuries?

Wijewardena quotes from a poem by Goethe which, roughly paraphrased, says that one must rise or sink; win and rule or lose and serve; be the hammer or the anvil. (Eventually, it's the hammer and not the anvil that's more likely to break. Meanwhile, the innocent nails, caught between hammer and anvil, suffer.) Wijewardena's is a ruthless Darwinism; Tennyson's nature, red with blood in tooth and claw, here wrapped in divine election and sacred duty. There is no awareness in Wijewardena that the difficulty and ethical obligation is to overcome what appears to be our innate, human, nature. "Among animals, man is uniquely dominated by culture, by influences learned and handed down. Some would say that culture is so important that genes, whether selfish or not, are virtually irrelevant to the understanding of human nature." (Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish*

Gene, Chapter 1, "Why are people?").

Having advocated and justified domination, Wijewardena goes on to lament the deterioration of Buddhism, forgetting that the Buddha is credited with having urged compassion to all human beings, Buddhist or not. Either he did not realize, or did not acknowledge, that he (Wijewardena himself) is, therefore, an example of those who have betrayed the very essence of Buddhism, and caused its deterioration, its fall from the ideals preached by the Buddha.

The Sinhalese are Aryan, and the Aryan race is not only intellectually but, more importantly, *morally* supreme in the world (p. 33), asserts Wijewardena, blatantly ignoring history. The phrase, Aryan race, translates into "White" people. (I place "White" within markers because, as a character in Forster's *A Passage to India* observes, there are really no white human beings.) Western imperialism which lasted centuries, the African slave-trade, the horror unleashed on the Congo by Leopold of Belgium, the first and second World Wars, the near-extermination of the Jews – the list is long - these weren't perpetrated by non-White, non-Aryan people. One recalls the words of Mark Twain:

> In many countries we have chained the savage and starved him to death; and this we do not care for, because custom has inured us to it; yet a quick death by poison is loving-kindness [compared] to it. In many countries we have burned the savage at the stake; and this we do not care for, because custom has inured us to it; yet a quick death is loving-kindness to it. In more than one country we have hunted the savage and his little children and their mother with dogs and guns through the woods and swamps for an afternoon's sport, and filled the region

> with happy laughter over their sprawling and stumbling flight, and their wild supplications for mercy; but this method we do not mind, because custom has inured us to it; yet a quick death by poison is loving-kindness to it. In many countries we have taken the savage's land from him, and made him our slave, and lashed him every day, and broken his pride, and made death his only friend, and overworked him till he dropped in his tracks; and this we do not care for, because custom has inured us to it; yet a quick death by poison is loving-kindness to it […] There are many humorous things in the world; among them the white man's notion that he is less savage than the other savages."
> (Mark Twain, *Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World*. Chapter XX1. Pages 189-192.)

David Brian Davis makes the point that humanity was in the "savages" and savagery in those who claimed to be civilized (*Inhuman Bondage*, p. 215). For an eye-witness account, one turns to Bartolome De Las Casas and his *Short Account* (1542)**:** It was the Europeans who were the savages, and the Native Americans whose culture was poor, whose technology was non-existent and who had very few, if any, of the arts and sciences which for all Europeans marked the inevitable stages towards true civility, who were 'civilised'. (For a history of Latin America from the time the Europeans came ashore to the present, see Eduardo Galeano's powerful and damning *Open Veins of Latin America*; for a more general account of Western imperial and colonial action, see works such as Mark Cocker's *Rivers of Blood, Rivers of Gold: Europe's Conquest of Indigenous Peoples*.)

This is not to argue the contrary, namely, that non-White, non-Aryan, people were, and are, morally superior**:** *all* human beings

have the potential to be savage and, when possessed with power ("possessed" also in the sense of being in the grip of "evil" spirits) have tended to misuse it, to the detriment of other human beings and the environment. I have dwelt on Wijewardena because his work leads me to "race" - a Romantic (with a capital R) belief in "race" is but a short step away from "racism".

In an article titled 'The Term "Racism" and Discourse', published several years ago (see Appendix 2), I attempted to make the case that the word "racism" was unsatisfactory, being too vague, covering a variety of different forms of prejudice. In the West, "race" seems to be a coded way of referring to discrimination based on skin-colour**:** shouldn't one be specific and frank, and rather name this type of "racism" as "colourism"? Further, race, as popularly understood, has no scientific foundation**.** Race (now often substituted by the term ethnicity) does not exist, but "racism" continues to thrive and flourish, not least in Sri Lanka. Several scientists have shown that the racial categories utilised to divide people do not correspond with actual genetic populations. So too, the broad genetic populations that supposedly compose "races" are too genetically diverse for races to be meaningfully distinct from each other. Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, in their *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, observe that "racism" leads to contempt, intolerance, violence, humiliation and exploitation**:** "races" do not constitute isolable biological units but a certain mind-set, a certain group, at a certain time in its history, constructs and fervently believes in "race". Presently, the old biological "race" has been replaced by a "racism" without "race", one not based on blood and genes but on culture. But, racists argue, culture can be seen as nature, and so the biological returns with a vengeance. Racist organisations often refuse to be "designated as such, laying claim instead to the title of nationalist" (Balibar & Wallerstein, p. 37).

The human genome has been mapped**:** in the words of the journal *Science*, "the internal genetic scaffold around which every human life is moulded". The major impact of such studies is to reveal just how similar we are -- from a genetic perspective, all humans are African - not only to each other, but to other species. Prejudice, oppression and "racism" feed on ignorance. Knowledge of the genome should foster compassion, partly because the human gene pool is extremely mixed**:** stigmatizing any particular group of individuals on the basis of "race" is absurd. However, "racism" is irrational and, therefore, hard to combat with reason, science and fact.

Several states, particularly in the West, have passed laws that prohibit and penalise the inciting of hatred based on colour, gender, sexual orientation, religion, language and "race". The UN has urged that the perpetrators of such crime be "resolutely" brought to justice. It has also called upon those states that have not yet done so to consider including in their legislation laws that will punish incitement to group hatred; indeed, that it should be "an aggravating factor for the purpose of sentencing". Were there such laws in Sri Lanka, many public figures, political leaders and Buddhist monks will find themselves in court. Indeed, in the present climate, it would not be practical to apply the law**:** far too many would end up before the judge.

Sirima Kiribamune, in the paper already cited, reminds readers that the terms 'Aryan' and 'Dravidian' have entirely, and only, a linguistic, and not a racial, denotation. G C Mendis, in his *The Early History of Ceylon*, states that the word 'Dravidian' does not represent a distinct "race" but those who happen to speak languages classified as Dravidian. "It is difficult to gauge the extent of Tamil blood among the Sinhalese, but there is no doubt that it is considerable" (Mendis, p. 9)**:** one recalls Daniel Defoe's comment,

made in 1700, that the phrase "a true-born Englishman" is a contradiction, an irony, and in fact, a fiction. Martin Bernal, in his much-read, *Black Athena*: *The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, says that "race" does not exist, and should not be important. But there seems to be a mystic belief in it; in communion and communication not through reason, but via feeling and "blood": it exists because it has been brought into existence in order not merely to emphasise group difference but to assert group superiority. The belief in an Indo-Aryan family, the Romantic belief in an Indo-European *Urheimat* (original home) somewhere in the mountains of Central Asia, was the product of the racist atmosphere prevalent in Europe in the late 18th and early 19th century. The black (African) nature of Egypt was emphasised in order to distance Egypt from Europe, and India [one includes Sri Lanka here] replaced Egypt as the exotic ancestor of Europe. "For 18th – and 19th – century Romantics and racists it was simply intolerable for Greece, which was seen not merely as the epitome of Europe but also as its pure childhood, to have been the result of the mixture of native Europeans and colonizing Africans and Semites" (Bernal, p. 2. In the original, these lines are emphasised). Sir William Jones (1788) speculated: the similarity between "Sanscrit" (sic), Greek and Latin being such, could it be attributed to accident? Perhaps, they sprang from a common source? B.C.Clough, who produced the first Sinhalese-English dictionary (1821) picked this up, and applied it to the Sinhala language. Friedrich Schlegel, a German philosopher (he believed India had helped to civilize Europe) used the term 'Aryan' in 1819 to designate people whose languages seemed to be related. A few decades later, we find Max Muller using the term, 'Aryan race', though he later was emphatic in saying that 'Aryan' is inapplicable to race.

Bernal (op. cit, p. 236), states that Western imperialism ensured

the natives learnt about their own civilization only through Europeans and European scholarship**: "**This provided yet another rope to tie the colonial elites to the metropolitan countries." But among the Sinhalese, the Aryan myth is not only of the elite, not of the few, but of the group. For example, the 'national dress' worn by males was known as the 'Ariya Sinhala suit'. (No Sinhalese kings have been referred to as *Ariya*. In fact, it was the dynasty which ruled in Tamil Jaffna who called themselves *Arya Cakravarti*, or Arya emperors**:** "It is an irony of history that in later times it was the Sinhala who came to be associated with the term Arya". See, Gunawardana in Spencer, op. cit., p. 74.) Of course, as Western imperialism consolidated its grip on the Indian subcontinent, respect and admiration gave way to condescension and contempt. This is not hard to understand. The imperialist and the colonialist cannot see the Other as an equal human being and still continue to conquer and rule, dispossess and exploit. To justify conduct, to salve the conscience, he must believe in inferiority**:** in Darwinian terms, imperial subjects had proved themselves inferior, having been unable to defend themselves – the most fundamental requirement for group survival.

The Sinhalese attitude to imperial Britain was (and is) complex and contradictory. On the one hand, there was deep resentment – the consequence of which I will come to later – but, on the other, admiration for Western power (scientific and military) and other attributes such as discipline and organisation. (I recall that a high compliment in Sinhala was to say of someone that he was like a "white" man – *sudha vaage!* I don't know whether the expression is still used.) Though defeated and ruled by European powers for almost half a millennium, the Aryan affiliation (from the end of the 19th century) helped the Sinhalese to redeem a measure of self-respect. It provided a prestigious pedigree, relating them to the advanced 'White

race'. If the 'Aryans' had been an impoverished people, bereft of power and science, an association with them would have been contemptuously rejected. Yet once again**:** we believe what we like, and need, to believe. It was a salve to the Sinhalese that they were defeated, and ruled, exploited and insulted by their "own", fellow, Aryans. (Similarly, some Tamils say that, if they are to be tyrannised, they would prefer being tyrannised by the Tigers than by the Sinhalese.) So it is that one still comes across sentences such as the following**:** "The Kandyan Chieftains really exchanged the Nayakkar Dynasty with the Windsor Dynasty of England who were of Aryan stock replacing the wholly alien Dravidian power" (*Sunday Times*, Colombo, 4 March 2007, p. 4.) The British deceived and betrayed the Kandyan chieftains, but the result was rule by fellow Aryans – something preferred and, therefore, a consolation. (I am grateful to the author for sending me a copy of his article, and would believe that either he was not aware of the full implication of the sentence or, better, that I have misread it. With reference to the hurtful phrase, "wholly *alien* Dravidian power", see Appendix 3**:** Alien at home.)

Kumari Jayawardena, in her work already cited, presents evidence showing that in the 1930s, the myth of Aryan-ness led some to admire Hitler, to wish for a Sinhalese Hitler to stop the degeneration of the Aryan Sinhalese "race", and to make it pure and triumphant. In 1939, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike was favourably compared to Hitler because he expressed violent nationalist (read "racist") sentiments and determination**:** see, David Little, *Sri Lanka: The Invention of Enmity* (p. 61).

If Hitler had, however briefly, occupied Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), Nazi ideology, attitude and conduct would have been bitter disillusionment to those Sinhalese who foster fond ("fond" also in the earlier meaning of "foolish") belief in belonging to the Aryan

family of "races". It would have been a cruel shock, but it would also have been curative. In contemporary terms, one imagines a Sinhalese, Aryan-believing individual (or group), meeting up with a neo-Nazi band in the West, proclaiming his Aryan-ness and expecting a brotherly embrace. Sri Lankans in the West know that, if and when there is "racial" prejudice, what usually counts is skin-colour – not whether one is "Aryan" or "Dravidian". V G Kiernan, as quoted by me in Appendix 2, says that "White" people had the impression of belonging to one "race". See also, Theodore Allen's *The Invention of the White Race*, London, 1994. No doubt, after 9/11, there is a new 'clash of civilizations' and not only "people-of-colour" but Moslems are also looked upon with suspicion and hostility.

However, given the degree of irrationality in human beings, my imagined encounter between a Sinhalese "fondly" believing in his Aryan-ness, and a neo-Nazi Aryan group in the West, may not effect a cure**:** of the almost fifty million killed in the Second World War, about thirty million were from the former Soviet Union. (The Russians took their revenge when they marched into demolished Berlin, and other parts of Germany.) Despite that history, despite Nazi contempt and devastation, people of colour in Moscow and other cities - Aryan or not - were warned this year (2007) to stay indoors around the 20th of April because Russian right-wing gangs would be celebrating Hitler's birthday! Belief is impervious to reason.

Coming to the period of Western imperialism, it's sometimes said that citizens of former imperial territories, since they've been independent for decades, should now take responsibility for the present state of affairs in their respective countries. (In the strict sense, what happened in India and Ceylon was imperialism and not colonialism because, unlike in America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand – for a while, in Kenya and Rhodesia – people from the

West did not settle in large numbers, did not "colonise", the sub-continent. However, the word "colonialism" seems to have become an umbrella term, like "racism", and now includes "imperialism".) Some of the effects of imperial history persist into the present**:** some pasts are not past. The Portuguese first made contact with "Ceylon" around 1505 and soon encroached more and more into the island. In due course, the Portuguese were displaced by the Dutch (1656-1802) and the latter by the British who ruled until independence in 1948. Of the many consequences of centuries of Western, Christian, rule I will mention two. Imperialism submerged, rather than merged, the Island's different ethnic groups. Foreign intervention and control for almost five-hundred years arrested what I would describe as the indigenous historical development of Sri Lanka. Left alone, the different ethnic groups would have fought but, over the centuries, reached an accommodation. (Of course, no country is left free of external influence and interference, but five hundred years of continuous foreign domination *is* a considerable chunk of time.) Secondly, imperialism meant forcible occupation, oppression and exploitation**:** whatever empires may have achieved and contributed, their basis was (and is) the ability to wield far worse violence than the violence defenders could (or can) deploy.

