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**Editor
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Sustaining Societies Under Strain: Migration, Remittances and Class in Sri Lanka and Ghana

Nicholas Van Hear²

Introduction

This paper looks at the potential for diasporas to assist their homelands, particularly those that are ailing through socio-economic disintegration or conflict and its aftermath. From the point of view of those at home in such societies, the presence of family members abroad may be a lifeline, particularly in times of distress. More generally, expatriate populations increasingly determine many aspects of their homelands' society, economy, politics and culture. Indeed, **arguably some countries could not sustain themselves without the support of nationals abroad** (Brown 1992; de Montclos 1999).

The paper investigates one concrete way in which those abroad shape the living conditions of those at home: the transfer of remittances. As many other studies, particularly of 'economic' migration, have shown, remittances from abroad can have profound impacts on those at home (see Massey et al 1998: 221-274); this paper will show that this is true, if not more so, for societies in conflict or otherwise in distress. Again as has been shown elsewhere, while remittances have helped to *sustain* households and communities back home, the

¹ This paper draws on research funded by the Leverhulme Trust, whose support is gratefully acknowledged.

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evidence for *transforming* the homeland is much less clear. The impact of remittances on balance seems conservative, and the potential for transformation of the homeland through them is yet to be realised; herein perhaps lie some implications for policy and practice, particularly for societies that have experienced conflict or other serious distress.

Does the 'transnational communities' approach add anything to our understanding in this arena, or is it just a voguish fad? Overall, I suggest that the 'transnationalism' approach is not radically different from what has gone before in migration and refugee studies, particularly exploration of the impact of migration at home and abroad, in investigations of integration and adaptation, and in the field of ethnic relations. What is perhaps new is the insistence on seeing those who leave and those who remain as a single socio-economic field. This connection is exemplified in concrete, material terms by the approach in this paper to remittances. I suggest that it is misleading to see them as a one-way transfer, from those abroad to those at home. Rather remittances should be seen as part of an exchange, a return for the outlay or investment of the household in the migration of some of its members. It is in this link between home and abroad that 'transnationalism' lies.

Two countries that have experienced heavy out-migration in recent years are considered here: Ghana and Sri Lanka. The paper first briefly elaborates the conditions that prompted the migration of Ghanaians and Sri Lankans in the 1980s and 1990s, leading to the emergence of diasporas among expatriate populations of both countries. Household migration strategies are then briefly examined, and how socio-economic background increasingly determines the forms of migration undertaken, and its outcomes; the focus is on the outlays households must make and the returns they may expect from the migration of some of their members. The paper then considers whether and under what conditions Ghanaian and Sri Lankan diasporas sustain, conserve or transform the living conditions of those at home.

Finally some conclusions are offered about the usefulness of the 'transnationalism' approach.

Migration from Ghana and Sri Lanka: Mass exodus from distress

While there are great differences in the culture and societies of West Africa and South Asia, there are also significant similarities between the two countries under review. Their populations are similar in size, both are former British colonies, and they have similar political economies, not least in their dependence until recently on a single soft export commodity: cocoa in the case of Ghana and tea in the case of Sri Lanka. Both have had an unhappy post-colonial history after a promising start at independence. Their problems culminated in crises in the early 1980s. Curiously, the year 1983 figures prominently as a watershed in the recent history of both countries, and marks the date from which mass exodus from distress began in earnest.

For Ghana 1983 was the country's nadir, when the accumulated mismanagement of previous decades combined with adverse external conditions to bring the country close to collapse. Near bankruptcy, a valueless currency, widespread scarcities of essential goods, drought and a failure of the harvest coalesced in near social and economic breakdown - epitomised by the 'Rawlings necklace', the name for the protruding collar bones on emaciated Ghanaians with not enough to eat, a condition wryly associated with the president, Flight Lt Jerry Rawlings. 1983 was also a watershed year in terms of migration, for it was then that Nigeria expelled perhaps a million Ghanaian migrant workers, compounding the country's dire socio-economic situation. The throttling of one of Ghana's principal outlets for migration marked the acceleration of diasporisation as Ghanaians sought other diverse destinations, increasingly outside Africa, from the later 1980s. They joined

and reinvigorated a prior diaspora of migrants who had sought professional and educational advancement abroad. By the 1990s, between ten and 20 percent of Ghana's population of about 16 million may have been abroad (Van Hear 1998).

Since the early 1980s the country has climbed back from the abyss. A recovery in the later 1980s faltered but was just about sustained in the 1990s when fragile democracy took root, with elections in 1992 and 1996. For Ghana the years since 1983 might be compared with a period of post-war reconstruction: it moved from a society that did not work, dogged by scarcities, lack of trust, the necessity to act corruptly or starve, and general dislocation, to a society that in the 1990s did function. Despite the improvements emigration has continued, however. Substantial numbers of Ghanaian migrants have sought and in some cases received political asylum, although in many, if not most, of these instances the case for asylum would seem hard to sustain. There has certainly been repression and persecution of political opponents of the Rawlings regime (Nugent 1995; Jeffries 1998); sometimes this has resulted in deaths and disappearances. That these were unstable, insecure times for many Ghanaians socially, politically and economically is beyond question. But it was this general insecurity, rather than violent conflict or widespread persecution, that drove so many Ghanaians to seek better times abroad.

1983 was also a crucial year for Sri Lanka. It was the time of the country's most serious ethnic riots, and is usually regarded as marking the beginning of the civil war that has afflicted the country ever since. The riots were the worst in a series of disturbances since independence in 1948, as ethnic tension escalated against the background of increasing discrimination against the Tamil minority (about 18% of the population and mainly Hindu) and in favour of the Sinhalese majority (about 72% of the population, and mainly Buddhist). In retaliation for the killing of Sinhalese soldiers by the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the

northern town of Jaffna, anti-Tamil violence broke out in the south, resulting in several thousand deaths, large scale destruction of homes and massive displacement of Tamils within the country. The riots polarised the two main ethnic communities, and foreshadowed a period of ethnic 'unmixing'. The armed conflict that followed sparked the exodus of thousands of Tamils, at first mainly to south India, but later further afield to Europe, North America and Australasia. Later another minority, Tamil-speaking Muslims (about 7% of the population), were drawn into the cycle of displacement and 'ethnic cleansing'. By the 1990s, out of a population of about 18 million, there were some 100,000 Sri Lankan refugees in India, 200-300,000 in Europe and North America, and up to a million Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese displaced within the country as a result of the protracted conflict (US Committee for Refugees 1998).

Flight from conflict was just one layer of emigration. Tamil asylum seekers joined a prior diaspora that had been deployed by the British in the empire, and that had resulted from emigration for educational and professional purposes as discrimination took hold in Sri Lanka. Sinhalese professionals also sought educational and occupational advancement abroad. There was a further, separate stream of labour migration drawn from poorer Sri Lankan households, mainly though not exclusively Sinhalese. From the later 1970s increasing numbers of Sri Lankans were drawn to work in the oil-rich Gulf states, usually on two-year contracts; these migrants were mainly unskilled women employed as domestic workers, but some semi-skilled and skilled men were also engaged. By the 1990s about 200,000 such workers went each year to work in the Middle East, as well as in southeast and east Asia (Sri Lanka Ministry of Labour 1998).

Both Ghanaians and Sri Lankans have made use of the services of brokers or agents to arrange their travel. There were two main types of agent in Sri Lanka. In keeping with the country's migration order generally, they were more

institutionalised than in Ghana. *Overseas labour recruiters* had burgeoned in response to the demand for Sri Lankan labour, particularly housemaids, in the Middle East since the late 1970s. They were licensed by the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, under the Ministry of Labour; but despite its legitimate status, the sector was not well known for its probity. Not all agencies were regulated, some licensed agencies charged migrants greatly inflated fees, and many relied on the services of 'sub-agents' who sought out recruits in villages and towns, and who were not regulated. Other brokers, operating as *travel agents*, arranged the illicit movement of people, including asylum seekers, to the west. By the early to mid 1980s there was reported to be a network of contacts operating in Colombo and Europe to facilitate movement of Tamil asylum seekers to Europe (McDowell 1996), but it is not clear that the professionalisation of 'travel agents' in Sri Lanka had emerged by this stage. By the 1990s, however, few managed to seek asylum without the assistance of such agents.

In Ghana the agents were more disparate, varying widely in form and legality. Among those most often resorted to were *travel agents*, who organised tickets and visas, both legitimately and illegally. Such 'connection men' were in contact with staff at foreign embassies, who for a fee might be able to organise visas for countries which were difficult to enter. *Hajj agents* specialised in arranging pilgrimage travel to the Muslim holy places, their business diversifying into arranging travel to the Middle East, sometimes with a view to onward movement to Europe, North America or Asia. Other agents arranged travel for the purposes of *sports, cultural exchange, or education*, both legitimately and fraudulently. *The pentecostal and charismatic churches*, which have exploded in numbers in Ghana since the late 1970s, also provided an avenue for migration, legitimate and illegitimate, through their strong transnational links: church leaders acted as brokers arranging travel to Europe and North America for

church work or marriage to other church members (Van Dijk 1997). Mosques in Ghana could also organise accreditation for study in the Middle East. While usually utilised for legitimate reasons, this means might be used for onward travel if the opportunity arose.