Imperialism, particularly British imperialism, was based on, and expressed, utter contempt**:** contempt for the natives, their colour and person; history and all aspects of their culture, including religion and language. The Buddhist monks who had enjoyed patronage and prestige at the royal court were marginalised. All public business - government, administration and commerce - was conducted in English, and those not proficient in English (the vast majority) were made to feel inferior *in their own country* because they did not know a *foreign* language. These are some of the factors that created a reservoir of resentment, seething, potentially virulent but inarticulate

because of imperial control. Nehru in the speech made at India's independence said that "the soul of a nation, long suppressed, [now] finds utterance"**:** in Sri Lanka, it seems the Sinhalese soul at independence was sorely bruised, angry and bitter, confused and impatient. Reaction found vent not on the British – distant and powerful – but on the Tamil.

It's a common awareness that when those to whom injustice has been done get the opportunity, they act unjustly in their turn. For example, the Palestinians pay the price for centuries of insult and cruelty inflicted on the Jews by Western Christians, culminating in the Nazi holocaust. One is reminded of Shylock in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* who said that a good student tries to be better than his teacher. Western Christians "taught" the Jew insult, humiliation, unkindness, and these he would try to practice in turn, but in a "better" (that is, worse) form. Independence was granted, the British left, and the Sinhalese felt the time for rectification and restitution had come. Unfortunately, the majority of Sinhalese felt that the way to regain what had been lost over the centuries was by continuing to deny to the Tamils what the latter too had lost. There followed the politics of exclusion and subordination; the politics of asserting one's dignity and rights by denying the dignity and rights of others; the politics of not allowing to others what was wished and demanded for oneself. I was told of some workers who complained to the manager that the foreman was favouring a particular group of fellow workers. The manager promised to put a stop to it, but the workers didn't want that to happen**:** their wish was to have the same consideration extended to them. Similarly, the Tamils were not against the use and development of the Sinhala language. But what prevailed and found expression was the unjust and unkind politics of "only", the result of thinking that one could best protect one's language by denying to others the right to use theirs. So, it was a case of "Sinhala

only" and of the Sinhalese being the *only* true Sri Lankans. (So too, only "white" Christians are true Europeans and Americans; the Jews, and only the Jews, are the people chosen by god etc.) What is enjoined on the individual – treat others as you yourself would like to be treated – is not practised by the group. Multiculturalism, toleration and inclusiveness urged, and sometimes enjoyed abroad, are rejected at home. I recall these lines, for purpose of comparison, from Andrew Wheatcroft's *Infidels***:** *A History of the Conflict between Christendom and Islam* (2004)**:** The two alternatives in Granada after 1492 and the expulsion of the Moors were "the cautious and painstaking approach" and the violent and abrupt. "There had been no systematic campaign of forcible Islamization in Spain after the Muslim conquest" (see, p. 140). The Sinhalese government too had a choice, one that was wise, cautious and kind; the other, abrupt and unjust. It opted for the second.

During parliamentary debate on what was known as the language issue, Dr Colvin R De Silva famously warned that the forcible imposition of one language would lead to two nations; two languages to (the continued existence of) one nation. Ten years later (1966), Professor G C Mendis, in his address as President of the Ceylon branch of the Royal Asiastic Society, pointed to the lack of wisdom**:** the Sinhalese had little need to learn the Tamil language, but Tamils, if it had not been forced upon them, over time, would have learnt Sinhala, and the language problem would have been solved, gradually – I may add, imperceptibly and painlessly. But, as one who was caught up in the ensuing attack on Tamils (1958), it seemed to me that the wish was not to be wise, not to be kind, but to express power and that disregard which power permits; not to heal but to humiliate**:** *oderint, dum metuant*. A rough translation of these words of the cruel Emperor Nero would be, "Let them hate, as long as they [also] fear". Fear and hate can coexist but once the former is

removed, I fear that in some only the latter will remain, leading to an emotional, if not political, parting of the ways.

It is asserted that at independence Tamils enjoyed positions in administration and the civil service completely disproportionate to their minority status. I am unable to access actual statistics which will either confirm or contradict this claim, but Michael Roberts suggests evidence to the contrary in his *Sinhala-ness and Sinhala Nationalism*. I think it is more a matter of a vague (envious and resentful) impression, rather than of fact. Similarly, some "Whites" see dark-skinned people everywhere. Such "Whites" and right-wing groups exclaim that their country is being swamped, taken over, by foreigners. I witnessed this in the London of the early 1960s when Enoch Powell, by predicting trouble in the near future, attempted to foment it in the present. Such fear is the product of deep-rooted insecurity, and its dire and exaggerated expression creates insecurity in the rest of the population, alarms the herd into panic and defensive aggression. But the reality is otherwise and statistics show that the number of so-called "coloured" people constitutes a very small percentage of the total population. Crimes committed by persons of colour are "seen", highlighted and reacted to as being crimes perpetrated by "Blacks", while those carried out by "Whites" are simply seen as criminality. So too, Tamils holding jobs or posts were *seen as Tamil*, creating the impression, fear and resentment that they were too successful. But, for the sake of discussion, let us assume that there indeed was a disproportionate number of Tamils holding government jobs or doing well in business. Still I would argue that if there were a need to redress matters, *how* it was done was unjust and unwise.

At auctions, the highest bidder is successful but what we saw in "Ceylon" was a political auction where the person who bid the

lowest won**:** Sinhala only in twelve months; twelve weeks, a month, a week and finally S W R D Bandaranaike won with the minimum bid of "Sinhala only in twenty-four hours". It was not "Sinhala in twenty-four hours" but "Sinhala *only*". With a stroke of a pen, most Tamils were rendered "official illiterates". English, the language of British imperialism, had been replaced by Sinhala. The more "racist" a politician proved himself or herself to be, the more hate-filled and inconsiderate, the more he or she was recognised as a "patriot". Hatred, intolerance, and violence become proof of patriotism, of a "nationalism" based narrowly and exclusively on "race" and Buddhism." But, as it was said (I believe by Professor Sarachandra), one cannot tell the difference between a Sinhalese and a Tamil when they both lie naked on the mortuary slab. What flourishes in Sri Lanka is linguistic nationalism, with language being a marker also of religion**:** see Appendix 2.

To cite an instance of folly, according to *The Island* newspaper (12 July 2000), plans are afoot to compare the genetic make-up of the different ethnic groups in the country. The project, funded by the Department of Archaeology and carried out in conjunction with the Chemistry Department of the University of Colombo, will first "map" and then compare the DNA of a sampling of the populace. All groups, including the aboriginal people, the *Veddahs* of the country, will be covered under the study. Perhaps, traces of lion blood will be detected in the Sinhalese, and so provide scientific proof that *The Mahavamsa* is fact, rather than imagination and myth. One wonders that these are the concerns, preoccupation and priorities of some Sri Lankans in the 21st Century.

Most Sinhalese being Buddhists, the role played by Buddhism and the Buddhist clergy must be addressed. The following thought is taken from David Scott's *Refashioning Futures***:** *Criticism After*

Postcoloniality (1999). Until comparatively recently, Pali and Sinhala did not have words representing the concepts "religion" and "Buddhism". No doubt, pious men and women in Sri Lanka thought a good deal about the Buddha and his teaching but, until about two hundred years ago, they had not thought of "religion" in its modern sense of a systematic entity, as being one among a family of such distinct religious entities. (See also, Appendix 1, Asoka not a Buddhist?) Kitsiri Malalgoda writes that the term *agama* as the general equivalent of "religion" was introduced by Christian missionaries in the 19th century. "It was only later that it gained acceptance among the Buddhists themselves as a term of self-reference"**:** see Scott, page 57.

In the past, philosophy, ethical injunction and religious teaching was not only a set of propositions but a way of life. The Buddha and Christ are said to have lived the life they taught and enjoined**:** there was no fracture, much less contradiction, between doctrine and practice. (Dharmasiri de Zoysa, to whom this essay is partly dedicated, did not talk about Buddhism**:** in terms of values and conduct, he simply lived Buddhism.) The impression is that monotheistic faiths, with their exclusive and exclusionary belief in *one* god, *one* message and *one* truth breed intolerance, while religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism are eclectic, accommodating and tolerant. One could be a theist, a pantheist, a Communist - even an atheist - and still be a Hindu or Buddhist. Indeed, the true Buddhist is an atheist.

As I have argued elsewhere, religion does not determine the nature and actions of a society. Rather, it is a people who, at different times, determine the nature and behavioural expression of a religion. So India's BJP has damaged Hinduism's reputation for tolerance, and the Buddhist monks of Sri Lanka are associated with stoking

hatred and violence. Not to focus too narrowly and intensely on Sri Lanka, and in order to place matters in a broader context, one recalls that Christianity was used to sanction the African slave trade, the exploitation (and near-extermination) of the native peoples of South America, slave-labour in America, the veritable nightmare of Leopold's rule in the Congo, and imperialism in general. "Gentle Jesus" gave way to "muscular Christianity" and Christians became soldiers marching in the name of Jesus to conquer and pillage, rule and exploit hapless peoples. Today, the Neoconservatives of the United States are willing, even eager, to unleash violence for the sake of civilization – that is, democracy and Christianity. Their repeated call to "engage with moderate Islam to counter a militant Islam that carries out terrorist acts," is inaccurately worded. It is not Islam but moderate or extreme individuals and groups who happen to be Moslem**:** see the difference between Islam as practised by the Emperor Akbar, and that expressed by his almost immediate successor, Aurangzeb. Going further back in time, during the European persecution, many Jews found protection under Moslem rulers. In the 12th century, the Jewish philosopher Maimonides fled to Saladin and was given an honoured place at court. (Salah ad-Din, born in Tikrit, 1138, is known by many in England because he defeated Richard the Lionheart.) One recalls too that when the Crusaders captured Jerusalem, they killed as many Jews as they could; when Saladin liberated the city, they were protected and left in peace. The Caliph Abd al-Rahman turned Cordoba into "one the most civilized places on earth", helped by one of his deputies, (Jewish) Hasdai ibn Shaprut.

Buddhism, in my opinion, is the gentlest and wisest of doctrines. G C Mendis writes (op cit) that the Buddha was a teacher, and the core of his teaching had to do with the individual developing his or her self – one may add, through cultivating characteristics such as

self-knowledge, an all encompassing compassion, detachment and self-control. Regarding gentleness and wisdom mentioned above, I would refer readers to K. S. Palihakkara's *Buddhism Sans Myths & Miracles*. The book's cover states that Dr Palihakkara was formerly "Director of Pirivena Education (temple schools)… and also one time Secretary to the Oriental Studies Society (which conducts examinations mainly for the Buddhist clergy.)" Dr Palihakkara's effort is to rescue Buddhism from myth and miracle; superstition, metaphysics and ritual, and to present it "as close as possible to the actual words of the Buddha" (p. i). The scriptures were first written about four hundred years after the death of the *Maha Karunika* (the Being of Great kindness) and, by that time, even the earlier Theravada texts had been corrupted by later additions. Buddhism as taught by the Buddha is essentially an ethical doctrine. There is no creator god, and neither past birth nor future rebirth. Since there is no past life, *karma* means action in the past of one's present life. However, belief in *karma* is useful to those wielding power (be it political or religious)**:** when the poor and the outcastes of society suffer from "poverty, sickness and squalor in their hovels", their suffering is attributed to bad *karma* from past births. The unfortunate are led to believe that they themselves are responsible for their misery (p. 120). The Buddha did not have miraculous powers and, rather than this being an insult, "he appears even greater without them" (p. 28). The Buddha did not visit Ceylon (as claimed in *The Mahavamsa*). Indeed, there is no reference to him visiting even any other part of India "outside the Gangetic Plain" (p. 25). It is difficult to reconcile chanting *pirith* and tying the *pirith* thread with "a rationalist like the Buddha who rejected prayers and slokas (recitals) of the Brahmins to their gods" (p. 66). In short, what most Buddhists in Sri Lanka practice practise today is more Hinduism than Buddhism (p. 109)**:** see also Nanda Godage, Appendix 4.

Turning from this representation of Buddhism (as already

stated, a rational and essentially kind and gentle doctrine) to the reality of its expression today in Sri Lanka, we find a total and most unfortunate divergence. Indeed, it can be argued that Buddhism as preached and practised today has proved false to itself, to Buddhism. As Godfrey Gunatilleke points out in Michael Roberts (Ed.) *Sri Lanka. Collective Identities Revisited*, Vol. 11, the revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka did not take an inward, *spiritual*, form. On the contrary, it found vociferous and violent expression, and the presence today in Parliament of members of a political party made up of Buddhist monks is the inevitable result of this participation in public life. Sri Lanka is in danger of becoming a theocracy, like Iran, where important decisions in all spheres of private and public life must have the approval of the clergy. The Bandaranaike-Chelvanyagam Pact, to which I will refer later, was abrogated because Buddhist monks descended on Mr Bandaranaike's residence. (Bandaranaike was assassinated in 1959, not by a Tamil but by a Buddhist monk, even as Gandhi was killed not by a Moslem but by a Hindu; even as Yitzhak Rabin was killed in 1995 not by a Palestinian but by a fellow Jew.) Regarding the Pact, Bandaranaike said that, reflecting in the light of Buddhist precepts, he had come to "an honourable solution"**:**

> In thinking over this problem I had in mind the fact that I am not merely a Prime Minister but a *Buddhist* Prime Minister. And my Buddhism is not of the "label" variety. At this juncture I said to myself**:** "Buddhism means so much to me, let me be dictated to only by the tenets of my faith, in these discussions." I am happy to say a solution was immediately forthcoming.
>
> (Colombo**:** *Sunday Observer*, 2 March 1958.)

In signing the Pact, "Banda" (as he was popularly known)

claimed he was acting as a Buddhist, that is, according to what the Buddha had preached. It is ironic and unfortunate that finally he was "dictated to" not by the Buddha and Buddhism but by Buddhist monks**:**

> "The present national crisis would not have arisen had we allowed the implementation of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanyagam Pact without resorting to the short sighted polices we pursued […] the Pact was designed to mete out justice to the Tamil community […]The late Mr J R Jayewardene provoked us in order to politically capitalise for his benefit […] It is pertinent to mention here that I went to Jaffna when I was 15 in 1941 with my Nayake Thera. At that time, Mr Jaya Pathirana's father [Sinhalese] was a Jaffna Municipal Council ward member."
> (The Venerable Mawatagama Vimalagama Thera, as quoted in *The Sunday Observer*, Colombo, 01 June 1997, p. 27.)

If Buddhism is given the highest place, it follows that those who most represent that religion, its clergy, will also enjoy power and prestige**:** it could be argued that the demands made by the monks were not motivated by lofty spirituality but for the *secular* position and power they believed they had wielded and enjoyed before the coming of Western, Christian, hegemony. The protestation is Buddhism but the goal is power. One recalls Durkheim's observation that in highly and overtly religious cultures, God and society are one. Thus, in worshipping God, people are in fact worshipping society – ultimately, themselves. It follows that in an ostentatiously religious society, priests, monks and religious leaders enjoy the highest position

and authority. And where there is cultural and ethnic plurality, religious identity becomes ethnic identity, leading to a state that is both theocratic and ethnocratic.

The Sri Lankan experience must not be seen as being unique**:** the world over and throughout human history, members of the clergy have participated in public life, religion being a potent force in the mobilisation of the masses. (Roman Lucretius, c.99 - c.55 BCE, wrote of men using wickedness in the name of religion; that religion is a potent force in propelling men to evil.) Returning, in the context of Buddhism, to the distinction made earlier between what is remembered, and why and how it is remembered, the discovery of Buddhist artefacts in the Tamil North of the Island is given a political, hegemonic, significance. The finds are not used to establish an earlier coexistence and harmony, a borrowing and incorporation. K M Panikkar states (*A Survey of Indian History*) that the exclusiveness of religious doctrines is a monotheistic concept**:** for instance, the Emperor Asoka offered gifts both to Hindu priests and to Buddhist monks.

The observation has been made that the Buddhist clergy is passionate only on the ethnic problem**:** they do not march vociferously; do not "incite" the people, on issues such as crime, violence, poverty, prostitution, paedophilia, police brutality, social injustice, corruption in high places, and moral decline. (I write "in high places", mindful of the saying that when a fish turns bad, the rot starts with the head, and works its way downwards.) The issue that excites and mobilises the majority of monks is the ethnic question where their stance is right-wing in the extreme, though there are also monks such as the Venerable Nandaratena Thera, chief priest of a vihare in the Trincomalee district. He worked for ethnic co-existence, and was shot dead on 13 May 2007.

Since 'effect' implies 'cause', an attempt must be made to understand the 'political Buddhism' rampant in Sri Lanka. Again trying to retain a broader perspective, one looks elsewhere, for example, at Sikhism, founded by Guru Nanak (1469-1539). It was a pacific movement, and Sikhs were "anxious to live at peace with their neighbours", as one writer expresses it. But the fifth Guru, Arjun (1563-1606) was killed, and this violence helped to transform the Sikhs into an armed brotherhood. (The military nature of the Sikhs was completed by Gobind Singh who became the last of the Gurus in 1675.) Returning to Buddhism, one reads in David Scott's work that, though the Christian missionary societies were aggressive, the Buddhist monks did not retaliate. On the contrary, they reacted to aggression and insult with kindness, hospitality and generosity. But this attitude of forebearance changed around 1860. The present (ungenerous and violent) nature of Buddhism has imperial, Christian, roots. David Little (already cited) observes that both the aggressive Catholicism of the Portuguese and the militant Calvinism of the Dutch left behind a record of religious oppression (p. 11). The first experience of religious intolerance in Sri Lanka came with [and because of] the Christian missions (p. 12).

Reflecting on *The Mahavamsa*, "race", Aryan-ness and political Buddhism, brings me to the defiant assertion made by some (almost invariably Sinhalese) that they are proud to be Sri Lankan. Oddly, this emotional declaration is also made by Sinhalese who have voluntarily chosen to leave the Island of which they claim to be proud; by those who have returned to the island having made money or won reputation which proud Sri Lankan circumstances did not permit. (Afraid of harassment or worse; having lost hope of positive change in the future, few Tamils, if any, return to what was once "home" - except on short, and rather anxious, visits.)

The dictionary defines "proud" as the feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction, the result of one's own achievements, qualities or possessions or those of someone with whom one is closely associated. Taking up collective achievement in the present, I wonder how much justification there is for national pride. There are slums in and around the capital, and people live in "shanties" in the most insalubrious of conditions, often by canals and stagnant water. (Some tourists may find this "picturesque".) It is a distressing, near-overwhelming, experience to walk down Colombo's Galle Road in the late evening, and see misshapen creatures settling down by the pavement for the night**:** scenes out of the novels of Dostoevsky and Dickens. For them, the Paradise Isle is hell. There is a high degree of crime and violence. Amnesty International reported that over 4,000 people have "disappeared" in the short period since early 2006 and the date of the report - 12 April 2007. Victor Ivan in his *An Unfinished Struggle* (2003) cites Harold Laski's statement that the manner in which justice is dispensed in any country is the measure of that country's civilization, and concludes that, based on this criterion, "Sri Lanka is at the lowest level of civilization". The police force is corrupt and, rather than protecting the population, tends to bully it, Tamils with greater impunity**:** see, 'Being Tamil today' below. A few years ago, the Asian Centre for Human Rights reported that political patronage and resulting impunity have turned the Sri Lankan Police into one of the country's most feared and organised criminal gangs. Sri Lanka is one of the destinations for sex tourists, including paedophiles. The suicide rate is high, as is that of alcoholism, and women (supposedly from a traditional, conservative, island) go abroad into helpless servitude**:** I once taught in the Middle East, and am well aware of their plight. Individuals in power have paid or rewarded followers who can be mobilised at short notice to form a righteous, patriotically outraged, mob. As for the people, they seem to have

given up hope of real, qualitative, change, and get on with their daily lives, snatching distraction and recreation when they can. Unemployment, poverty and the lack of hope are some of the factors that explain the propensity to sudden, extreme and vicious violence. Cricket is an exception, and the achievement of the team in international fixtures partly explains the passionate interest in the game by a people who have little other real cause for pride. According to the e-Edition of the *Daily Mirror* (1 May 2007), while Sri Lankans are obsessed with cricket, the country is burning and breaking apart, and one in every 18 Sri Lankan is a refugee. Of course, the Island is beautiful, in terms of its beaches, mountains and valleys, and one can delight in them, draw solace and strength, but can we take "pride" in landscape and seascape? In other words, is it our achievement? I read the following lines in the *Sunday Island* (25th January 2004, p. 7)**:** Despondency, deep, deep despondency and the desire to cry for this ill-fated land of ours.

Then there is the other part of the definition of "proud"**,** namely, **"**someone with whom one is closely associated". Since Sri Lanka was conquered and ruled for almost five hundred years, one indeed has to go back a very long way in time to locate those "closely associated" (that is, unless one includes the "White", "Aryan" imperialists). How "closely" can one be linked with figures lost in the distant mist of History? The other aspect of ancient history is that we know it almost entirely by the "peaks" of achievement (tanks, statues, palaces), and events (battles, changes made and reform instituted). The daily life of the vast majority of ordinary women and men is not recorded, remains largely unknown and conjectural. That being the case, the past becomes our pliant possession, to be shaped as we wish. The operative words in this exercise are "idealise" and "idealisation". It is a need and a process - particularly seen in a people who have little cause to be proud of and celebrate in the

present. To cite a mundane example, given the lack of penicillin, surgical instruments and present-day knowledge of hygiene, health-care must have poor and painful, as in other parts of the world. Of course, there were wise and kind rulers, but the fact remains that there was no middle-class, and no civic right for the people to elect their rulers. There is no avoiding the truth**:** it was feudalism in the extreme, with power on the one side, and servility on the other. Chandima Wickramasinghe in her comparative study of slavery in ancient Greece and ancient Sri Lanka, records the incident of a slave woman, eight of whose children "were buried as soon as they were born, by order of the master" because she had to look after his children (p. 45.) The same work recounts that Kings and nobles offered food to thousands of Buddhist monks, food that had been cooked by slaves.

The attempt here is not to discredit the past; not to deny that a measure of example and encouragement, even of pride, can be derived from it, but to plead for a more balanced, realistic, view of the past. It is easy to idealise and wax sentimental over the past, simply because it *is* past, and we can shape and believe in it as we will. One can be "proud" but one must also be clearly aware of the grounds for that pride. If not, it becomes an empty assertion**:** vague and easy to trumpet, emotional and potentially dangerous. Further, "pride" can lead to complacency, take away the responsibility and effort of "constructing" (and I don't mean building in the literal sense) in the present, in the here and now**:** it is enough to defiantly proclaim, "I am Sri Lankan, and proud of it." Nobel Prize winner, Wole Soyinka of Nigeria, declined to join the Negritude movement, saying that a tiger did not feel the need to proclaim pride in itself**:** Soyinka recognised the Negritude assertion for what it was, a sign of insecurity. Altering Shakespeare's sceptical words, one can say of those given to proclaiming pride in being Sri Lankan, "I think they protest too much".

Terrorism, 1983, the Tigers

"Terrorist" is now *the* term of political abuse, freely used and misused. As with my thoughts on History, I begin with "terrorism" in general before moving on to Sri Lanka. Terrorism can be understood as (a) the unleashing of haphazard violence (b) on the civilian population. It follows from the definition that (1) attack on military personnel or installations is not terrorism, and (2) that the state can also act in terrorist fashion by visiting violence on civilians, even if the pretext proffered is that terrorists are harbouring among them.

The label "Strawberry jam" on a bottle leads one to assume that the content is strawberry jam. So it is with "terrorist"**:** stick on the label, and most, without further thought, will take the content for granted; will believe that content and label tally. But neither abuse nor labels encourage reflection and analysis. On the contrary, political labels foreclose reflection and understanding. The aim of those who use the term "terrorism" in this fashion is to make independent thought seem unnecessary, create fear and arouse anger.

In the first instance, one must make the distinction between two kinds of "terrorist" group**:** one with an international, even global, agenda; the other, with a specific, local, aim. Terror is usually resorted to when the struggle is asymmetrical, that is, where one side in a conflict is at a significant disadvantage. Governments can go shopping on the open, commercially competitive market, and furnish their troops with the best weapons of destruction, while opposition groups must rely on weapons seized from the government, or buy at an enhanced cost and bring them in at great risk. The unleashing of terror is an attempt to redress this imbalance.

Moving on, one remembers that Nelson Mandela was branded a terrorist by former UK Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. Menachem Begin was accused of blowing up the King David Hotel (22nd of July, 1946); declared a terrorist by the British government, and a reward offered for his capture. Begin went on not only to become Prime Minister of Israel but to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Yitzhak Shamir, who also became Prime Minister of Israel, is alleged to have been involved (in what was termed the campaign of "personal terror" to force the British out of Palestine) in the assassination of the UN mediator, Count Bernadotte of Sweden, in September 1948. Altering the famous words of Sir John Harington (1561-1612) about treason, one can say that terrorism never succeeds because, if and when it succeeds, it ceases to be seen as "terrorism".

This is not to condone acts of terror, whether by an individual, a group or by the state. Sir Bernard Crick, in the course of a lecture on political violence delivered at Birkbeck College, University of London (14 June 2006), said that to understand is not necessarily to condone. By way of example, I remind readers of the massacre of Armenians by the Turks, towards the end of the 19th and in the early 20th century. These acts of state-sponsored terrorism can be explained as the product of Turkish humiliation and vengefulness, resulting in turn from successive Western military success, and increasing Western intrusion in Turkish affairs. It explains, but does not excuse the horror of that holocaust.

Sir Bernard also observed that, because we are law-abiding, we go along with what the state does; indeed, we give tacit support to the very acts of the state which cause terrorism; which "excite and anger the terrorists". Violence, whether on the part of the terrorist or of the state, "too often arises from a failure to pursue political or diplomatic solutions". I repeat that the attempt here is not to defend

the indefensible but to urge analysis and thought**:** after all, Sri Lanka is largely a Buddhist nation and, etymologically, "Buddhist" is derived from enlightenment; enlightenment comes from knowledge, and knowledge is not the product of emotion, abuse and violence but of reason and understanding. Robert Pape (*Dying to Win***:** *The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, Random House, 2005) offers foreign occupation as the prime cause of terrorism, and Louise Richardson (*What Terrorists Want***:** *Understanding the Terrorist Threat*, 2006) argues that terrorists are not crazed maniacs but individuals rationally choosing a tactic they think (correctly or not) will further their political ends. The 'Final Report' presented to the UN Secretary General on 13 November 2006 by the 'High-Level Group' states that injustice and inequality fuel violence and conflict. "Wherever communities believe they face persistent discrimination, humiliation, or marginalization based on ethnic, religious, or other identity markers, they are likely to assert their identity more aggressively" (3.13). The Report also points out that state terror has done far more damage than that unleashed by terrorist groups. To their list of the Holocaust, the Stalinist repression, the genocide in Cambodia, the Balkans and Rwanda (3.12) one can add the two World Wars, North Korea, Burma under the military junta, certain dictatorships in Africa and South America, China under Mao – the list is long, and the destruction and death caused by governments is much more gross (the word "greater" is inappropriate here) than that carried out by "terrorists". Indeed, there is no comparison.