The outcome of the various migration streams from both countries has been the emergence of substantial diasporas of Ghanaians and Sri Lankans, on whom substantial numbers of households at home depend for a large part of their livelihoods. As entry was tightened in many destinations from the later 1980s, particularly in the affluent west, the various forms of 'people movers' became increasingly important in both countries. Their charges also increased, so that international migration became more and more expensive, involving households in substantial outlays, as the following section shows.

Remittances as a Form of Transnational Exchange

It has become widely accepted that migration is often a matter of household strategy -- one among several -- particularly for coping during times of adversity. When and how to move, who should go, how to raise the resources to travel, how to use any proceeds from migration, and other decisions are commonly matters for the whole household rather than the individual migrant. This approach has been well demonstrated for 'economic' migration (Stark 1991; Massey et al 1998). As this chapter shows, it is also a useful approach in circumstances of forced migration. Like other household strategies, migration involves outlays or investment, and there is an expectation of return from that investment. Conceiving migration in this way suggests that remittances are not a simple one-way transfer from those abroad to those at home, but rather that the process may be better viewed as a kind of exchange.

While migration from both Sri Lanka and Ghana has been prompted by some of the same factors - which might be glossed as distress migration - the strategies of migration are rather different in the two cases. Household decision-making and strategies are in evidence to different degrees in Sri Lanka and Ghana: households as collectivities are more involved in migration decisions in Sri Lanka than in Ghana. In Sri Lanka migration is routinised, while in Ghana it is speculative and opportunistic. As would be expected, migration strategies also vary with social class, ethnicity, and gender in the two cases. In this section I consider the different strategies pursued, how the means to migrate are raised, the expectation of a return from such outlays on the part of those left behind, and the extent to which those expectations are satisfied.

Sri Lanka: Routine migration

There have been broadly three migration strategies open to Sri Lankans against the background of conflict since the early 1980s: labour migration, usually to the Middle East; seeking asylum, initially in India and later in Europe or North America; and marriage to a partner abroad in Europe, North America or Australasia.

Whatever the form of migration, migration decisions are usually firmly a household matter. Among most of the households in the Sri Lanka sample, the decision to go was jointly made between spouses or was a collective household one. Even if the decision to migrate was the individual migrant's, household resources were often used. There was often considerable household investment; most raised the money needed for migration from relatives or from their own savings. Resources accumulated for the dowries of daughters might be invested in migration, meaning that marriage might have to be delayed. Substantial numbers of households, especially those displaced or otherwise war-affected, and those with members who had sought asylum, resorted to

moneylenders, or sold, mortgaged or pawned assets like land, equipment, houses, shops or jewellery.

Partly because the different migration strategies require very different levels of outlay or investment, these strategies divide broadly along class lines, or at least according to the scale of resources that a household can muster. Strategies also vary along ethnic lines. Migration for work in the Middle East and elsewhere requires considerable outlays, but is within the reach of farming and working class households who have some resources: it is pursued by poorer rural and urban Sinhalese families, both displaced and not, and among poorer Muslim and (to a lesser extent) Tamil households who have been displaced. In the 1980s, poor Tamil households displaced by the conflict were able to find refuge in south India. That option faded with the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by the LTTE in 1991, after which India's general tolerance of Tamil asylum seekers hardened and the authorities attempted to repatriate Sri Lankans or otherwise pressured them to leave (US Committee for Refugees 1995). Asylum migration to other destinations, particularly in Europe or North America, has become increasingly costly. It has therefore become largely (though not exclusively) the preserve of well-to-do Tamils, who have both the grounds and resources to pursue it. (Well-to-do Sinhalese families rather pursue migration through education, professional employment, or family reunion). Migration for marriage may also be costly, for the outlay that must be found is likely to be high when the spouse-to-be has residence status abroad.

Labour migration: the poorer households' option

A Sri Lankan household might lay out 5,000-15,000 rupees for a woman to secure work as a housemaid in the Middle East; the figure might be double for men to secure work as drivers or in construction, with correspondingly higher earnings. This

might entail borrowing money at high rates of interest -- 15 percent per month was common -- meaning that much of the first year's earnings could be swallowed up in debt repayments. Many poor households were prepared to undertake such a risk. For those households displaced or otherwise affected by the war, whose margins for survival were slimmer, the risk was correspondingly greater. Sending a member abroad was nevertheless an increasingly common strategy. The following cases show how labour migration to the Middle East was used as a means to sustain displaced and war-affected households, and in some cases to assist them to recover after displacement or distress.

A Sinhalese settler household in Eastern Sri Lanka. This household was relocated from the populous west under a government settlement scheme in a hamlet in territory traditionally peopled by Tamils. They were allocated land to develop a paddy farm and to build a house. In 1992-94, the wife went to Lebanon as a housemaid to earn money to strengthen the family finances while developing the farm. They paid an agent R12,000, part of which was raised by mortgaging paddy land; the woman remitted most of her monthly salary of R4,000. The house was destroyed and the household displaced after the hamlet came under attack by the LTTE in 1995. The wife again went to work in Kuwait after the attack; they paid another agent R12,000, borrowing the money from him; with interest, a debt of R20,000 accumulated, which they were still paying off in 1998. Some of her earnings abroad, of R4,500 a month, were used to fund rebuilding the house and restarting the farm. Though apprehensive about further attacks, they were expecting their first harvest soon after the time of my visit.

A Muslim household in a displaced persons camp, Eastern Sri Lanka. This household of small farmers were displaced from a village in eastern Sri Lanka after an LTTE attack in 1990. The wife first went to work as a housemaid in

Kuwait in 1989 before their displacement, but her stay was cut short by the Gulf crisis and she had to return empty handed late in 1990, shortly after which they were displaced by the LTTE attack. The household thus experienced two serious crises in 1990. They borrowed R18,000 from an agent to send her to Kuwait, with their house deeds as security. Her limited earnings -- seven months at R4,900 -- were used for the household's daily needs, to pay off some of the debt to the agent, and to buy bullocks and a cart; however, when her earnings were discontinued because of the Gulf crisis, payments for the bullock cart could not be kept up, and it was repossessed. The woman went to the Middle East again in 1991-93, by which time the family was living in the camp; this time the agent charged R12,000. During this two-year contract, she managed to remit her monthly salary of R6,900. More than half of the money she earned was used to mark the circumcision of their son; some was spent on the purchase of some livestock; and the remainder on jewellery which could later be sold in case of need. In the settlement as a whole, about 50 women had been to the Middle East as housemaids. Most had gone since being displaced and coming to the camp; few had gone before.

The two cases show how displaced families with modest resources used the labour migration option to sustain themselves or to reconstruct their lives after displacement. In both of these cases, household members had already migrated before displacement, and did so again afterwards. In other cases, labour migration was adopted as a strategy only after displacement. In both cases described above, the households went into substantial debt, but there was some success in that the debt was paid off and some earnings were left over to invest - although the outcomes of this investment were mixed. Other households were not so fortunate. The early end of contracts through abuse or ill-treatment, failure of employers

to honour pay and employment conditions, sickness or other misfortune could be disastrous for the household, particularly if a loan at a pernicious rate of interest had been taken out.

Asylum migration: a middle class strategy

While the amounts laid out to send members abroad to work were substantial for poor households, the outlay to get Tamil asylum migrants to the west was in a different league altogether. By 1998, sums of R400,000 (about £4,000) and above paid to agents were commonly reported. Given the size of such outlays, the strategy of those families who could afford it was to secure a future abroad for one child, usually a son. Where several household members had to use agents to secure refuge abroad, the drain on household resources would be substantial, as was the case with a Tamil household from a well-to-do background in Batticaloa in eastern Sri Lanka.

Following a series of arrests, and in one case torture of the three sons in the family, together with displacement as a result of fighting, this household sent them abroad as asylum seekers or students to Canada and Switzerland between 1990 and 1997. The departure of the three sons involved substantial outlays -- some 1,400,000 rupees in all, the equivalent of more than £14,000. Their safety was assured but at the cost of the disposal of substantial assets, houses and shops. It is also likely that the two daughters had had to forgo marriage, because there were not enough assets left for dowries. The family income came from remittances, a small pension that the mother received from her former local government employment, some rent from two shops, and a little income the daughters received. Remittances of about R15,000 were sent each time, irregularly.

While this family, though seriously affected by the conflict and spending much of their capital, were still comfortably off, others were not so fortunate. For some of

the many thousands of Tamil households displaced by the conflict and languishing in government-run 'welfare centres' (actually tantamount to detention centres) in the areas bordering the conflict zone, remittances from those who had sought asylum abroad, and the hope of resettlement abroad could be a lifeline, as was the case with a female-headed Tamil household in a camp in the northern town of Vavuniya shows. The husband was abroad, in Toronto. His brother and younger sister had gone to Canada in 1985 and 1990; they were married to Tamils who came from the home area, and both had Canadian citizenship. The family came from a small town in Kilinochchi district, close to the Jaffna lagoon in the north of the country, where they had had a large house, five acres of paddy land, a tractor and some livestock. They fled to Kilinochchi town in 1990 as a result of fighting. The husband left there for Switzerland in 1991, and went on to Canada in 1995. The wife and two young daughters stayed with a relative in a village near Kilinochchi. In 1996 they were forced by fighting to move again, fleeing to Vavuniya where they were put in a camp.