And yet, it is not state terrorism but that carried out by individuals and groups that make the greater impact. The reasons are several, among them that adduced by Sir Bernard Crick**:** governments, even if they come to power by illegitimate means, once in power, are seen as legitimate and, therefore, their actions as legitimate and justified. Terrorist acts are dramatic and draw much media coverage, and civilians identify with the victims**:** It could have

been me, or someone I love, in that bus or train, building or market. Governments (with their influence over, if not control of, the media) highlight "terrorist" attack in order to discredit the enemy, to arrogate more power, and to vindicate their own policies: reaction and consequence are made use of to justify policy and action; the effect to justify cause. Since "terrorists" operate from the shadows and remain anonymous, their thought remains unknown to us, heightening a sense of irrationality and madness. On one day (Wednesday, the 18th of April 2007), a single bomb placed in a market in the Sadriya district of central Baghdad killed over one hundred and forty people. Dozens die daily in Iraq, and over four million have fled the country, making it perhaps the largest exodus since Palestinians were "terrorised" into fleeing their land sixty years ago, their 'right of return' denied by Israel. Almost every day, a few die in the North or East of Sri Lanka. Deeply grieved over by family and friends, they are unknown to the world and unnoticed. Evil does not cease to be evil because there exists a counter evil. Tragedy is heightened, not lessened, because there is counter tragedy: anger and mutual blaming blind us to this fact.

Moving specifically to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (known in short as the Tigers), I find myself holding pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that do not fit. I was born in Jaffna, but spent barely the first fourteen years of my life there. Looking back, I recall a place that was peaceful and quiet. The soil not being arable, the people worked hard, and lived simple, one would say, austere, lives. There seemed to be neither taste nor scope for self-indulgence or consumerism. (Sinhalese friends who visited the North of that time confirm my recollection.) In contrast to the "timid Tamil", the South, particularly along the coast, had the reputation of volatility, with men carrying fish-knives and being quick to anger. I find my memory of the North, this piece of the jigsaw, difficult to fit with the present image of the Tigers, and of the North as a battleground. (Lines from

a poem, 'Easter, 1916', by W. B. Yeats come to mind**:** "Transformed utterly…changed, changed utterly".) Those who are against them will see the Tigers as brainwashed fanatics; those who support them, will use other words such as courage and self-sacrifice, perhaps quote from *The Bible***:** there is no greater expression of love than laying down one's life for the sake of others (John, 15**:** 13). But neither execration nor admiration leads to understanding.

Returning to history, with the Sinhala-Only bill, there began the plea, and the (peaceful) protests of the Tamils. The Tamil leadership, over the years, had virtually begged and cajoled for concessions, but successive Sinhalese governments turned them down**:** M. R. Narayan Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka*, p. 14. (It must be pointed out that Tamils reject the condescending term "concession", their struggle being one for rights and equality.) The person most identified with this peaceful phase of the Tamil struggle is S. J. V. Chelvanayagam, a soft-spoken man; like Mahatma Gandhi, frail in figure but strong of soul. "SJV" based his struggle on Satyagraha (the force, or strength, of truth) drawing inspiration from Gandhi's non-violent campaign against the British. But in India, the weapon of Satyagraha had been deployed by a majority against a very small (occupying) minority. The parallel did not apply to Sri Lanka because, Island-wide, the Tamils are a small minority, and because of the ready willingness of the Sinhalese government and a section of the Sinhalese people to meet peaceful protest with brutal violence. In this respect, the genius of Gandhi (as I see it) is that he chose the right weapon for the specific conditions obtaining in India – spiritually elevated, ethically sound and politically effective. (Gandhi, in his own words, was overwhelmed by Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, a work he read in 1894, while in South Africa. However, his campaign of Satyagraha on behalf of the Asian population there brought little result.) Non-violent protest by the Jews against the

Nazis would have been ludicrous and tragic. Nor would it have succeeded against a Pol Pot or a Saddam Hussein. Prayers, fasting and "sit-down protests" by the Tibetans against Chinese occupation have not succeeded. Gandhi himself commented that a mouse cannot be said to "refrain from hurting a cat": see Tidrick, page 126. The mouse must first acquire the means of retaliation and then, voluntarily refrain: *that* is the true moral and spiritual nature of satyagraha.

It seems the Sri Lankan government thought that if mob violence were unleashed on peaceful protestors, they would be cowed into an acceptance of subordinate status. Those performing satyagraha on Colombo's "Galle Face Green" were assaulted and spat upon. A senior, respected, member of the Federal Party (I will not mention his name) was stripped. He ran into the nearby Galle Face Hotel for shelter, jeered and laughed at as he ran. There were anti-Tamil riots in 1956, 1958, 1961, 1977, 1979 and 1981 - I deal with 1983 separately. In short, peaceful protest brought only humiliation and suffering. I think it will be acknowledge that, until the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was no Tamil retaliation.

In the list of non-human damage, destruction and consequent hurt, one must include the burning down of the Jaffna Library, the flames consuming thousands of books (and texts written on *ola* leaf) many of the former irreplaceable, not having been "saved" electronically. The destruction of a library is an act of barbarism, a loss to humanity of knowledge and culture (in the general sense of the word). Like other such acts of vandalism, this one has also been blamed on security forces temporarily running amok**:** in context, the term "security" is ironic. However, Nira Wickramasinghe (and other writers) suggests government instigation, pointing to "the presence of two important government [Cabinet] ministers in Jaffna at the time" (*Sri Lanka in the Modern Age***:** see Note 64, p. 285). In

Germany, on 10 May 1933, crowds in which students were well represented, burnt books, particularly those by authors who were Jewish, including Freud. Much earlier, the German-Jewish poet, Heine, had written that those who burn books today will burn human beings tomorrow. That came to pass with the Nazi Holocaust and, in 1983, in blessed Sri Lanka.

If one wants to understand the Tigers – and understanding does not exclude criticism or condemnation – one must honestly and frankly place their action against this background of History. As Nelson Mandela notes in his autobiography, *Long Walk To Freedom*, it is the oppressor, not the oppressed, who dictates the nature of the struggle. Or, as the Caribbean-American Claude McKay, urged in his sonnet, "If we must die, let it not be like hogs / Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot". The title of Professor K. M. De Silva's study, *Reaping The Whirlwind*, is taken from *The Bible*, Hosea, Chapter 8, Verse 7. The full quotation reads**:** For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind. But in Sri Lanka it seems that earlier generations sowed the wind, and have left an awful legacy, one where the present persists in sowing and reaping violence and tragedy.

Apart from the major anti-Tamil riots I've listed, there were incidents which are too minor (though not for those affected, the bereaved) to find space in the historical record. For example, at Bindunuwewa, Bandarawela, Tamils, aged between 14 and 23, were massacred on 25 October 2000: ironically, they were in a state-run 'rehabilitation' centre. There was a massacre of civilians in Chemmani, 1998, the evidence of mass graves thereafter destroyed. Tiger retaliatory massacre has established a balance-sheet in the popular mind; set in motion the cycle of counter-violence; mutual recrimination and blame. In such an atmosphere, historical antecedent

and a step-by-step development are cancelled out or forgotten.

It must be borne in mind that it did not always appear to be a situation of enmity and conflict. There was a time when most, if not all in the Island, irrespective of language and religion, equally took a measure of pride and encouragement from ancient achievement, temple and lake; an equal measure of happiness in being "Ceylonese"; a time when Tamils described themselves as Ceylonese and not (as some tend to do now) as "Sri Lankan Tamil". When in 1915, D. S. Senanayake (later the first Prime Minister of independent Ceylon) and his brother, F. R. Senanayake were jailed by the British authorities, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan went to England to plead their case. On his successful return, jubilant crowds placed him in a carriage, detached the horses, and dragged the carriage themselves. He was not seen as a Tamil who had helped free a Sinhalese, but as a Ceylonese helping a fellow Ceylonese. Perhaps then there was not that phrase which unconsciously betrays group assumption and prejudice in various parts of the world and situations**: "**even though he is…" In 1925-6, when Bandaranaike, as leader of the Progressive National Party, set out the case for a federal political structure for Sri Lanka and made this the main plank of the political platform of his party, he received no support for it from the Tamils**:** K M De Silva, p. 513. In the 1930s, the Jaffna Youth Congress rejected federalism. (They looked not look to Tamil Nadu but to Gandhi and Nehru.) They persuaded almost all the leading schools in Jaffna to teach Sinhala as a compulsory subject. As A E Jayasuriya observed, "At a time when the Sinhalese were prepared to do without Sinhala, the battle for Sinhala and Tamil was fought by Tamil leaders"**:** see, D Nesiah, *Tamil Nationalism*, p. 12. Even after the trauma of Standardisation ("racial" quota) in relation to University admission beginning in 1971, and the Draft Constitution of 1972, the All Ceylon Tamil Conference declared, "Our children and our children's children

should be able to say, with one voice, Lanka is our great motherland, and we are one people from shore to shore. We speak two noble languages, but with one voice" (Nesiah, p. 14). I recall that when C. Suntheralingam of Vavuniya argued for a separate (Tamil) state in the early 1950s, he was indulgently laughed at by most Tamils who saw it as the eccentricity of a brilliant mind. In 1952, the Kankesuntharai parliamentary seat was contested by Chelvanayagam, as a member of the Federal Party**:** he was comfortably defeated *by a U.N.P. candidate.*

"Those were the days", one exclaims with nostalgia, but were they? Was this amity and "oneness" *pro tem* and superficial (that is, of the surface only)? The leadership drawn from the English-educated elite was soon to be replaced. Indeed, some from this elite (like S W R D Bandaranaike) reinvented themselves, taking on a more popular and profitable identity. It was a complete "make over", changing religion, language and clothes; voice, tone and content. Do (unscrupulous and foolish) politicians create ethnic attitudes and feelings? It is all too easy for people to blame politicians, shifting responsibility away from themselves. To what extent do politicians "merely" exacerbate "racial" and religious feeling? To what extent do they reflect them? Do they create or pander to? Is it an interaction, the one worsening the other? What, in short, was the real state of inter-ethnic relations then? And so one must be cautious when reading statements such as the following**:** Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan was elected to the state council in the 1912 election by the majority Sinhala vote. The Ceylon National Congress established in 1919 was predominantly Sinhalese but Sir Ponnampalam Arunachalam was elected its first president.

Soon after the euphoria of independence, there began a pattern of using mob violence to achieve political ends, the "p" in "politics"

in this instance standing for power; power implying domination; domination, in turn, the dominated. As Kumari Jayawardena notes (op. cit), in 1883, the conflict was between Buddhists and Christians; in 1915, it was between Buddhists and Muslims; in the 1930s, the target was the Malayalis. At independence, citizenship and the vote were withdrawn from the Upcountry Tamil. Thereafter, it was the turn of Tamils in general. (In an informal conversation, a Sinhalese, unaware of my ethnic identity, told me that after the Tamils had been "fixed", the Muslims would be taught a good lesson.) Seen in the context of this historical development, the pogrom of 1983 becomes less of a surprise**:** sometimes, historical understanding turns the incredible into the inevitable. On the lines of the distinction between "doing" and "being", it can be said that the Tigers "did" (attacked), and the general Tamil population paid for "being", simply for being Tamil. Tamils were killed most horribly by strangers, that is, by those who had no *personal* grievance against them**:** to be Tamil was sufficient crime and sin. In this hate and frenzy, even Tamils who had worked for the state were not exempt**:** in the long run, collaboration does not buy favours, not even exemption. Police inspector Bastianpillai was a relentless hunter of the Tigers; he was warned by them and, when he failed to stop the hunt, murdered. Yet, in 1983, his widow and their children were on the list, together with the other Tamils marked for death. They were Tamil and that was good enough reason**:** see, L. Piyadasa, *Sri Lanka: The Holocaust And After*, p. 84.

"Black July" or "July '83" as it has come to be known (rather like the later shorthand, "9/11") was not a spontaneous "riot" but a pogrom. It was planned, with voter-lists studied to identify Tamil homes, and the "security" (sic) forces providing transport. On 19 July, that is, five days before the incident in Jaffna claimed as the cause (and justification) of "Black July", President J. R. Jayawardene

issued an emergency order imposing press censorship. The Public Security Act permitted the security forces to bury or cremate bodies without post-mortem examination or judicial inquiry.

In the modern history of the Tamils of Sri Lanka, "Black July" is the most significant and painful event – one cautiously adds, *to date*. On the part of the Sinhalese, the response is various, among them being that of suppression or repression, leading to a wished and willed amnesia. (The term «suppression», in a broad sense, was used by Sigmund Freud to describe a conscious mechanism intended to eliminate undesirable psychical content from consciousness. According to Freud, the difference between suppression and repression lies in the fact that the latter defence-mechanism is unconscious and under its influence repressed content becomes or remains unconscious.) Other responses include that of minimisation ("It wasn't really *that* bad" – see D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke below) or self-justification, and a 'blame the victim' attitude**:** "It's their fault. They asked for it"; even to "They deserved what they got". I must add that I know Tamils who were personally caught up in Black July or are closely related to those who were, and yet have "forgotten" the event. Perhaps, it is too painful and, in some ways, embarrassing? Perhaps, they want to put it aside and get on with their lives?

Minoli Salgado, in *Writing Sri Lanka*, quotes Professor D C R A Goonetilleke as stating that what was done to the Tamils in 1983 was "no Holocaust" (see, Salgado, Note 105, p. 179). There are no official statistics but the number of Tamils killed is placed between two and three thousand. It is therefore terminologically inaccurate to describe the pogrom as a holocaust, and Tamils who do so, moved by emotion, harm the case they attempt to make by over-stating it. A holocaust is determined by intention (extermination) and, following from that, also by number. Of course, one can quote

Donne and say that any one's death diminishes us because we are (or ought to be) involved in humanity; one can claim that what makes for the heinous is not number but the nature of the action. Still "holocaust" and "genocide" remain inappropriate terms for what happened in Sri Lanka, and Goonetilleke, though lacking in sympathy, is quite correct.

Michael Roberts has written extensively on Sri Lanka, combining thorough scholarship and academic detachment, yet heeding Yeats' earnest wish that he be saved from thoughts thought in the mind alone, that is, without compassion (Yeats**:** 'A Prayer For Old Age'). In his writing on July '83, Roberts uses words such as "gristly" and "beastly". Since what happened took place also in Colombo, there were several foreign, impartial (although horrified, unbelieving) witnesses. It was revolting in detail – pregnant women disembowelled; women gang-raped in public; whole families set alight alive - and distressing in effect. Almost every Sinhalese family known to me personally has a story to tell of help rendered or protection afforded to "terrorised" Tamils. But there was no sense of national revulsion, no collective protest; no public demand for inquiry, justice and compensation. It was all blamed on a few unruly elements. In contrast, Germany has publicly, almost obsessively, accepted culpability for its actions during World War 11; paid compensation, released self-incriminating documents. (As an Armenian said to Jewish writer, Yossi Klein Halevi, "Your're lucky it was the Germans who killed you. They are a civilized people. They know how to apologize." *The New York Review of Books*, 10 May 2007, p. 37.) The government of Sri Lanka expressed no regret because it felt none. On the contrary, President Jayawardene said he was not worried about the opinion of the Jaffna people. "The more you put pressure in the north, the happier the Sinhalese people will be here. Really, if I starve the Tamils out, the Sinhala people will be happy." By way

of contrast, in a different context, Hannah Arendt admonished those of her fellow Jews who were "racist" and ready to terrorise the Palestinians**:** "Thou shall not kill, not even Arab women and children". (See, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, Yale University Press, 2004, p. 291.)

Focusing on the massacre that took place at Welikade prison on the 25th and 27th of July, fifty-three Tamils in state custody were murdered, the guards having opened the cells and given the mob free access to the prisoners. Among this hapless group was "Kuttimani" of TELO, found guilty of murder committed in the course of a politically-motivated robbery. Asked by the court, as is customary before the death sentence is passed, if he had anything to say, Kuttimani replied he wished to donate his eyes so that, one day, they would see an independent Tamil homeland. This unusual statement was widely publicised, and when the mob dragged him out, they taunted, "Are these the eyes that wanted to see Tamil freedom?", gouged them out, and then killed him.

A character in Romesh Gunesekera's novel, *The Match*, asks, "How can they do it? What could make a person throw kerosene over another human being and set fire to him? Watch his skin crinkle and burn? How could they hear the screams, see the flames wrap around a writhing man, smell the burning flesh, and then do it again?" (London: Bloomsbury, 2006, p. 154). Basil Fernando wrote a poem, 'Yet another incident in July 1983', based on an incident witnessed by one of his Sinhalese lawyer friends at Narahenpita, close to the Labour Secretariat. A car carrying parents and their two children, aged about four and five, is stopped; Tamil identity is established; petrol poured over the vehicle. Then someone opens the car door and takes away the two children, crying and resisting. The vehicle is set alight. Suddenly, the father, already on fire, steps out, bends down

and takes his two children. Not even looking around as if executing a calculated decision, he resolutely re-entered the car. Once inside, he closed the door himself… I heard the noise distinctly.

Michael Robers, from whose *Exploring Confrontation* (1994) the above is taken, comments that his interest is in the lucidity of the indictment expressed by that unknown Tamil father**:** his courage and "incisive clarity of comment has etched its imprint on my soul" (p. 322).

Returning to the dismissal by Professor D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke, what remains in Tamil memory and heart is not the *number* of those killed but the horrific *nature* of the attack. Tamils are puzzled at the intensity of the hatred and, following, the ready willingness to commit appalling atrocity. Tiger atrocities being post-1983, Tamils have asked, "What have we done to excite and deserve *such* intense and venomous animosity?" (In Coetzee's prize-winning novel, *Disgrace*, the daughter, victim of vicious gang-rape, asks her father, "But why did they hate me so? I had never set eyes on them".) In another work of his, Michael Roberts discusses various theories to explain the horrific violence which included the dismemberment of corpses. According to one possible explanation, the Tamil has come to represent the demon and, therefore, like the demon, must be tortured and mutilated; made afraid and brought under control. The mal-treatment of the body (before, during or after death) has an effect on those related to the person**:** "In effect, the anxieties of kinfolk will be multiplied not only in the immediate aftermath, but also throughout their life span because the cause of specific afflictions could be the wandering ancestor spirit of mutilated kin. In brief, the dismemberment of a body maximises the ripple of chaos… over a considerable span of time" (Roberts, *Sinhala Consciousness*, p. 152). The belief in demons and spirits takes us back to *The Mahavamsa*;

to superstition and magic, to belief in spells and exorcism which have penetrated, permeated and contaminated Buddhism. The placing of dead or dying bodies before the Buddha statue is a recursion to primitive times when some tribes offered human sacrifice to please and placate an atavistic and bloodthirsty god. (One notes that, etymologically, the word "holocaust" comes from burnt offering, that is, sacrificial flesh offered to propitiate and please a god or spirit.)

Narayan Swamy's study of the LTTE leader, *Inside An Elusive Mind*, states that prior to 1983 the Tigers were little known and had no popular base, not even in Jaffna. (Swamy is no supporter of the Tigers, and the book's cover describes his work as a profile of the world's "most ruthless" leader.) Tiger numbers prior to 1983 have been variously placed between twenty and thirty; at a maximum below fifty. All this changed after – and more importantly, *because* – of that fateful year, a fact that must be borne in mind if one is to make sense of subsequent development, of the violence and appalling human tragedy.

As already mentioned, the government has at its disposal, fighter jets, attack helicopters and tanks. It can purchase weapons freely on the open, competitive market. Government soldiers whose training is helped by US special forces and other countries, number close to 100,000. (Repeated attempts to gain official figures failed.) The Tiger cadres are thought to be down to 12,000, particularly after the breakaway of "Colonel Karuna" in 2004. Seen in this light, the wonder is that the Tigers have fought for so long - call it what one will, heroism or fanaticism.

Since there is no conscription in Sri Lanka, the children of the upper and middle classes are not found in the armed forces and, if they are, serve in the relative safety of the higher ranks. The soldiers who die are usually from rural areas, obscure family, and attract

little public attention. The majority of the Sinhalese population is untouched, unaffected and gets on with its normal life. The simple but brutal fact is that the battleground being in the North and the East of Sri Lanka, the rest of the Island enjoys or, if poor, endures, a normal existence. When elephants battle, it's the grass and the trees in the immediate vicinity which suffer. The exception is when a terrorist attack takes place, causing death, injury, damage - or the annoyance of having the watching of the cricket-cup final on public television screens disrupted, as happened in April 2007.

It is well to remind ourselves that, as already mentioned, states have killed far more, and wrought far greater destruction, than any terrorist group, however 'dramatic' the actions of the latter.

By way of drawing attention to yet another "not-fitting" piece of the jigsaw puzzle, I offer quotations from different articles. "The battle-scarred Jaffna peninsula… The war-ravaged northern peninsula… Jaffna has borne the brunt of a war that has killed 64,000 people" (*Gulf Daily News*, Bahrain, 15 March 2002, p. 16). Jaffna is desolate. There is no sustainable education system, and public transport is in "shambles". "Magnificent family homes have been converted into mini bases for the security forces". A lack of water and daily power-cuts create a sense of hopelessness amidst the shattered houses. "*What is taken for granted in the south is a luxury in the north*" (Colombo: *The Sunday Leader*, 17 March 2002, p. 11. Italics added). The following is taken from Jehan Perera's article in the *Daily Mirror* (Colombo, 3 April 2007)**:**

> There are in fact two societies in Sri Lanka: "the much larger one outside the north and east which is relatively prosperous and free, while the other is ruined and *terrorised*" (emphasis added). The

> release of the Central Bank's annual report for 2006, which shows a 7.7 growth figure demonstrates the resilience of the Sri Lankan economy. The economy of the vast majority of the people has been relatively unaffected. With the exception of the tourism sector, the life and economy of people outside the north and east has been barely touched by the violence of the ethnic conflict. There is "a disregard for those who are suffering and are being left behind in the north and east. By and large, violence and dislocation is contained in the north and east." There is gross violation of property rights, and people are "driven repeatedly from their homes to live in squalor in refugee camps" without hope.

Mr Kathirgamathamby of the White Pigeons Institute, reporting on the North (24 September 2007), describes a tragic situation. People do not attend religious festivals because of the curfew and the extreme feeling of insecurity created by the "security" (sic) forces. Economic deprivation, the stress of daily life and the trauma of war have created not only beggars, but mentally disturbed beggars.

Few Tamils visit the North, and those Tamils who fly in from abroad tend to meet up with relations and friends in Colombo; fewer Sinhalese make the trip, and so the truth, the reality on the ground, is not personally *seen* and understood. Of course, extreme Sinhalese groups will rejoice at the havoc, but I wish visits can be organised for others so that they, personally and directly, get a measure of what has been done, and is being done, in their name. Professor Jayadeva Uyangoda (*Beyond the Talks***:** *Towards Tranformative Peace in Sri Lanka*, p. 20), goes so far as to describe the Northern

and Eastern provinces as "*one of the most ruined regions in the world*" (italics added)**.** See Appendix 5**:** extracts from a letter to my sister, living in London, shortly after visiting Jaffna early in 2004.

Let me recapitulate. Inequality was abruptly imposed, and met by peaceful, Gandhian-model, Tamil protest which was met by increasing violence, culminating in the "bestial" and shameful pogrom of 1983. At that time, the Tigers were a very small band, but reaction – a mixture of anger and the loss of hope in redress through Parliament - drove thousands of Tamils into their ranks. The conflict is asymetrical in the extreme, with one side having jet fighters and helicopters in the air, and a comparatively massive number of soliders on the ground. (The two Tiger aircraft which are presently creating so much excitement are hand-assembled, propellor-powered planes, slow and clumsy.) The North and East are devasted, sections of the population turned into refugees, traumatised, and harassed. The rest of the Island, by and large, enjoys normality. In this context, the Tigers occasionally succeed in making the South realize that they too have a price to pay, albeit much, much smaller. A little bit of the daily reality in the North and East is intruded into the South so that the "problem" will be addressed. This explains the resort to "terrorism" – and I repeat, to understand is not to condone; is not to be without deep regret. Terrorism, whether perpetrated by the state or dissident group, causes human tragedy, and is morally repugnant.

During the American war of independence, Lord Chatham (also known as William Pitt, the elder) said that if he had been an American, he would have fought the British. The Sinhalese must honestly ask themselves, *"If I were a Tamil, and given the reality sketched above, what would my options be? How would I react?"* As I wrote earlier, each group is trapped in its own experience, and resulting perspective,

attitude and feeling. African American Claude Mckay, in his poem, 'The Negro's Tragedy', wrote, "There is no white man who could write my book". Towards the end of the 1950s, John Howard Griffin, an American "White", changed himself and travelled, including the notorious (in "racial" terms), Southern states of the USA, as a Black. He published his experience in a work, *Black Like Me*, that became a bestseller**:** apart from actually visiting the North, perhaps some Sinhalese, preferably female, journalist will take on a temporary Tamil identity –- in Colombo or elsewhere in the South, and investigate the commonplace, everyday, experience ethnic identity can visit on the individual? What does it mean to be a Tamil in today's Sri Lanka? As Human Rights Watch reported (New York, 6 August 2007), the government has given the green light to the security forces to wage a dirty war against the Tamil civilian population. The Minority Rights Group International's Report, "Minorities under Threat", moves the Tamils of Sri Lanka from forty-ninth endangered place in the year 2006 to fourteenth in the year 2007.

In a personal communication to me (April 2007), Fr Paul Caspersz of Satyodaya, Kandy, remarked that both the JVP at the time they staged their uprising and the LTTE had real and legitimate grievance**:** what was unfortunate was the path chosen in the pursuit of redress. Immediately after "July '83" there was much sympathy for the Tamils, with international condemnation of what happened – remarkably absent within the Island – and the opening of immigration doors. However, the Tigers by their action have lost the moral high-ground, dissipated goodwill, forfeited much support. They are now proscribed in several countries and, generally, are associated not with freedom but with terrorism. Dissent is not tolerated, and competing groups have been eliminated without hesitation or mercy. Ruthlessness was directed as much against fellow Tamils, as against the "enemy" Sinhalese**:** among several works**,** see, Nira

Wickramasinghe, already cited. The Tamils find themselves caught between Sinhalese chauvinism, and Tiger tyranny - or, as someone here in Berlin said to me, they are trapped on a branch on fire at both ends. Those who can, jump off – into exile and life in a foreign country. Some may argue that the Tigers, fighting against huge odds, must maintain "discipline" and an iron control at all cost but, again, an explanation does not necessarily lead to exculpation**:** "at all cost" is humanely and morally unacceptable.

The conviction, particularly among Sinhalese circles, is that if the Tigers are removed from the equation, then everyone in the Island (not just the Sinhalese) will enjoy peace and harmony. The Tigers, their coming into being and existence (once the consequence of injustice and violence) are now the cause of bloody and destructive conflict. And so, like Cato's oft-repeated cry, *Carthago delenda est*, the current mantra is "*The Tigers must be defeated, if not destroyed*."