The whole family had decided that the husband should go abroad. They used agents based in Colombo and Switzerland, and paid R250,000 for the travel there; part of this money was raised by the sale of their tractor, and part by relatives abroad. The household left behind now subsisted on rations supplied in the camp and on remittances from the husband and other relatives abroad. The husband and the husband's sister in Canada pooled their money for remitting to the family in Vavuniya; about R20,000 was sent monthly. The objective now was to join the husband in Canada, but there were formidable obstacles to overcome. Not least, the stringent system of government control of Tamils' movement made it extremely difficult to secure the paperwork necessary to migrate, even if permission to come was given by the

destination country. The woman's frustration was obvious. The family had secured the safety of the husband, but she and her children had been stranded in camps for nearly two years. She had suffered an attack by a deranged man in the camp. At the same time, the family was receiving substantial income in remittances - at R20,000 monthly, perhaps four or five times as much as a manual worker's pay - and much of this could be saved because the family subsisted at least partly on rations. The two cases show how asylum migration was essentially the preserve of those with substantial resources, although they might be impoverished in the process of sending household members abroad. Raising the necessary funds required the disposal of substantial assets, and often the support of those already abroad. The returns from such outlays might be substantial relative to standards of living in Sri Lanka, as they were in both of these cases; but those at home might still languish in displaced persons' camps, and efforts at family reunion might be stymied. Moreover, many displaced households were not so fortunate in terms of returns from migration, even after substantial outlays that may have been crippling.

Migration for marriage

As has already been suggested, marriage is another integral part of many households' migration strategies, also involving heavy outlays. After getting established abroad, the priority of an asylum seeker or other migrant will be to pay off loans from relatives and moneylenders that have financed the migration: as has already been shown, these costs may be substantial. After this, attention may turn to family unification and/or marriage. If the migrant is married, efforts may go into bringing over the spouse and children. If the migrant is unmarried, starting a family will be the priority. Achieving this in exile has become more difficult as time has gone on, for the

right to family reunion is associated in most destination countries with full refugee status - and that status has been granted less and less since the later 1980s (Fuglerud 1999: 99). The dowry system further complicates the migrant's aspiration to marry. Fuglerud points out that a migrant is under an obligation to procure his sisters' dowries before establishing his own family. This is because, in the circumstances of conflict, the realisable capital of his family - which might normally be earmarked for dowries for the daughters - has been invested in his migration abroad. Depending on the status of the husband, the dowry will be substantial, and if a migrant has several sisters, the sums involved will be very large (ibid: 98-100).

All this has far-reaching implications for remittances. If, after paying off debt, a large sum of money has to be accumulated to pay the dowries of sisters, little or nothing will be left for other uses by those at home. If the objective is to get sisters or daughters out of the war zone, then little of the resources accumulated abroad will be transferred for the use of those back home. At least, this is the case in the short term. Later, when a male migrant abroad marries, a dowry should pass to him or his family. Meanwhile, the pressure both on those at home to raise funds, and those abroad to remit, will be substantial (Fuglerud 1999).

All three forms of international migration - for work, for asylum and for marriage - involve substantial outlays for households, the more so for those that have been displaced, whose margins are slim. As the cost of migration to the west has inflated, it has increasingly become the preserve of those that can mobilise very substantial resources. For the less well-off, labour migration may be an option to help rebuild lives damaged by the war, but even this requires large outlays for poor households. However, while the returns from migration may be substantial, there is no guarantee that they will be commensurate with the outlay. The poorest households cannot afford to send any members abroad.

Ghana: speculative migration

Although the culture of migration is well-established among Ghanaians, the strategies of migration are rather more diffuse than in Sri Lanka. Ghana does not have the well-established labour migration option of Sri Lanka and elsewhere. Nor, while many have tried the asylum route, has there been much of an established asylum migration nexus. Ghanaian migration tends to be more individualistic, more opportunistic, and less institutionalised than in Sri Lanka.

As elsewhere, migration strategies are shaped by socio-economic background. Migration of Ghanaians for education or professional advancement is long-established, but depends on resources and connections; as elsewhere it is largely the preserve of the more prosperous. The former colonial power, the UK, and the US and Canada are the main destinations aspired to. The less well-off pursue a number of different strategies, of which asylum migration is just one among several in the repertoire, which also includes marriage, stowing away on ships and other forms of illegal migration. Destinations are more disparate and generally less affluent.

Such migration is often very speculative. Poorer Ghanaians who have modest resources to invest in migration, and not much to call upon by way of networks abroad often have no particular idea -- although maybe some preferences -- of where they are making for. This kind of speculative migration is well exemplified by stowaways, many of whom board ships at Ghana's ports with no notion of where they may end up. Those who attempted to use the asylum route often did so in a similarly speculative way. Some made for certain countries, such as Libya or Lebanon, with the idea of using them as stepping stones to more prosperous destinations. Such speculative migrants described their ventures in the following terms: 'I went to Lebanon because that is as far as my money would take me'; or 'I just decided to gamble and see which place would be good for me'. For those with relatives

already abroad, perhaps through education or marriage, the migration may be more purposive in terms of destination. A little more wealth in the family and a network of relatives abroad could make a speculative trip successful.

The household may be involved in the decision to migrate, and help with resources for it, but the process is more individualistic than in Sri Lanka. There is less direct household investment in the migration and less of a sense that migration is a collective household strategy: the view of remittances as part of an exchange is less compelling. The migrant usually resolves to go him or herself, and the necessary funds are commonly raised from his or her own resources. Relatives in Ghana or abroad may help, but commercial moneylenders are rarely resorted to. Ghanaians commonly send remittances for use 'in their own projects' - usually housing - rather than for collective household use. There is nevertheless expectation by the household of support from the migrant. However, remittances are not built into family finances in the way they are among Sri Lankan households. They are rather seen as windfalls, or as a kind of insurance that may be drawn upon in times of need.

For Ghanaians, the outlays for migration were usually rather less than in Sri Lanka. Although some utilised 'connection men' at considerable expense, most appeared to go with the help of their own contacts rather than agents. Funds for onward travel might well have to be supplemented by earnings en route; otherwise the trip would have to be curtailed early.

It was increasingly the well-to-do, usually already with links abroad, who could afford the substantial charges made by 'connection men' to secure some kind of legitimate presence in a desirable destination. One man from a comfortably-off family in a small town north of Accra paid a Nigerian agent 210,000 cedis to get him entry into Germany in 1988. He used his own savings, and the help of a brother. He left from Nigeria for Germany, where he applied for asylum, which enabled him

to stay for 15 months. He was eventually deported, and returned to Ghana in 1991. While abroad, he sent back modest sums occasionally, and eventually retrieved some 3,000 Dutch guilders and some electronic goods after his return. He had brothers abroad in the US and Italy who also occasionally sent money.

The US was the most favoured and expensive destination through an agent. The wife of an Ashanti man from Kumasi, a former sawmill operator, claimed that he had paid an agent 12 million cedis in 1995 (then about US\$10,000) to secure some kind of residence in the US. A sister had helped him find the money. The journey involved at least four transit stops, so was likely to have been circuitous. The returns from this outlay were good so far by Ghanaian standards: he sent about \$500 twice a year to his wife. The money was used for daily needs, for the children's schooling, for their medical bills, and to invest in her second-hand clothing business. Some clothing and electronic goods were also sent, and some money was contributed to the church. The woman hoped that she would be able to join her husband in the US.

Charges appear to have escalated as destination possibilities have contracted. Households from poorer backgrounds (drivers, tailors, traders) in Accra suburbs reported that their members had paid agents between \$750 and \$1,500 to arrange travel to Libya and Lebanon in 1996-97. Relatively small sums - perhaps \$50 a time - were sent back occasionally, hardly a worthwhile return from such an outlay.

If most of these returns seem modest compared with the outlay, there were material success stories. One such appeared to be a 30 year-old northerner living in his own house, a prominent building in a suburb of Accra. He described himself as a trader or a 'hustler', with rental income from three houses. His father was a wealthy commercial farmer in his home town, and his mother a trader. He left Ghana in 1988, first to Egypt and then to Japan, using his own savings and the

help of his father. He worked for an airline servicing tyres, and returned when he thought he had made enough money. Three of his brothers were abroad, in the US, Germany and Japan. He was involved in an association of his Dagomba ethnic group while abroad. The migrant claimed to have remitted and to have brought back with him tens of thousands of dollars. The money was used for daily needs of the household at home; for the travel abroad of the three brothers; to buy land to build houses; and for the purchase of a BMW car. He also claimed to have brought back goods like sound systems, air conditioners, washing machines, motorbikes, computers and video cameras, which were distributed among family and friends. He said he had contributed \$2,000 and some goods towards the mosque and the local community. He had saved some of the remainder.

If his story and the amounts of money claimed to have been accumulated were true, this migrant and his extended family had benefited substantially from his migration. His well-to-do background had laid the basis for the migration. His largesse in the distribution of money and goods to family and friends, the contribution to the mosque and local community, the heavy investment in land and houses, and the purchase and distribution of conspicuous consumer durables would have led to the accumulation of substantial social as well as economic capital.

While Ghanaians' migration strategies and the deployment of remittances were on the whole more individualistic than that of Sri Lankans, a loose collective strategy could sometimes be discerned among Ghanaian extended families. Such was the case with the extended family of a household living in the port of Tema. The household head ran a transport business and his wife a hardware store; they also had a farm and rented out some houses. There were six brothers and two sisters abroad, two in the US, two in Germany and four in Korea and Japan. The man went abroad in 1994, financing the travel from his own savings. He went first to

Senegal, and then took a ship to Germany; he went with a brother who later left Germany for Belgium. He found work in a laundry and sent some money home; he thought he brought back the equivalent of about £5,000. This money was spent on daily needs, schooling of household members, the purchase of some land for housebuilding, and vehicles for his transport business. The brothers in the US had gone in the 1980s: the first, a seaman, had helped the second to go. Those in Germany had gone in the 1990s; one had sought and got asylum there. Those in Asia had gone between 1994 and 1996. The brothers abroad were involved in their Kwahu ethnic association overseas. Those abroad sent money to be deployed on their various 'projects' - principally land purchases for house building, but also for schooling and for a funeral and other life passage events; lathes, saw mills and other machinery had been sent, and were being used by the family. Contributions were also made to the church.

These cases show the variety of migration strategies deployed, sometimes by members of a single household - speculative economic migration, seafaring, asylum seeking - and the importance of overseas networks of kin and ethnicity, particularly for chain migration. They also show some success in terms of investment in housing and livelihoods of the extended family as a whole, as well as modest contributions to the wider community. However such collective benefits were the exception rather than the rule. The two cases were also exceptional in their material success. Many migrants returned or were repatriated with little to show for their efforts, apart from an adventure and the questionable prestige of being known as a 'burger' or 'been-to'.

The deployment of remittances

In the previous section, the kinds of outlays Sri Lankan and Ghanaian households make for migration and the returns they

receive as part of a kind of transnational exchange were explored. Some of the uses to which remittances were put were also indicated. Those uses might be divided into those which sustain households, or enable them to survive (such as spending on daily needs, medical expenses, and perhaps clearing debt) and those which improve, advance, or transform the living conditions of the household (such as improving housing, education of children, or investment in a business). Social investment (on weddings, funerals, other life passage ceremonies, or contributions to the wider community) might be seen as a subset of the latter.

As with migration strategies, decisions on the deployment of remittances depend on the circumstances of the household receiving them. Given utilitarian decision-making, it might be expected that households in distress - such as impoverished families or those displaced or otherwise war-affected - would need to satisfy the requirements of physical survival before investing in advancement. Labour migrants might be expected to support household members at home, but also perhaps to invest for their eventual return. Refugees might be expected to pursue two main remittance strategies. One would be to send money to assist the survival of those back home, particularly at times of hardship, such as during the intensification of conflict. Another might be to accumulate funds to pay for the passage of family members abroad, either to the same country as the refugee, under family reunification, or to another safe destination. The two strategies are not mutually exclusive, but might be pursued consecutively depending, among other things, on assessments of the situation at home, on the ability of those at home to move, and on the capacity for supporting newly arriving family members abroad. Scrutiny of the uses of remittances among the two country samples and among different kinds of migrants within them only partly bears these expectations out.

In Ghana, most households spent remittances on daily needs and subsistence, as would be expected. The next priority

appeared to be schooling of family members, followed by investing in housing - buying land, building, or improving housing. Then came investment in a business - overwhelmingly other than farming. Savings and paying off debt were among the lowest priorities in this sample. Examination within this sample of households whose members had sought asylum abroad revealed broadly the same pattern of priorities, except that the proportion of households that invested in businesses was rather less, and that paying off debt was more important than in the general sample. This is not surprising considering the greater cost of asylum migration relative to other forms of movement.

The Sri Lankan sample revealed some differences in the pattern of priorities. As in Ghana, satisfaction of daily needs were the chief preoccupation, and investing in housing and paying for schooling were of roughly equal importance. Then significant differences from the Ghana sample were apparent. Settling debt was much more of a priority, reflecting the greater outlay on migration, and the resort to credit outside the family. Investment in businesses was negligible. However, savings (or rather the accumulation of reserves in the form of jewellery) were rather more prominent than in the Ghana case, as was social investment in the extended family, in life passage events like weddings and funerals. Among households with members who had sought asylum and households that were displaced or otherwise affected by the conflict, most spent on daily needs and schooling, but fewer households spent on housing, fewer saved, and there was correspondingly greater concern with clearing debt, again reflecting the high costs of asylum migration. Interestingly, the priority given to spending on social functions was maintained or even increased among these households.

How should these different patterns of spending be interpreted, particularly with respect to investment in livelihoods? The differences in remittance use might of course be put down simply to social and cultural variation between

the two countries, but some differences are likely to be attributable to the presence or absence of conflict. In Ghana, in the absence of conflict and with a measure of relative stability, conditions are more conducive to investment in livelihoods, seen in the resources put into businesses. In the more uncertain circumstances of the Sri Lankan conflict, investment in livelihoods or businesses is less attractive. After housing, education and clearing debt, any funds left over are put into savings or reserves, which can be seen as a form of insurance in times of uncertainty. For households with asylum seekers abroad, or which have been displaced or otherwise affected by the war, the margins are even more narrow.

What, if anything, should be made of the weight given to spending on social functions in the Sri Lankan cases? The importance accorded to it, even among poor households, is reflected in one of the cases outlined above: that of the Muslim family in a displaced persons camp in the east of the country. Here a substantial proportion of a woman migrant's earnings were spent on a circumcision ceremony for her son. The ceremony involved much of the population of the camp. Consideration of this episode brings us back to an old debate about the use of remittances (for a summary see Massey et al 1998: 257-262).

If we accept that cultural imperatives are as important as material ones (see for example, contributions to Ager 1999), spending on this life passage ceremony should be seen as an understandable and legitimate outlay. It shows how a household tries to reconstruct its social life in times of displacement and stress. In the context of forced displacement - these people were violently uprooted by the LTTE - it can be seen as a reassertion of identity, a reconstruction of social cohesion in the face of adversity. It also fostered the accumulation of 'social capital' by the male household head, who was a prominent figure in this section of the settlement.

But there is an alternative, neo-utilitarian view. Given the circumstances of this household in the camp, spending at

this level on the ceremony can be seen as wasteful, conspicuous consumption. In utilitarian terms, the household could not possibly afford such an outlay, which represented a high proportion of the wife's hard-earned income. There were much more pressing material and social needs to be met - such as improved housing, investment in income-generating ventures, education of the children, healthcare - that should surely have come first. From this perspective, the material, social, spiritual or psychological benefits of the ceremony were hardly commensurate with the level of spending on it.

These two perspectives on remittance use - socio-cultural versus material - are perhaps irreconcilable. The importance of reasserting social bonds in situations of displacement is obvious. So too is the psychological importance of showing to oneself and the wider community that one's standing still counts. On the other hand, there was an air of desperation about this household, as about others in similar circumstances, and at least part of the reason for holding the circumcision ceremony seemed to have been an impetuously expressed need to demonstrate that the household could do something successfully. Given their material circumstances, it is also difficult to avoid the conclusion that the remittance income would indeed have been better spent on immediate and longer term needs. Whatever the conclusion, however, the deployment of remittances here, as elsewhere, was essentially conservative or restorative, rather than transforming.

Indeed, perhaps the most notable feature of the findings overall is a seemingly unexciting one: that, apart from the predictable variations that have already been alluded to (more spent on sustaining households, and less for investment), there are not great differences between economic and forced migration in respect of uses of remittances. Some of the ways in which remittances are used may acquire different or special significance in circumstances of forced migration (such as

spending on social events, as illustrated above), but overall the differences in deployment are slight: usually they are deployed to conserve rather than to transform or innovate. How should the overall lack of divergence between the uses of remittances between labour and forced migration be interpreted?

From the point of view of the people at home, the form of migration - seeking asylum, migration for work, for marriage or for education - does not matter. From their perspective, the motivation is the same: the aspiration is for greater household security, and if possible, betterment. Whatever the form of migration, there will be an expectation of something from those who made it abroad, the more so if the household back home has invested much in that migration. In this sense, migration that was not necessarily initially for economic purposes cannot help but transmute into economic migration.

For the household as a whole, conflict and displacement may be seen as like other misfortunes or afflictions, such as a bad harvest, a natural disaster, or general socio-economic collapse, from which the household must recover or at least it must ride out. Remittances are deployed to effect that recovery or to assist in sustaining the household while reconstruction is under way. It is therefore not surprising that remittances are used in similar ways: the common feature is society under strain.