But does History give confidence to the Tamil community that, once the Tigers have been eliminated or neutralised, equality, justice and inclusion will prevail? Where within Sri Lanka's history does one start to answer this question? In 1919, Ponnambalam Arunachalam, on behalf of the Tamils, and James Pieris and E. J. Samarawickrama on behalf of the Sinhalese, agreed to provide a seat in the legislature for the Tamils of the Western Province. When in 1922 it came before the Ceylon National Congress for ratification (before it was forwarded to Whitehall), it was successfully opposed by H. J. C. Pereira and others. That was the end of of the 1919 pact. There followed "the Mahendra Pact" in 1925. C. E. Corea, accompanied by others such as George E. de Silva and P. de S. Kularatne, entered into a pact in Jaffna with a Tamil delegation. The meeting took place at the residence (known as 'Mahendra') of Waithilingam Duraiswamy, and so the agreement is known as the

Mahendra Pact. The proposals agreed to at this meeting were placed before a general session of the Congress (Kandy, 1925) but ratification was postponed to the next meeting. This took place in Galle (1926), but the proposals were rejected.

G G Ponnambalam's demand of "Fifty – Fifty" was deliberately misrepresented and ridiculed. "Ponna" saw that in a multiethnic country, the majority would always vote on "racial" lines, resulting not in democracy but majoritarian dictatorship. (In a true democracy, there is no fixed voting bloc, and the electorate changes support for a party according to the issues that are considered important. It is not a firm and predictable allegiance based on "tribal" lines.) I quote words from the speech made by G. G. Ponnambalam in the State Council (1939) on the Reform Despatch of Sir Andrew Caldecott:

> The demand, as far I as I am aware, of the minorities of this country has been for balanced representation, for representation on the basis that no single community should be in a position to out-vote a combination of all the other communities in the Island.
>
> Thirty-four Members belonging to one community united by a common language, united in most cases by a common religion [...] as opposed to another 34 Members, consisting of a number of *thoroughly heterogeneous* groups - of Tamils, Indians, Muslims, Burghers, and Europeans and Malays [...] I ask you, 'What have the Sinhalese to fear'?

Section 29 of the Soulbury Constitution under which Ceylon was granted independence in 1948 clearly reads that *no law shall*

"confer on persons of any community or religion any privilege or advantage which is not conferred on persons of other communities or religions". This all-important safeguard was omitted in the Republican constitution of 1972. In other words, it was made lawful to discriminate, to deny equality and, therefore, justice - and there was no outcry on the part of the majority community against this reactionary, retrograde, move. (Those who wish a more detailed listing of broken promises and disappointed hope could read the article by one Stylo in the *Morning Leader*, Colombo, 27 December 2006.)

The best-known of agreements and pacts is that between S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and S.J.V. Chelvanayagam, already referred to. Caught between Tamil protest and Sinhalese vehemence, "Banda" thought the solution would be to allow the mob a few days in which to "terrorise" and cow the Tamils into acquiescence. This resulted in the 1958 anti-Tamil riot. There then followed the Senanayake-Chelvanayagam pact of 1965, but it too was abandoned, left unimplemented. It must be made clear, and stressed, that these pacts were not broken by Tamil action.

Given these facts, given this past record, what confidence can the Tamils have that justice will prevail if the Tigers are neutralised? What is pondered by Tamils is, "If, despite the Tigers, the majority of Sinhalese are unwilling to extend justice and equality, why should they when the Tamils are defenceless? Will it not be yet again a case of "Woe to the vanquished"? When I asked a Sinhalese friend what he thought would be the fate of the Tamils if and when the Tigers are defeated, he answered without hesitation, "Subordination"**:** it was not his wish but a sober prognosis. The issue of 11 January 2005 of the *Asian Times*, from which I have already quoted, states**:** "Without the protective role of the LTTE, the Tamils would be at the mercy of the Sinhalese chauvinists." Tamils have pointed out that, were a

Sinhalese group to take up arms against the government, the latter would not bomb Sinhalese villages on the excuse that some combatants are also there in the vicinity, take over property, destroy schools and the infrastructure. Though ostensibly a war against the Tigers only, the Sri Lankan Tamil population, whether in the North, East, South or West, pays in one form or another. And yet Tiger conduct has been such that even some Tamils see them as part of the problem, and not of the solution**:** a tragic tale and dilemma.

Paulo Frire in his classic work, *Pedagogy Of The Oppressed* (1970) states that those who are not fully free cannot be fully human. The LTTE leader stated, "We are not chauvinists. Neither are we lovers of violence enchanted with war. We do not regard the Sinhalese people as our opponents or as our enemies. We accord a place of dignity for the culture and heritage of the Sinhalese people. We have no desire to interfere in any way with the national life of the Sinhalese people or with their freedom and independence. All we desire is to live in our historic homeland in peace, freedom and with dignity".

However, human history, over time and the world over, shows that justice and freedom are never gifted, voluntarily, out of altruism**:** they are demanded, dearly paid for, extracted and won. Writing about Kosovo, Tim Judah observes that though people say violence doesn't pay, experience shows the opposite. "Indeed, it was the passive resistance of Kosovo Albanians to Serbian rule that failed to produce results." This failure finally drove the Albanians to resort to force (*The New York Review of Books*, 10 June 2004, p. 36) and, one may add, "force" means violence. Going back much further in time, African American Frederick Douglass, during a speech in 1857, said**:** **"**The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims have been born of struggle… If there is no struggle, there is no progress… *Power*

concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will". (See, Robert Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, p. 183. Emphasis added.) A prominent 20th century politicial theorist wrote it would be "ludicrous to believe that a defenceless people has nothing but friends, and it would be a deranged calculation to suppose that the enemy could perhaps be touched by the absence of a resistance". (Carl Schmitt, *The Concept Of The Political*, p. 53). Recent Sri Lankan history validates this statement. Without oppositional power, there is no need for compromise; without the need for compromise, no incentive to seek a negotiated settlement leading to peace. (Negative peace is the absence of war; real peace is the presence of harmony, resulting from equality and justice.) To demand disarmament before a settlement is reached and implementation actually begun, is to be incredibly innocent, ahistorical or, worse, dishonest and Machiavellian.

Decades ago, the Tamils rejected federalism**:** as already stated, Chelvanayagam contested a seat in Jaffna as a Federal Party candidate and lost to the UNP. Violence and an adamant refusal to accept equality made the Tamils change their mind and see federalism as the solution. When that was opposed, and mob "terror" unleashed, they turned to separatism, exclaiming, as Moses declared to the enslaving Egyptians, "Let [our] people go [free]**:**

> Ever since independence successive Sri Lankan governments have done everything in their power, from state-sponsored racism to state-sponsored pogroms, to render the Tamils a separate people, and inferior – and then cried out against that separatism when the Tamils embraced it to carve out their dignity and future ("Sri Lanka: Racism and the Authoritarian State", The Editor, *Race & Class*, London, Vol XXV1, No 1, Summer 1984.)

By the late 1970s, after a succession of failed effort in parliament; after a succession of riots, culminating in the horrific pogrom of 1983, it seemed to the Tamils that the parting of the ways had been reached. So too, the thirteen American "colonies" declared (4 July 1776) that in the course of human events, it sometimes becomes necessary for a people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another. I quote (not always verbatim) extracts from that famous Declaration:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. Government is instituted among humankind to secure [not to deny] these rights. The power of government is just because [and only when] it is derived from the consent of the governed. When a government becomes destructive, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it. But governments "should not be changed for light and transient causes". That is why people continue to suffer "while evils are sufferable". "But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government.

Recent military gains in the Eastern province have created an air of triumphalism – "the Tiger has been turned into a pussy cat" - and the encouraged populace urges a military, rather than a political, settlement. Few voices speak beyond the "racial", the political and the military to fundamental human rights. Few urge justice and compassion, inclusion, and the according to others what one has arrogated to oneself. It is unfortunate that while Sri Lanka has had

(and has) hate-filled "racists" like Dharmapala (Buddhist monk) and Wijewardena (layman), it has not produced a Mahatma Gandhi, a Martin Luther King, a Mandela or Desmond Tutu. (In Bertolt Brecht's play, *Life of Galileo*, a character exclaims, "Unfortunate the country that has no hero", and the penetrating answer comes, "Unhappy the country that *needs* a hero".)

The Mahatma ("great of soul"), though himself a Hindu, opposed Hindu lack of generosity and intransigence, both of which led to ugly violence. Similarly, during the Rivonia trial of 1963, Nelson Mandela said, "I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination". In a tribute to the late Adrain Wijemanne, I wrote, *inter alia*:

> Of yet another kind of protest is when someone takes a stand against the actions of her or his own people**:** for example, those "Whites" who joined their fellow Black Africans and fought the good fight against apartheid in South Africa. They were branded "traitors" by their fellow "Whites", and hated even more than the "enemy". Wijemanne's stand was for justice**:** if the Sinhalese were oppressed, he would have fought for them. *What mattered to him was not ethnicity but ethics*. He saw himself not as a Sinhalese but as a Sri Lankan, and Sri Lankans as members of the one, human, family**:** joining the struggle for justice for the Tamil people of Sri Lanka, he fought for (a part of) humanity. Politics mattered to him because humanity mattered. Tamils who remember him must be inspired by his example not only to continue the struggle for justice, but also to have

> his honesty and courage to confront mistakes and injustice - even when they emanate from fellow Tamils.

Ironically, the "LTTE's conditions of existence are not supplied by the LTTE itself but by others, including those who claim to oppose separatism and terrorism" (Dayan Jayatilleka, in *Remembering Kethesh Loganathan*, Sri Lanka Democracy Forum, March 2007, p. 27).

In other words, *the Tigers can be neutralised if the grounds that led to their creation are removed*; if one moves beyond ethnic and party politics; beyond dealing with symptoms, rather than addressing underlying causes. The past has determined the present, but one must not fatalistically allow the present to fashion the future. In this context, borrowing words from Karl Marx, the challenge; indeed, the responsibility, is to change history. Altering and applying a concept from Buddhism, one can say that we are responsible for our political *karma*. The Tamils turned away from a monolithic state to federalism; failing in that, and with continued and increasing suffering, particularly in 1983, some Tamils – in their view, logically, perhaps unfortunately, but inevitably - to separation. However, the process can be retraced, *if* confidence, trust and hope are created. And it is not a matter of pacts and agreements, but their clearly evident *implementation*; not merely the letter of the law, but its spirit. The Tigers can best be "disarmed" if Tamils are shown unequivocally that there is no longer a need for an armed group to defend their rights.

In the shameless and irresponsible pursuit of party politics; that is, of personal and group power, federalism in the 1950s was made into a veritable bogey, an ogre about to devour the Island. A

populace characterised by credulity and emotion (and therefore also by volatility) was easily convinced and "excited", fear and passion aroused. The people, unknowing and trusting, are easily led into falsity and, resulting from that, deep-seated fear. The United States, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, Russia, India, Pakistan, Malaysia – to name but a few - have a federal structure, but we do not see them as in anyway divided nations. Etymologically, the word 'education' means to lead outwards**:** the horizons of the Sri Lankan populace is deliberately kept narrow, and focussed, intensely and obsessively, inward. As with the term "terrorism" discussed earlier, "federalism" is used without definition and clarification. It must be added that, unfortunately, the contrast is between federal and unitary structure, mistakenly suggesting in the minds of the people that federalism destroys unity.

In viewing the present, one must also recall the past, and its betrayed possibilities. I quote, again not verbatim (except when within quotation marks) from the memoir of Lee Kuan Yew**:**

> Ceylon was Britain's model Commonwealth country. It had a relatively good standard of education, a civil service largely of locals, and experience in representative government. "When Ceylon gained independence in 1948, it was the classic model of gradual evolution to independence. Alas it did not work out. *I watched a promising country go to waste* (emphasis added). One-man-one-vote did not solve a basic problem**:** the Sinhalese could always outvote the Tamils.
>
> The greatest mistake Jayawardene made was over

> the distribution of reclaimed land in the dry zone**:** it was not shared with the Tamils who had been the farmers of this dry zone. "Dispossessed and squeezed, they launched the Tamil Tigers."
>
> Ranasinghe Premadasa was a Sinhalese chauvinist. I met him on several occasions. "I argued that his objective must be to deprive the terrorists of popular support by offering the Tamils autonomy", but he was convinced he could destroy the Tigers. Under his successor, Chandrika Kumaratunga, the war continues.
>
> Ceylon's ancient name was Serendip, and serendipity means an accidental, but happy, discovery. The Island is "now the epitome of conflict, pain, sorrow and hopelessness."

Lee Kuan Yew's comment is terrible and tragic but it should not lead to despair and a sense of helplessness. Rather, it should provoke clear and honest self-examination on all sides, and a determination to create and bequeath a happier future. Pavlov's experiment with dogs conditioned to salivate is general currency, but what is less known and noted is that if 'reinforcement' is stopped, then the effects of the 'conditioning' wears off – and History offers numerous examples of people led to see yesterday's foe as today's friend.

Turning from Sri Lanka to India, that country neutralised the separatist tendency in Tamil Nadu, not by armed might and counter-productive violence, but by inclusion and incorporation; by convincing the people that they had a share, and a say, at the centre.

Conclusion

Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards, resulting in anti-Sikh riots that left hundreds dead**:** today, the Prime Minister is a Sikh. The leader of the party in power, Congress, is an Italian, and the President, despite tensions with Moslem Pakistan, is Dr Abdul Kalam. In stark and telling contrast, it is unthinkable that in post-independence Sri Lanka, a Christian, even if she or he is a Sinhalese, becomes President (hence the politic and political-religious conversion of Bandaranaike and Jayawardena to Buddhism) and much less, a Tamil, even if s/he were a Buddhist, whether by birth or 'conversion'.