In a way this conclusion concurs with the perspective of what has been called the 'new economics of labour migration'. Confronting the widely-held pessimistic view that remittances are 'wasted' on consumption, luxuries, 'rituals' or housing, rather than being 'usefully' invested in productive enterprises, this approach suggests that remittances are deployed on subsistence needs and other 'non-productive' uses so as to reduce risk among (or within) households. By underwriting such household risks -- by meeting immediate households needs (subsistence), longer term demands (such

as housing, or schooling for children), or providing liquidity for the household (or to other households by providing credit), for example -- the deployment of remittances may open up the possibility that other surpluses can be invested in more directly 'productive' ventures (Massey et al 1998; Taylor 1999). A convincing argument can be made that this is precisely the strategy of displaced households or those otherwise under strain.

Sustaining or transforming societies under strain?

Remittances have sustained households in trouble against the background of socio-economic near collapse in the case of Ghana and vicious conflict in the case of Sri Lanka. As was indicated above, Ghana in the early 1980s was in severe straits. Scarcities, the 'Rawlings necklace', the disintegration of trust, and ubiquitous corruption to avoid starvation were indicators of acute socio-economic dislocation, coming to a head in 1983. The recovery of the 1980s, which faltered but was sustained in the 1990s with the emergence of a fragile democracy, can be seen as akin to the reconstruction undergone by some countries that have experienced serious conflict. The mass exodus precipitated by the socio-economic crisis, an exodus perpetuated even after some of the reasons driving people to leave were alleviated, provided part of the means, through remittances, for the society to sustain itself and recover into working condition: the possibility of leaving the country and the receipt of remittances relieved desperation at household level.

As in other countries, there is room for argument about whether money transferred has been deployed productively; but there is a case to be made that remittances have helped the survival of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of Ghanaian households, by giving them the breathing space or

supplemental resources needed to claw back and reconstruct since the 1980s. If the sample interviewed is at all representative, there appears to have been substantial investment in housing and in schooling of family members, and considerable investment in businesses, even if these were frequently unsuccessful. Of the cases analysed, those leaving in the later 1980s seem to have been notably more successful in terms of accumulating funds from abroad and investing them at home than those who left in the 1990s. The contribution of remittances to Ghana's socio-economic recovery thus may have peaked in the later 1980s and early 1990s, thereafter declining as migration opportunities were closed off and remittances therefore slackened. If this is a general pattern, it is not unreasonable to suggest that those remittances assisted in the socio-economic reconstruction of Ghana from the later 1980s. Arguably, such transfers have been more effective than aid in fostering socio-economic recovery (the term 'socio-economic' is used deliberately here, since the 'social' was in as poor condition as the 'economic' in the early 1980s). Perhaps more speculatively, as opportunities to migrate were curtailed in the 1990s, and more migrants were deported with nothing to show for their migratory efforts, earnings abroad will have contracted and will have been less likely to sustain Ghana's recovery.

At the same time, remittances have arguably had corrosive effects. Socio-economic differentiation has been accentuated, not least between those households with migrant members abroad, and those without. There has also been differentiation between those households with successful migrants and those with migrant failures. These differences will have contributed to those exacerbated by the pursuit of structural adjustment since the early 1980s (Brydon and Legge 1996). Furthermore, relations between migrants and those at home may be tense, not least over the deployment of

remittances in the absence of the migrant. In Ghana there are numerous and sometimes bitter disputes within extended families, which sometimes reach the courts, about the ownership or disposal of property, commonly housing, financed from abroad. The disputes commonly centre on the amount of finance provided by those abroad compared with the labour invested by those at home in the building or maintenance of property. Conversely, there are often complaints voiced by those at home about the lack of reciprocity from the migrant for the help he may have been given by those left behind: 'we helped him to go, but now we never hear anything'.

Some of the same observations may be made of Sri Lanka. As in Ghana, migration and remittances have contributed to the survival and reconstruction of perhaps hundreds of thousands of households -- both those directly and those indirectly affected by the conflict. Here class differentiation in migration patterns is much clearer, with the distinction between asylum migration and labour migration apparent to a much greater extent. There is also a distinction - largely based on ethnic background - between those communities with a diaspora and those without.

Remittances from migrants by asylum or marriage have helped to sustain displaced and war-affected Tamil households in and outside camps, and assisted some in the long haul to reconstruction after displacement or return. However this has increasingly become the preserve of the relatively well-off. While poorer households earlier had the exit option of south India and some made it to refuge in the west, the cost of asylum migration and the fading of the south India option now meant that poorer households were rather displaced within Sri Lanka. It might be expected that more poorer Tamil households would go for the labour migration option in these circumstances, but it is far from clear if they have been doing this. Remittances from temporary labour migrants to the Middle East and

southeast Asia have helped to sustain displaced Muslim and Sinhalese households who have few if any members abroad in the diaspora.

Beyond just survival, investment of remittances in housing, and particularly schooling, are encouraging trends among displaced and war-affected households, as among those outside the zones of conflict. However, there are also socially corrosive aspects of the relations between those outside and those inside the country. To give just one example noted in passing above, migration has not only inflated the cost of dowries, but has fundamentally changed their deployment. As Fuglerud puts it, 'Instead of one dowry helping to finance another, floating as capital within the system of family networks, the cost of transport and settlement now siphons off this capital to greedy agents' (Fuglerud 1998: 9).

An even more serious charge is that migration and remittances have helped to perpetuate the conflict in Sri Lanka. Most obviously, exactions from migrants and their families by the LTTE have been a lucrative source of income for the organisation (Davis 1996; McDowell 1996), and can be seen as another form of transnational transfer. The LTTE regulates movement out of the areas they control. Exit taxes are levied on people leaving, and appropriations are made from households with members abroad. The LTTE is also said to be involved in migrant trafficking itself. Exactions continue once the migrant is abroad: house to house collections, taxation of incomes from paid work and businesses, and the staging of cultural and sporting events all bring in money for the organisation. The LTTE is also said to be directly involved in the remittance transfer business, from which it takes a cut -- another form of transnational transfer (McDowell 1996).

The extent to which exactions were contributed willingly by migrants abroad varied. Many Tamils abroad do support the Eelam cause. Others take the line of least resistance, mindful of relatives back home who may still live in areas controlled by the LTTE, or accessible by them (Davis 1996;

McDowell 1996). At the same time migrants also arguably contribute (with no choice) to the conflict through general taxation they paid as citizens to the government. Sales duties and other taxes and fiscal measures include a defence levy component which goes into the government's war effort.

Turning to less direct ways in which migration and remittances may help to perpetuate the conflict, there is quite a strongly held view among some Sri Lankans, that has some foundation, that the conflict is being prolonged in other ways than finance for arms. It has been suggested that those in receipt of money sent by refugee or asylum seeker relatives abroad live a comfortable life in Sri Lanka - or at least one considerably more comfortable than it might otherwise be. Some were said to be renting or living in accommodation that they could not otherwise possibly afford. For those abroad, particularly those whose status is uncertain, the attitude to the conflict is to say the least ambiguous, for it is the continuation of the war that justifies their asylum claim and therefore their stay (McDowell 1996) -- and hence makes possible the sending of remittances.

Conclusion

The term 'transnational community' is not a synonym for 'ethnic minority' or 'ethnic community'. In my view, one cannot speak of a 'transnational community' (still less a diaspora) in country x'. Nor should we speak of the relationship between the transnational community and home. The transnational community includes the people at home who are integral to it. The members of the 'community' in question are those at home as much as those abroad. It is the connections between those at home and those abroad, and among different sections of those abroad when they are dispersed, that constitutes 'transnationalism', and it is recognition of the increasing importance of these connections as 'globalisation' has

proceeded that makes the 'transnational communities' approach an advance on earlier ways of looking at migration. As this paper has shown, remittances and other transfers from abroad can be seen as concrete, material manifestations of 'transnationalism'. Remittances should be seen as two-way exchanges, for households' investment in the migration of some of their members - as labour migrants, asylum seekers, for education, marriage or other reasons - is usually a prerequisite for movement.

As constraints on migration have increased, particularly in destination countries, and the cost of movement (often necessarily clandestine) has correspondingly increased, individuals' and households' migration choices are increasingly constrained by the resources they can mobilise; class is therefore a important determinant of the kinds of strategy pursued. This was less pronounced in Ghana than in Sri Lanka, where asylum migration has increasingly become the preserve of the well-to-do and well-connected; labour migration or internal displacement were the forms of movement that poorer households could afford; and the poorest often could not move at all. One important policy issue that this implicitly raises is the question of who is more deserving of assistance: those who leave, who may be relatively well-off, or those who remain, who may be worse off? If the need for assistance is greater for those who stay than for those who leave as refugees, the current focus of relief and assistance efforts may be misplaced.

Households invest substantially in migration of their members as labour migrants, as asylum seekers, for marriage or family reunion, and those left behind expect something in return from those who go. In this sense there is convergence between economic and forced migration, to the extent that asylum seekers and other forced migrants are unavoidably confronted by economic issues (of the livelihood of those left at home as well as their own) similar to those encountered by labour or 'economic' migrants. There is a similar convergence

in terms of the outcomes of or returns from forced and economic migration. The evidence from Sri Lanka and Ghana confirms the ambivalence associated with the use of remittances sent back to societies in conflict or distress that has been noted in numerous studies of conventional economic migration, where assessment of the impact of migration in general and remittances in particular ranges from the 'optimistic' -- remittances are productively deployed and contribute to 'development' -- to the 'pessimistic' -- remittances are wastefully spent and do not contribute to 'development' (Taylor 1999). Ambivalence concerning remittances is still greater in the context of conflict and forced migration. On the one hand, remittances and other transfers from abroad have certainly helped to sustain displaced, war-affected or otherwise distressed households and communities, sometimes for long periods, even if the durability of such underpinning is questionable. On the other, remittances have sometimes helped sustain the very conditions that lead to forced migration, both directly by funding conflict, and indirectly by giving some of the recipients of transfers an implicit interest in those conditions continuing.

This ambivalence poses serious policy dilemmas for countries that host refugees and other migrants. On the one hand, those expatriates may well be fuelling conflict, which governments hosting them may well wish to discourage. On the other hand, the authorities of countries hosting migrants and refugees should be aware of possibly far-reaching consequences if such people are repatriated, or indeed if harsh restrictions are put on immigration. The consequences include the possibility that a diminution of remittances may lead to hardship, instability, socio-economic or political upheaval, and even the resumption or provocation of conflict -- and then quite likely renewed out-migration. The curtailment of immigration and the implementation of repatriation may therefore likely imperil the very economic and political security (or in broader

terms the human security) that the international community claims to want to foster. In the longer term, remittances have the potential to be harnessed for the reconstruction and development of societies recovering from the distress of war or economic collapse; diminution of such transfers through repatriation will likely undermine such potential. It follows that migration policies that purport to be oriented to the country of origin of migrants cannot afford to leave those abroad, especially those hosted by relatively affluent countries, out of consideration. It is in this link between those at home and those abroad that the relevance of 'transnationalism' lies.

In the two cases examined, which are unlikely to be atypical in recent times, the net result of the 'transnational' relationship has so far been essentially conservative so far as remittances are concerned: households and communities have at best been sustained, rather than radically transformed. For many in both countries life is on hold: transfers from those outside to those inside appear to both sustain and perpetuate that limbo. While sustaining households in societies under strain may be a positive outcome, the potential for remittances to reconstruct or transform such societies has yet to be realised.

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Exorcising the Political: H.L. Seneviratne and the Modern Sri Lankan Buddhist Sangha

Regi Siriwardena

'It is more a value-imbued activist document than the scholarly treatise it is often mistaken to be.' (168) That is Prof. H.L. Seneviratne speaking of Walpola Rahula's *Bhiksuvage Urumaya* (The Heritage of the Bhikku). Of his own book, *The Work of Kings*¹, one may say that while it's certainly a scholarly treatise and not an activist document, it's also value-imbued: in fact, I would describe it as steeped in value-based discourse. Very late in the book, the author, in discussing the tradition of thinking deriving from *The Heritage of the Bhikku*, says: 'The task of the anthropologist is not to question and even less to denounce the monk's claim that his role is social service but rather to examine the social formations such a claim brings about.' (334) That reads like a self-reminder, because earlier the author had spent twenty pages, though not in denouncing, still in conducting a debate on that same book where his own social preferences and aversions are clearly evident. *The Work of Kings* is, in fact, a book written with personal conviction, commitment and passion, as much a polemic as it is a social analysis. But don't get me wrong: I have no quarrel with it on that ground. Perhaps because I am not a professional social scientist, I even doubt whether it is possible to write a work of social science of any significance

that is value-free. Of course, scientists of all kinds have to be objective, but in the very nature of the material that social scientists deal with, we can't expect that their beliefs and attitudes shouldn't enter into their work: all we can reasonably ask is that they should be honest in recording, examining and displaying all the relevant data. So where I disagree with Prof. Seneviratne, it's not because he makes so many value-judgments, but for a different reason. Sometimes it's because I don't share some of these values; at other times, it's because I share the values but can't endorse the judgments. All that will come out in the course of this review, but first let me make a general comment. I regard *The Work of Kings* as a tragic document: it's for me evidence of the intellectual impasse into which a serious-minded, able and humane scholar may be driven in contemplating the irrational, destructive and murderous forces that have been unleashed in our society.

The subtitle of the book is 'The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka', but it doesn't indicate quite precisely the scope of the book. Unlike, say, Gananath Obeyesekere and Richard Gombrich in *Buddhism Transformed*, Prof. Seneviratne doesn't set out to examine the range of new religious practices in the community at large. His focus is the role of the monk, the new conceptions regarding that role and the activities that have arisen from them. Anagarika Dharmapala is presented as the innovating figure in this respect, who saw his task as that of regenerating the lost glory of the Sinhala Buddhist people. It was a task that was economic as well as cultural, ideological and political. 'This mission,' says Prof. Seneviratne, 'needed a missionary, and the monk was the obvious choice.' (27) But it also demanded a new vocation for the monk. In fact it called for the creation of a new type of monk, different from the traditional one, sunk in what Dharmapala saw as un-Buddhist practices such as ritual or astrology. The new monk had to be a 'soldier of the dhamma'.

Prof. Seneviratne's chapter on Dharmapala is lucid and succinct, but it doesn't alter substantially the picture we have

¹ H.L. Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings* (University of Chicago Press, 1999). Page references to quotations from this book are given in parentheses in the body of this paper.

already formed of him and his work from previous writers in this field. What is most original - and also most controversial - in the book begins with the two chapters he devotes to the monks of the Vidyodaya and Vidyalkara pirivenas. He argues that they constitute a bifurcation of Dharmapala's heritage - the former working towards his economic goal of regenerating the village economy, and the latter taking up his ideological and political mantle. These chapters are punctuated by a series of reiterated contrasts between these two groups. 'Of the two agendas of Dharmapala, Vidyodaya embraced the sober and pragmatic one, and Vidyalkara the ideological and uncompromisingly cultural one which by definition was nationalist.' (57) And again, 'The Vidyodaya monks visited and worked in individual village communities and literally got their feet dirty. The Vidyalkara monks proclaimed lofty nationalist slogans, keeping their feet up and dry. The Vidyalkara monks were talkers, the Vidyodaya monks were doers.' (193) In particular, he celebrates three Vidyodaya monks - Kalukondayave, Hinatiana and Hendigala - whom he salutes rhapsodically as 'hero-giants of regeneration'. (96)²

This contrast between Vidyodaya and Vidyalkara is pivotal to Prof. Seneviratne's argument in the book, and I want to interrogate the terms in which he makes it. In doing so, I shall concentrate, for brevity's sake, on the principal 'hero-giant' of Prof. Seneviratne's devotion - Kalukondayave.

Like that of the rest of his spiritual soldier-band, Kalukondayave's activity in the village was directed to rural development, which went hand in hand with moral reform

through exhortation, temperance and crime prevention. In this reformist project, 'he accepted the framework of colonial authority as a part of the landscape, and he also accepted the conservative indigenous political leadership of the day that ruled the country in collaboration with the colonial power as the legitimate authority which could restore to the village its unity and harmony'. (84) We learn that this readiness to acquiesce in the status quo could sometimes attain extraordinary proportions. He was on excellent terms with some imperial governors, and when Governor Herbert Stanley was the chief guest at the pirivena prizegiving in 1926, the address presented to him began with these words: 'The king named George the Fifth, in whose dominions the sun, as though unable to over-reach his sway, never sets, may he live long, steeped in glory.' (132) Kalukondayave's 'pragmatism', as Prof. Seneviratne calls it, included also a hostility to Marxism, which, in his view, 'destroyed the traditional order and the mosaic of deference that...sustained the idyllic harmony of the village community.' (83) 'Marxism' here obviously referred to the activity of those who were its pioneers in Ceylon, the LSSP.