Sri Lanka ever since 1948 has deteriorated in political and moral terms**:** what counts is not cricket, but the ethnic conflict and the suffering it brings; corruption and crime. Corruption, having infected the highest levels, has seeped down, so that the public takes it for granted, accepts it as a part of life, like the weather, and are no longer shocked and outraged. On Independence Day, the minorities and the poor, being excluded, have more cause to mourn than to celebrate, and the title of Alan Paton's novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country,* comes to mind. And yet (with acknowledgement to Martin Luther King), there is the dream that, one day, people will not be reacted to on grounds of ethnicity "but by the content of their character"; that one day, the children of different groups "will be able to join hands" and walk together; that one day, the Island rise up and live out the true meaning of that belief and assertion**:** All are created equal, and should be permitted, indeed, enabled, to live in equality. As Chelvanayagam said in Parliament in the course of a debate (1 March 1951), "Let us have one nation, but that 'one nation' must be based on the principle of evolving a harmonious unit, not on the principle of destroying the smaller units. [But] you are proceeding on the principle of destroying, hurting, the smaller units. How can there be one nation on that basis?"

Conclusion

Things fall apart. Anarchy and the blood-dimmed tide are loosed, and innocence drowned. The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity. Rough beasts stalk the land**:** Freely adapted from Yeats' poem, 'The Second Coming'. Sri Lanka's present is marked by irrationality, hatred and violence; the future, uncertain.

I offer no solution but have merely sketched some of the problems, including what I term the Tamil dilemma and, in that way, tried to make a contribution to awareness. The country is in a state of acute cultural crisis – "cultural" in its broad sense, as a way of life, and so including the political, religious and moral. It is said that the first and essential step in an addict's effort at redeeming himself is to acknowledge and accept that he has fallen into a pit. Similarly, the Island must give up denial and empty "pride", and admit that it is in a sorry state, a state all the more tragic because, unlike the tsunami, it is self-created. Once that is done and acknowledged, the next step will be to ask how we got where we are. Finally, a way out can be found and fashioned, one that - because it includes elements such as equality, justice, fairness and inclusion – will lead to harmony and happiness.

Sri Lanka has the highest level of literacy (91%) in the South Asian region; it boasts many who are highly qualified but the people are not educated, that is, not led outward. We are inwardly focused and obsessed. Mired in the past, we take myth for fact; distort Buddhism; believe in essentialism and "race", exclusivity and superiority; in Aryanism and divine election. There is little desire to recognise what is common and shared, while celebrating – even encouraging - variety and equality. Posthumous restitution is not practical, and perhaps it is too late for the present, but for the sake of the children of the present and future, the long reign of anomy must be ended.

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Appendix 1: Asoka not a Buddhist?

The highly-regarded historian, K M Panikkar, in his *A Survey of Indian History*, states the following**:** "Asoka is spoken of as a Buddhist emperor and his reign as a kind of Buddhist period in Indian history. The division between Hinduism and Buddhism in India was purely sectarian […] The exclusiveness of religious doctrines is a Semitic conception which was unknown to India for a long time. Buddha himself was looked upon in his lifetime and afterwards as a Hindu saint and avatar and his followers were but another sect […] In the view of the people of the day [Asoka] was a Hindu monarch following one of the recognised sects. His own inscriptions bear ample witness to this fact. While his doctrines follow the Middle Path, his gifts are to the Brahmana, Sramanas (Buddhist priests) and others equally. His own name of adoption is Devanam Priya, the beloved of the gods. Which gods? […] Buddhism had no gods of its own. The idea that Asoka was a kind of Buddhist Constantine declaring himself against paganism is *a complete misreading of Indian conditions through the eyes of Christian Europe*. [Emphasis added] Asoka was essentially a Hindu." (Asia Publishing House, London, 1960 reprint, page 31. First published: 1947.)

Similarly, *India***:** *A History* by John Keay, claims that Asoka's "inscriptions never mention the Buddha and show no awareness of his 'Noble Eightfold Path' or any other Buddhist schema. Even the idea of conversion is suspect, since codes like those of the Buddhists and Jains were not seen as exclusive. Religion as creed, doctrine as dogma, and faith as truth are equations with little validity in pre-Islamic India. […] Conversion, in the sense of renouncing one set of doctrines for another, was meaningless […] the crucial distinction was not between different belief systems but between different lifestyles. The individual was defined purely by his relationship to

the rest of society. Not doctrine but conduct was what mattered. [Asoka] attempted no philosophical justification of *dhamma*, nor was he much given to rationalising it. It was not a belief system, nor a developed ideology, just a set of behavioural exhortations" (HarperCollins, London, 2000, pp. 96-7).

Appendix 2: The Term 'Racism' and Discourse.

The following is a slightly altered – and considerably abridged - version of an article by me (parts of which are meant tongue-in-cheek), published in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, London, Vol 35, No 2, 2000. As Derrida has pointed out, some words should be placed "under erasure"**:** they are inaccurate, and so are crossed out; but since they are necessary, they remain legible. In my opinion, "racism" is one such term.

The term "racism" is vague, covering several forms of group consciousness, and the resulting ill-treatment of those seen as not belonging, the other(s). "Racism" in discourse is a palimpsest written differently to suit varying emotions and agenda. For example, prejudice against Jews is anti-Semitism, a manifestation of "racism" – even if it is expressed by an Arab, that is, by a member of the same Semite "race", and Moroccan Jews have complained about the "racism" they allegedly endure in Israel at the hands of European Jews. In the United States, there is concern at what appears to be a deterioration in relations between American-Jews and African-Americans, both victims of "racism", the former a racial group once branded "the killers of Christ", and the latter, on the ground of colour, marked as the children of Ham. (Apropos the U.S.A., the census form for 2000 listed sixty-three racial categories.)

Benedict Anderson states that though nations exist, there is no scientific definition of a nation; a nation is a cultural artefact with emotional legitimacy; an imagined political community – imagined because not even those who go to make up the smallest of nations will ever know most of their fellow-members, yet in the consciousness of each lives the image of their communion (p. 6). Six pages on in the same work, Anderson cites Ernest Gellner's argument that

nationalism does not awake nations to self-consciousness: rather, it is a certain kind of consciousness which *invents* nations. To belong to a state (a legal status implying citizenship, obedience to a particular set of laws etc) may not have emotional connotations, while a sense of belonging to a nation usually does. An individual can be a citizen of one country, and yet feel that s/he belongs to, and is a part of, a nation geographically far away. The Kurds, fragmented in different countries, scattered in many European and U.S. centres, are a case in point: emotionally, they belong to a "nation" which they are struggling to bring into existence. Some of the foregoing comments on "nation" can be applied to "race", and the latter term substituted for the former: *a certain kind of consciousness invents and thinks in terms of "race"*. Moving forward from these preliminary considerations, I wish to examine the problematic of the term "race" as currently used in discourse. For example, Caryl Phillips' *Cambridge* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* are said to deal with the issue of "racism", but the "racism" in these novels is different, one based on colour, and the other primarily on religious affiliation, and secondly/secondarily, on notions of "race".

Language and words, whether written or spoken, remain the main counters of expression and exchange we human beings have, and we must try to be as clear and precise as we can, whatever the experiential difficulty or philosophic discouragement. Helen Cooper points out that there is no word equivalent to misogyny, and tentatively suggests "misandrony". The lack of a recognized term, she argues, is an indication of an ingrained gender imbalance, as if man-hating were literally unspeakable because it is unthinkable (p. 3). "Ethnicity" (deriving from the Greek "heathen" or "pagan") is an increasingly popular term which, in the U.S., around the time of World War 11, was applied to groups thought to be inferior, such as Jews, Italians and the Irish, and now is often used as if it were a synonym for "race". Ethnicity is an aspect of relations between groups where at

least one party sees itself as being culturally distinctive, if not unique. This sense of difference influences the perception and treatment of others. However, the boundary delimited by one cultural criterion – system of government, language, religion, social customs and practices – does not coincide with those established by other criteria. The difference is deferred in the Derridean sense, and the term remains problematic.

Dictionaries offer a plethora of definitions of "race", the term from which we derive "racism": a group connected by common descent or origin; a tribe, nation or people regarded as of common stock; a group of several tribes or peoples, forming a distinct ethnic stock (notions of a great Aryan race and Nazism?); one of the great divisions of humankind having certain physical peculiarities in common; humankind, as distinct from animals. The first paragraph of Noel Ignatiev's *How The Irish Became White* states that no biologist has ever been able to provide a satisfactory definition of "race", a definition that includes all members of a given "race" and excludes all others, and that attempts to give the term a scientific foundation have led but to absurdities (1995). David Lowenthal argues that race is a social artefact (1996) and, going further, Eric Foner, in a review titled "How a Desire for Profit Led to the Invention of Race", writes that it is "now almost a cliché that race is invented or socially constructed (1999). The tragedy as I see it is that though "race" does not exist, racism most certainly does. The mountain cannot be precisely located, it may not even exist, but the damaging lava continues to flow. Racists fervently believe that human characteristics, both physical (visual) and non-physical, are inherited and, what is more, that these characteristics differ *systematically* and consistently between all who go to make up different "races". Behaviour that confirms the stereotype is fastened upon and highlighted; that which refutes and contradicts, passed over as an exception proving the rule: it's a "no-win situation". In the words of

Jeremy Waldron, "race" is something which should not matter, but it has mattered, and therefore has to matter, in the sense that it should be a subject of concern (1998). Undergoing a semantic shift as the result of over-use, "racism" is now an umbrella term covering and blurring many different manifestations.

As one who was born in Sri Lanka, let me begin with that island, partly because some of us so-called third-world critics are sensitive to racism in places such as Britain, Europe and America but are unmindful of it at home. Indeed the same critic, hurt by and indignant at attitudes and treatment in the West, may subscribe to and righteously support racism back home, seeing her/his intolerance as proof of patriotism. In Sri Lanka during the successive attacks on Tamil civilians culminating in the ghastly pogrom of 1983, individuals and families were asked to identify themselves – a prelude to assault, rape and/or murder. Absurd as it may seem, life or death can hang on a vowel or consonant. Tamil names, for example, *Rajaratnam*, tend to end with a consonant; Sinhala names with a vowel: *Rajaratne*. In the Old Testament of *The Bible*, the fleeing Ephraimites were identified only by their language, by the way they pronounced words like "shibboleth". In Sri Lanka, during times of riot, Tamils have been asked to pronounce certain Sinhala words, or to recite lines of Buddhist prayers, the majority of Tamils being Hindu. The point I endeavour to make is that in the Sri Lankan context where two groups have inhabited the same, small island for approximately two millennia; where inter-marriage was and still is not uncommon; where some Hindu deities and elements have been incorporated into the essentially secular philosophy the Buddha taught, often there are no visible signs, no external markings, of "race". The so-called "racism" which flourishes is finally not based on a racial division: the tectonic fault-line is mainly linguistic, resulting in the assertion that only native-speakers of Sinhala constitute the original (therefore "authentic") nation. Language is the chief identity-marker and

sustainer of "race". (Religion to a lesser extent because there are Sinhalese and Tamil Christians.) Elsewhere, too, where the ethnic group is not visually distinct and immediately identifiable, the group affiliation of the individual or family has to be ascertained before discrimination is practised or barbarity unleashed. I propose that the type of group hostility, such as the one thriving in Sri Lanka, be known as *linguoracism***:** "there is no more intimate or more sensitive an index of identity than language (Crystal **:** p. vii). In Northern Ireland where neither colour, language nor physical characteristics differentiate warring groups, do we have a case of *religioracism*? But here too, language can play a part: the name of a Nationalist leader is Martin McGuinness, and that of a Loyalist leader, Ken Maginnis. The surnames are homophones but the difference in spelling signals group origin and affiliation (John Thieme,1999).

There's another kind of prejudice, and resulting discrimination and exclusion, also known as "racism", based neither on "race", religion nor language, but on the colour of one's skin, on whether or not one is "white" (or "pinko gray", as Fielding suggests in *A Passage to India*). Unlike the other forms of "racism", the difference here is immediate, visual and overt. The white/non-white division is broad and transcends different "nations", "races" and languages. The sole criterion is that of pigmentation and, sadly, Indians and Sri Lankans who fondly (in both the Shakespearean and present meanings of the term) claim to be of "the Aryan race," are excluded. One is either "white" or "non-white", and so it has been said that a "white" woman can give birth to a "black" child but a "black" (that is, "non-white") woman can never give birth to a "white" child. A "mixed marriage" rarely means that (to give a random example) a German married a Russian. John Wideman contends that "race" stigmatizes "non-whites" only, and that "whites" view themselves as raceless (1994). I suppose, Pauline Hanson of the One Nation political party of Australia would disagree, for the first item listed in the principles

and objectives of her political party is the need for Australia to be truly one nation. It would seem that to the members of the party she founded, one "nation" equals one "race", which equals "white". With an uncharacteristic coyness, Hanson refrained from naming the party she founded "The Party of the One White Race."

Wideman also comments that "non-whites" in telling their own story unfortunately employ the words and terminology of the dominant group, rather than independently and confidently fashioning their own. It reflects a hegemonic situation, one which women too confront: see, for example, the comment by Helen Cooper referred to above. As Toni Morrison expresses it, a non-white writer struggles with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of "racial" superiority, cultural domination and dismissive "othering" (p. x). We see struggle and rebellion in Arundhati Roy's novel, *The God of Small Things,* as she rejects the discourse of Hindu caste hegemony and writes, for example, of a school for "Touchables", a dichotomic neologism, for in general usage, the opposite of "untouchable" is "high caste", even as in Britain the opposite of "coloured" is not "colourless" but "white".

The term "race" as presently used refers to feelings, attitudes and behaviour arising from an imagined and unscientific notion of "race," from a difference in language, religion or colour**:** with reference to colour-based constructions of "race", see Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, London, 1994. Patricia Williams's *Seeing a Colour-Blind Future* is a case in point, for the work is sub-titled, "The Paradox of Race", thus unsatisfactorily conflating colour and "race". Cornel West, another African-American, also equates racial discrimination with colour prejudice in his work, *Race Matters* (1994), dedicated to his son who daily combats the invisible injuries of "race". But Hispanics, Asians and other "races" in the United States also experience prejudice because they are not "white", because

they cannot, neither collectively nor individually, merge into the background, become unmarked and unlabelled. K Anthony Appiah may remind us that "until about 100,000 years ago the ancestors of all modern humans lived in Africa" but now, to some, there are only two races, the "white" and the "non-white". Perhaps what John Wideman meant was that most "whites", consciously or not, see themselves as the norm, and all others as deviant and inferior, calibrated according to the degree of colour or, more precisely, its absence. In early 1999, when I was drafting this article, two cases were receiving prominent media attention, one in the U.S.A., and the other in U.K. In the former, a "white" man was found guilty of assaulting an African-American who was on his way home, tying him to the back of a vehicle and dragging the victim to his death, body parts scattering along the way. Even violent America, albeit momentarily, was shocked at this raw, gratuitous brutality. In the U.K., the Stephen Lawrence story persisted. Stephen, aged seventeen, an aspiring architecture student "of African Caribbean descent" (see Toni Morrison below) was assaulted and killed in 1993 by a gang of "white" youths as he waited for a bus. The determination of Stephen's parents to see justice done prevented the incident from being forgotten, from becoming just another statistic. The report of a government-appointed inquiry, released on 24 February 1999, found that the police force in Britain is riddled with institutional "racism" – a reflection of the "racism" in the wider society. In both cases, the victims were innocently trying to get home and, it appears, strangers to their assailants. What singled them out and provoked murderous attack was neither "race" (for example, that they were thought to be Slavs) nor religion, but colour. These are two extreme cases that have received attention for reasons already stated. Other incidents, either less horrific or where the families and friends of the victims did not succeed in pursuing matters, have secured at best a brief and passing mention. At the other end of the racist scale, statistics cannot be compiled for minor slights and differentiations, however frequent

and hurtful they may be, though African-American and Postcolonial literature do provide attestation.

I feel that the different expressions of prejudice (tribal, linguistic, religious and colour-based) shouldn't all be labelled "racism", but ought to be differentiated so that they can be particularized, immediately recognized, better combated and dismantled. Their origins are different, as are their manifestations. "Racism" in the so-called developing world invariably has an (imagined) racial base or is premised on religion or language: *ethnicity-racism? cultural racism?* Where it exists in the West, racism is primarily predicated on colour, the visually immediate and most important dividing marker. Oliver Sacks notes that those who are colour-blind (in a literal, ophthalmologic sense) are not distracted by trivial or irrelevant aspects; that they don't go by the superficiality of colour, but take everything into consideration. Of course, what is at fault is not the perception of colour (nor language, "race" or religion) but the significance we attach to it. The varied and colourful world of nature is welcomed, causes delight and interest, but when it comes to human beings, the reaction is primitive, primordial. "A person of colour knows that the fact of her colour will register every time in the eyes of ["white"] strangers, officials, shop assistants, even friends and colleagues". The genuinely "colour blind" are very few in number though, moving with like-minded people, they may think the numbers to be far greater than they really are. As a character in Romesh Gunesekara's novel, The *Sandglass*, expresses it, In England, "it is my skin that people notice, that goes in front of me, everywhere […] Everything else follows to fit" (p. 65).

I have already offered *linguoracism* and *ethnicity-racism*, and my modest proposal now is that a colour-based "racism" be known as *whiteism*, an absurd term for an absurd attitude. I had thought of *colourism* because Africans and Asians are also guilty of partiality

and prejudice based on the visible, "accidental" signs of colour, but I think it will be acknowledge that, given Western military supremacy and economic domination over the last half millennium or so; given past conquest, occupation and exploitation; given present economic woes, and political and social turmoil, *whiteism* is more prevalent, and that *blackism* and *brownism* are often only a reaction to Western assumptions of superiority – witness, for example, the defensive assertion of the Francophone Negritude movement. V G Kiernan in his classic study, *The Lords of Human Kind*, argues that it was colonial power and control that made "white" the distinguishing feature that it has come to be. Being "white" became an important element in the Western collective consciousness, and "white" people, vis-à-vis "non-whites", "gave the impression, to themselves as to outsiders, of being one race" (p. 15). Not only colonialism and imperial rule, but the slave trade in Africans and, after its abolition, the use of Asian indentured labour, strengthened Western "racial" assumptions and attitudes.

Particularity and clarity are neither in the nature, nor in the interests, of those who harbour group prejudice and, as Toni Morrison says, the habit of ignoring "race", of pretending it doesn't exist – understood to be a tactful, sensitive, even generous, liberal gesture – is finally unhelpful (p. 10).

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Appendix 3: Made alien at home

I reproduce a slightly altered version of my letter (published in *The Island*, Colombo, sometime in 2005) responding to a statement attributed to D. E. W. Gunasekara, then the Minister of Constitutional Affairs. *Inter alia*, he was quoted as saying, "The LTTE is our own people. They are not invaders or foreigners. We must take every possible step to bring them closer. That is our job**:** not the job of the Americans or the British."

> Reading the above, I was reminded of an incident that happened over forty years ago. I was given a lift by a young African, somewhere in Sweden. Shortly after, the car crashed. While waiting for the police, surrounded by kind and concerned Swedes, the thoroughly shaken African asked me, "What happened?" Equally shaken, I replied, "It was raining, the road was slippery but you didn't slow down!" (It later turned out he was a newly-arrived student, the car was not road-worthy, and he didn't have a driving license.)
>
> "Why didn't you tell me?"
>
> "How could I? You are a stranger. You stopped and gave me a lift. How could I tell you how to drive?"
>
> What followed has remained with me over these many years. The African put his arm alongside my arm and said, "Don't you see, brother, we are closer to each other than to these people? You could have told me."
>
> Living abroad for decades, I have often thought that the Sinhalese and Tamils have far more things in common with each other than differences but, tragically and calamitously, we have chosen to

emphasise difference and discount what is common and, therefore, unites us.

As Professor K. Indrapala writes, “The deeper one delves into Sri Lankan history, the more one will find how much the Tamils and the Sinhalese have in common. They have a shared history and culture; and a common descent.” (*The Evolution Of An Ethnic Identity*, p. xii)

Appendix 4: From Nanda Godage's, "The Buddha statue and its 'desecration' ".

Daily Mirror, Colombo, 13 May 2005.

Sadly for Buddhists, some illiterate monks and other ignorant laymen are seeking to transform the Buddha into a God. Buddha, Sidhartha Gautama, was no God and never claimed to be one.

The Buddha escaped from the cycle of birth and death or *Sansara*, and so he cannot be prayed to.

Buddhism in Sri Lanka is being perverted by ignorant monks and laymen. They have taken a page out of the book of the Catholics and have been erecting statues of the Buddha at every nook and corner of his country to show their piety.

The essence of Buddhism is *Sila* (morality) and the eradication of ignorance. [Words of the relevant prayers are cited by Mr Godage.]

The worship of statues, all Pipal trees and monuments is contrary to Buddhism. Sidhartha Gautama, when he became enlightened, stood in front of the tree that had given him shelter during the period of his meditation, in order to show gratitude to that *particular* tree. Now every Pipal tree is being called a *Bodhi* tree - not just the tree under which the Buddha sat at the time he attained enlightenment - and is being worshipped. Some even bathe the trees with milk and make vows. This is wholly alien to Buddhism.

The Buddha's beautiful and meaningful sermon on loving kindness is chanted not in Sinhala but in the ancient Indian language Pali, understood by almost none. The intention of the Buddha as conveyed in the meaning of his words has been lost - the sermon was *meant to be lived, not merely to be recited as a mantra* [emphasis added].

My thanks to the author for sending me a copy of his article, and for giving permission to quote from it.

Appendix 5: Jaffna. Extracts from a letter to Shanthi, my sister. February 2004.

I deliberately went by car so as to see, experience and learn as much as I possibly could.

All along the way are the signs of war and its destruction, most evident in Kilinochchi, Chavakachcheri and Jaffna itself. Swathes of the forest on both sides of the road have been destroyed to deprive LTTE soldiers of cover, and for timber for the soldiers of the "government" to build bunkers. I saw many trees with their tops blown off by artillery and tank shells; saw bombed out schools, houses, places of worship (Hindu and Christian) and other buildings which once formed part of the infrastructure…The ground is littered with landmines - laid, I understand, by both sides. (The mines are not of the type that become inactive after a while, but will remain lethal for about forty years.) There are warning signs, and much work is being done by NGOs - slow, painstaking and dangerous work. I was shown fertile fields that one dare not venture to cultivate, trees with fruit one dare not attempt to pluck.

All houses and buildings along the main road have been taken over by the army, the owners summarily turned out, without alternate accommodation and without compensation. One speaks of "government" soldiers but, given the fact that they are *all* Sinhalese, it is difficult for the people not to see them as an occupying Sinhalese army.

On the return journey, we stayed the night at Kilinochchi. We were told that there was an LTTE cemetery, a "Resting Place of the Heroes," not far away, and that at night it's lit up. We found the place, but it was in total darkness. From somewhere in the middle,

an elderly man turned up with a torch, a thin man accompanied by a skinny dog. He explained that the power supply had broken down. We chatted briefly and, leaving, asked whether he didn't feel uneasy at being in the middle of a cemetery, far from town, all by himself and in total darkness. He laughed and answered, "How can I be afraid when I'm surrounded by thousands and thousands of heroic young men and women!" The next morning, we visited the cemetery again. It seems that the rule about removing one's shoes has been relaxed because some of the visitors are handicapped, some have artificial limbs – in other words, the wounded coming to visit the graves of their comrades who fell in battle.

It was strange to drive from such a geographic, and even more, an experiential, environment and reality into the lush green of Kandy and, the very next day, into Colombo, Colombo with its big shops, fashion boutiques, restaurants and cinemas: there are many, and very different, "normalities. You and I are sometimes startled by a cracker, say at New Year celebrations, and I wondered how innocent civilians "survive" aerial bombardment and heavy artillery barrages. How do they endure physical violence and brutality? How do they keep the soul, private and public ethics, intact and the mind whole and stable? In war, ordinary people endure the extraordinary.

Appendix 6: Shanmugan, Policeman. Extracts from my letter to Durgha and Skanda Shanmugan, May 2001.

Shun, like almost all human beings, was no "saint," and yet when it came to the police force, there was such a commitment in him that I felt the police service was some abstraction to which he had dedicated himself. It was his ambition from earliest childhood to serve in the force. I suppose this had a lot to do with the fact that his father had been a policeman.

I think his first appointment as an Assistant Superintendent of Police was at Mount Lavinia and, almost immediately, unpleasant reality presented itself. Shun had a telephone call from some political figure demanding that a certain man held in custody be released. Shun didn't even know that the man had been arrested, but looked into the matter and found that the person has been duly charged and locked up. Shun therefore stood firm and declined to release the man, that is, until his superior officer instructed him to do so**:** it transpired that the man's sister was a mistress of the politician.

Beautiful "Ceylon" was giving way to the ugly "Sri Lanka" of corruption in high places, "race" hatred and violence. I recall him telling me of his predicament during a time of anti-Tamil riot. He stayed in the 'Control room', trying to deal with matters. A call would come, asking the police for help and protection. He would look at his map, identify the nearest police car, and instruct it to proceed to the scene. Other calls and messages pouring in, he'd forget that case, assuming it has been with, but only to receive, hours later, a plea from the same place. On being contacted, the officers would say their car had down, or that they had a punctured tyre. One excuse followed another**:** the Sinhalese policemen did not see his actions as those of a police officer doing his duty, protecting law-abiding

citizens, but as those of a Tamil officer trying to defend Tamils from Sinhalese mobs. Much later, he was to comment, with deep grief, that no self-respecting Tamil could serve in the security forces because they had been thoroughly racialised.

During one of the troubles known as the "insurgency" in Sri Lanka's history, a cabinet minister – I seem to recall his name as one E L Senanayake – arrived in Kandy by helicopter, and ordered Shun to arrest certain individuals. Shun declined because there was no evidence whatsoever against them. The minister insisted, saying he had come from a cabinet meeting and spoke with cabinet authority. Subsequently, those individuals charged Shun in court with false arrest. (In private, they explained that the legal action was not really against him but the government.) The UNP, the party in power, then approached Shun with the request that he takes the blame, that he says that he had acted on his own initiative. In return, they would foster his career. Shun refused and, thereafter, the government made life as difficult as possible for him.

Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike (the world's first female Prime Minister) had once seen your father and said, "Shun, I hear they are giving you a lot of trouble. Be patient." Shun understood this as, "Wait till we are back in power." Recounting the incident to me, he added, "They will come to power, and perhaps will give me a district of my choice. But, then, sooner or later, they will ask me to do something which I shouldn't do; or not do something which I should; some man or woman with influence will approach me, and when I decline, I will be in trouble again." He was a deeply hurt and disillusioned man.

Then came the pogrom of 1983. What happened to your mother (down to the deliberate neglect of the nurses); to him, and to thousands of others, is well known, and I need not repeat them here. In his last

letter to me from California, he speaks of people being burnt alive while politicians and officials had their regular hours of sleep and fun… What really got me was the shock and reaction of my children, Durgha 7 and Skanda 5. It's taken them some time to get over things. My mother who was with me all these years, must be having a tough time without us. It is a pity I am unable to do the best till her sun sets – this hurts me more than throwing away the childhood dream of being a cop, and after twenty-one years without a single adverse entry.

A few months later, he was dead. I see the tragedy that befell dear Shun as a microcosm of the tragedy that has befallen the whole Island.

[Back cover]

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