I want to ask now: Can Prof. Seneviratne's distinction between the 'pragmatic' and the 'ideological' be sustained? I would suggest that all social action implies an ideology, even when the ideology underlying it is unformulated and the actor is unconscious of it. However, in Kalukondayave's case, the ideology seems to have been quite consciously held, in his conception of the idyllic traditional village and in his acceptance of existing authority - whether colonial or indigenous - as 'given' and not to be challenged or undermined. Prof. Seneviratne himself describes Kalukondayave's position on social questions as 'conservative', and isn't conservatism an ideology? I would raise similar questions about Prof. Seneviratne's sharp distinction between the 'political' and the 'economic'. The program of rural development of Kalukondayave and his fellow-monks was one of ameliorating poverty through self-help. But, like the later Sarvodaya

² I should explain that I am following the practice of the author who frequently refers to well-known monks by the first part of their names denoting their village - a practice that is often adopted also in popular Sinhala usage. He also drops the customary prefix 'The Venerable' since monks' names are so frequently cited in the book, and the invariable use of this prefix would mar the reader's smooth progress. This does not mean any disrespect to the monks mentioned. They are all venerable men.'(xv)_

movement, which probably drew inspiration from it, it was incapable of confronting the structural causes of poverty; to do that it would have had to question the political framework within which it was content to work. What is most striking is Prof. Seneviratne's own response to these limitations of the Vidyodaya program, which for him is praiseworthy because of these very limitations. Quoting the address to Governor Stanley, he first remarks that 'it is possible to describe it as the epitome of servility' (132) - only 'possible' because that isn't his ultimate judgment on it. He goes on to describe how Kalukondayave, on receiving a prize from Governor Robert Chalmers, felt as if he 'went to heaven'. (133). Years later, however, looking back on these feelings, he felt embarrassed that 'he, as a monk, had gone to the feet of a layman'. But he ultimately justified himself by reflecting that his original feeling of exultation was only natural, considering the deference at that time to colonial governors. Now comes Prof. Seneviratne's assessment. 'There is a healthy realism in this attitude, as if to say it is too bad that there is imperialist domination, but it is a fact that it is there, and one should make the best of the situation.' (134) This apologia seems to me problematic. The receipt of the prize was in 1915 (a significant year: that of martial law). I don't know when the autobiography, in which his later feelings are recorded, was written, but Prof. Seneviratne gives the publication date as 1970. If we assume that it wasn't written much earlier, there was half a century between the 'heavenly feeling' and the embarrassment - a period during which the political landscape had been transformed beyond recognition. So there's no evidence that in 1915 Kalukondayave thought of all the rationalisations that Prof. Seneviratne attributes to him.

But what is most startling in this part of the book is Prof. Seneviratne's speculation on an alternative political history. It occurs in a footnote: 'It is possible to speculate that, had Vidyodaya, with its realistic view of imperialism, triumphed over Vidyalandkara with its bitter and paranoid view, the fate

of the country would have been different. It would, then, have been placed on the path of realism, accommodating the necessary evil of imperialism and using it to the country's advantage. Such an attitude also would have bred pluralism and a willingness to accommodate ethnic and other minorities as well as tolerance and the creative accommodation of dissent.' (134) In the first place, I don't understand what Prof. Seneviratne means by his hypothesis, 'Had Vidyodaya triumphed over Vidyalandkara...' He has already told us that Kalukondayave 'accepted the conservative indigenous political leadership of the day that ruled the country in collaboration with the colonial power'. And that conservative leadership exercised power for at least a good quarter of a century, from 1931 to 1956. And they did follow on the national scale what Kalukondayave practised in his own activity - co-operating with the British -, while from the 'forties onwards they denounced the Vidyalandkara monks as 'political bhikkus' who were subverting Buddhism. So in those years Vidyodaya did triumph, or at least its outlook did, but this didn't lead to the beneficent results Prof. Seneviratne envisages; instead, it was a period largely of political, economic and cultural stagnation whose legacy of unresolved problems provoked the explosions after 1956. Secondly, what the language of the passage I quoted reveals to me is Prof. Seneviratne's deep distrust of politics. 'Realism', 'pragmatism', 'sobriety', as against 'bitter' and 'paranoid' - this is a wishful effort to exorcise the demon of the political.

I think the wish that Prof. Seneviratne indulges here betrays a failure of political understanding. The happy three-cornered co-operation between Vidyodaya, the imperial regime and the indigenous, conservative, 'natural' leadership belonged to an era that was doomed by two developments. One was the institution of universal franchise by the British themselves, in the teeth of opposition from the national leadership; the other, a consequence of mass politics under universal suffrage, was free education. These two developments created an

educated and increasingly politically active electorate, under the conditions of a stagnant or sluggish economy. The Sri Lankan political system failed to resolve the acute tensions resulting from this contradiction, which was further accentuated by the ethnic and cultural cleavages concomitant with the absence of a truly unifying national culture. Given a far-seeing and enlightened political leadership, we might have carried through the liberating and democratising aspects of the changes in and after 1956 and avoided, or at least minimised, the retrogressive and destructive. That this did not happen was a national tragedy, but even of the actual outcome of the post-1956 changes, it must not be forgotten that the former aspects were as real as the latter.³ In any case, there was no way in which the idealised colonialist or semi-colonialist order of Prof. Seneviratne's imagination could have been preserved - not after the social effects of universal franchise and free education had matured -, so his is 'an incantation to summon the spectre of a rose'.

When Prof. Seneviratne turns from Vidyodaya to Vidyalankara, the tone changes from the laudatory and lyrical to the vigorously and uncompromisingly critical. The shift is announced already in the heading of the relevant chapter: 'Vidyalankara: The *Descent* into Ideology' (my emphasis), and for Prof. Seneviratne, such a development must necessarily be a fall. I must make clear the implications of this view. For Prof. Seneviratne, Dharmapala was ideological because he was opposed to imperialism from his own standpoint, though

³ There was a point during the reading of this book at which I stopped and metaphorically rubbed my eyes - at p. 202, where it refers to the 'decline in all field of academic and artistic activity' since 1956. 'Academic' I would grant, though even there the issues seem to me more complex than emerges from his book. But 'artistic'? Is everything innovative and creative in Sinhala literature, theatre, film and music of the last forty years to be written off as worthless? And how much, apart from the fiction of Martin Wickramasinghe, has the pre-1956 period to show in comparison?

he was partially redeemed because he also engaged in the 'non-political' activity of reviving the village economy. The Vidyalankara monks were also ideological because they were anti-imperialist and declared themselves to be socialist, but the Vidyodaya monks weren't because they 'pragmatically' accepted the status quo. As I have already indicated, I can't accept such a definition of what is political and what is not.

Much of the chapter on Vidyalankara is taken up by the argument against the text *Bhiksuvage Urumaya*, which urged that the crucial role of the monk in contemporary society was that of 'social service'. Prof. Seneviratne argues, and I think rightly, that 'social service' here was a kind of code-word for political activism. He places the political orientation of the Vidyalankara monks as a movement deriving, on the one hand, from the nationalism of Dharmapala and, on the other, from the new Marxist politics, principally of the LSSP. 'By the mid-1940s these monks became openly associated with Marxism in general and the LSSP in particular. As later developments show, the Marxism of these monks was superficial... The Vidyalankara monks continued to talk about socialism, but this has to be distinguished from the international socialism of the Marxists. Theirs was rather a "Buddhist socialism." Increasingly it became more Buddhist than socialist, and in the mid-1950s it turned into a hegemonic Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism.' (131)

I regret, as much as Prof. Seneviratne does, that the brilliant constellation of monks who became prominent at Vidyalankara in the 1940s should have succumbed by 1956 to the hegemonic Sinhala Buddhist political project. But there is much in Prof. Seneviratne's account of them that I find wanting. In the greater part of this book, he shows himself to be a conscientious and careful researcher, even when one disagrees with his conclusions. But in respect of the Vidyalankara monks, he hasn't done enough homework, perhaps because of his disfavour for them. In the case of the Vidyodaya 'hero-giants' we get a clear picture of the processes

and influences by which they reached their kind of social activism. With the Vidyāṅkara monks, we have only generalities about their intellectual and political evolution. This is a shortcoming, because the influence of the LSSP on the Vidyāṅkara radical monks represents, to my mind, one of the promising potentialities of Sri Lankan political history that remained unfulfilled. If it had been fulfilled, it could have been far more productive than the triumph of 'pragmatic' Vidyodaya that Prof. Seneviratne would have wished.

We learn relatively little from Prof. Seneviratne's book about how the principal Vidyāṅkara monks came to consider themselves socialists. All I can say from personal knowledge is that in the late 1930s Walpola Rahula was a student at what was then the Ceylon University College, and was a member of the LSSP's student group there. The other Vidyāṅkara monks did not have those opportunities, so I presume they were drawn to socialism by the propaganda and activity of the LSSP in the pre-war years. That was the period when the LSSP was an open, broadly radical mass party, not yet committed fully to Marxism, except in the convictions of some of its leaders. I remember Hector Abhayavardhana, who was then my mentor in the LSSP, giving me in 1939 a booklet that had been presented to him by Kotahene Pannakitti, another of that constellation of monks. It was called *Sahityaya ha Samajaya* (Literature and Society); I read it and was impressed. But the Vidyāṅkara monks could have had no significant contacts with the LSSP in the wartime years when the party was underground and the main leaders were either in jail until 1942 or in India. Meanwhile in those same years the party went through fundamental changes in political orientation and organisation which would have made them uninterested in maintaining their influence on a group of 'Buddhist socialists' in yellow robes. This was a pity, because there was a considerable reservoir there of talent, energy and capacity for dedicated work. The best remembered of these monks today is Walpola Rahula because of his standing and

international reputation as a scholar of Buddhism. But I think the most original and creative mind among them was Yakkaduve Pragnarama, a writer in Sinhala of rare talent, with an ability to draw for literary purposes on the rich resources of colloquial Sinhala, and a personality of quiet but magnetic force. Prof. Seneviratne describes his dramatic confrontation with D.S. Senanayake at a meeting of the Vidyāṅkara executive committee and pirivena staff at the height of the controversy on 'political bhikkus', as they were called, in 1947. But perhaps more permanently significant was the vigour of his satirical and polemical writing in his *Vana Katha* (Jungle Tales). It was brought out as a translation of the Panchatantra, but like Ezra Pound translating Propertius so as to make him a contemporary, Yakkaduve made the stories from the Panchatantra a vehicle of his criticism of the Sri Lankan political powers of the time.

I can't agree with Prof. Seneviratne in his wholly negative picture of the political activism of the Vidyāṅkara monks. In their opposition to the political establishment in the 'forties and early 'fifties they did play a positive role which was measurable by the intensity of the anger against them of that establishment. Prof. Seneviratne says the Marxism of these monks was 'superficial' (131). I would go even further and say they weren't Marxists at all. I don't have space here to make a textual analysis of the Kelaniya Declaration of Independence of 1947, with its compound of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the American Declaration of Independence, the Gettysburg Address, and the Mahāvamsa. As for Prof. Seneviratne's characterisation of these monks, at least initially, as 'Buddhist socialists'; I see nothing objectionable in such a position, just as I have nothing against Christian liberation theology, although I am a non-believer in either religion and am interested in religion in general only in respect of its social and political effects. In fact, I would say that if the Vidyāṅkara monks could have consistently sustained a radical Buddhist socialism, free of sectarian ethno-

religious nationalism, it would have been a positive contribution to Sri Lankan political culture.

Why didn't this happen? I don't think one can answer this question without looking at the political and intellectual evolution of the LSSP itself.

The LSSP when it began was handed a great historical opportunity because there was in Sri Lanka, unlike in India, no vigorously anti-imperialist national movement led by the bourgeoisie. It was thus open to it to work towards winning hegemony over the national movement by developing a socially radical, militantly anti-imperialist, but also inclusive Lankan nationalism. This could have been the only viable alternative to the divisive and destructive ethno-nationalisms of both North and South. In other words, it could have played a role analogous to that of the Chinese and Vietnamese Communist parties, though its strategy and mode of operation would have had to be different, considering the fact that we had a parliamentary political structure and universal franchise. To some extent, the pre-war LSSP did develop in such a direction, but that process was short-circuited when it embraced the theory and objectives of permanent revolution. This involved rejecting nationalism altogether, and concentrating on mobilising the proletariat for revolutionary struggle. I can't really blame the Vidyālankara monks for not joining in the pursuit of this will-of-the-wisp. But with the LSSP's turn to an ideologically sectarian and myopically economic Marxism, there was lost also the possibility of a broad alliance of forces across the country standing for radical social change but rejecting the deceptive and disintegrative racist options.⁴

⁴ These points are more fully argued in my *Working Underground: The LSSP in Wartime, A Memoir of Happenings and Personalities* (ICES, 1999). The sterility and unreality of the LSSP's 'international socialism' should be evident from the fact that it was no more effective than the populist socialism of the Vidyālankara monks in preventing surrender, in and after 1964, to Sinhala ethno-nationalism.

The last chapters of this book are less unified than the first four. Prof. Seneviratne surveys a wide range of contemporary monks engaged in social and political activism. Some of them are followers of the paths opened by Dharmapala and theorised by Rahula, but operating on right, centre and left. Others are products of a different development altogether: the open economy, globalisation and the large-scale entry of foreign capital, and are no more than entrepreneurs in robes. What, however, holds these chapters together is Prof. Seneviratne's sustained antipathy to politics. For instance, when he discusses Inamaluvē Sumangala Thero, the chief monk at the Dambulla Vihara, who organised the protests and demonstrations against the construction of the Kandalama Hotel, he can see him only as a clever and able political strategist. He seems to find it impossible even to give him credit for the fact that when he broke with the Asgiriya Chapter, he threw ordination open to people of all castes - an action that must surely be applauded. One of the great failures in the practice of modern Sri Lankan Buddhism has been its inability to root out caste, not just in Sinhala society but within the Sangha itself.

I suppose I should make a brief response to Prof. Seneviratne's discussion of an article, written by me for the *Lanka Guardian* in 1970 and titled 'Where are the Radical Buddhists?', about the absence of a radical socio-political movement in Sri Lanka basing itself on Buddhism. Prof. Seneviratne says my article was 'thoughtful', but more important for the question I raised than for the answers I gave. (319-320). I agree. I think now that the error in my twenty year-old article was that I looked for an explanation of the phenomenon I was discussing in the social context of original Buddhism rather than in the social forces that have shaped its thought and practice in modern Sri Lanka.

To conclude, *The Work of Kings* is the product of the trauma of a sensitive, decent and liberal-minded scholar in

the face of the current careerism, corruption and violence of Sri Lankan politics. He has looked into the eye of the Gorgon, and though he hasn't been turned to stone, some of his critical faculties have been numbed. This is the only explanation I can find, not only for his wish that there had been a more orderly development with Vidyodaya working hand in hand with the colonial regime and the indigenous bourgeoisie, but also for what is perhaps the most astonishing thing in the book - his idealisation of antiseptic and authoritarian Singapore. 'Under able, disciplined and honest leadership, Singapore, a small city state with practically no conventional resources, was able to achieve an admirable standard of living and opportunities for its people.' (footnote, p. 161) Is it really necessary to remind Prof. Seneviratne that the achievements, such as they were, of that 'able, disciplined and honest leadership' have rested on the denial of those very democratic and human rights to which Prof. Seneviratne expresses his commitment in his first chapter? It will be remembered that he also expected the 'creative accommodation of dissent' to have been one of the good results if the Vidyodaya 'pragmatism' had triumphed in Sri Lanka. Singapore has hardly been known for its 'accommodation of dissent', creative or otherwise. The reaction against contemporary social and political disorder in Sri Lanka seems to have induced in Prof. Seneviratne a nostalgia for order at any price. But that is an intellectual and emotional temptation that should be resisted. There are many examples from regimes of both right and left in the modern world to demonstrate that an order that is imposed coercively from above is in the long run unstable and impermanent, and when it collapses, the resulting convulsions may be all the more violent because of the intensity of the pressures that have been dammed.

I said *The Work of Kings* was a tragic document because it is a cry of despair, and in that sense, for all its scholarship, courage and honesty, it is unfruitful. There are plenty of demons around us, but they are not to be exorcised by recoiling

from the political in disgust and horror. The only remedy for the evils of a bad politics is a better one. And as I closed this book, I wanted to say to Prof. Seneviratne: 'Cheer up, HL; we're in a bad way alright, but it isn't as desperate as you think. Forty years ago a group of monks brought the Prime Minister to his knees simply by squatting on Rosmead Place, and forced him to tear up the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact. Then you could hardly find a single monk to support him. Now, in this year's political battle on the constitution and devolution, the Sangha were divided - more divided than you thought possible when you wrote your book. Not because all the monks on one side had been intellectually converted to pluralist democracy, but because, like a lot of other Sinhala people, they had learnt the hard way, through sixteen years of war, terrorism and suicide bombings. It's a slow, costly and painful way of learning, but unfortunately, you know, HL., that's the way most people do learn. And even for the sake of ethnic peace I wouldn't wish we had a Lee Kuan Yew to bully and terrorise us into learning faster.'⁵

⁵ The vociferousness of those monks who take the extreme Sinhala nationalist position, and the prominence given to them by the privately owned media for their own political purposes, tend to create an exaggerated impression of their influence on public opinion. The 2000 general election confirmed the fact of its decline.

The State of 'Minority' Rights in Bangladesh

Amena Mohsin

'Minority' is a construction of the modern state. The latter, being predicated on the idea of 'nation', marginalises and alienates the communities that for one reason or another cannot identify themselves with the nation. The state of being marginalised, alienated and, to a large extent, derogated is inherent within the very etymology of 'minority'. It implies something minor as opposed to major, subordinate as opposed to superordinate or dominant, hence less important. 'Minority' does not necessarily have to do with numbers or numerics; rather it may be a matter of status, role, and, more importantly, access to power and resources. Thus one might be a 'minority' in ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender or, for that matter, sexual terms.

Of late the international community has put much emphasis on the idea of minority rights. The effort, though commendable, is essentially a problematic one. It is problematic on two major counts: [A] the declarations - for instance, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities; Draft Minority Declaration - take the nation-state as the sole source of all laws and regulations that govern the relationship between majorities and minorities. It states:

Nothing in this Declaration may be construed as permitting any activity contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations, including

sovereign equality, territorial integrity and political independence of states (emphasis added).¹

The notions of sovereignty and political independence indeed are very ambiguous ones. These notions can be and have been used and misused to construct as well as oppress 'minorities.' More importantly, the ideas of dominance and hegemony are inherent within the very organisation of the present state system, yet the Declaration only affirms and reiterates this very organising principle i.e., the nation. [B] The second problem follows from the first one i.e., it essentializes 'minorities'. In other words the state system remains an unequal one.

This paper takes the position that in order to establish the rights of 'minorities' one has to look beyond the concepts of 'nation' and 'minorities' and search for ways and mechanisms to reorganise the state system. Such constructions as 'nations', 'majority', 'minorities' create artificial boundaries and divisions within human society; and more alarmingly, it helps to create and sustain a culture of hegemony and violence. The paper is divided into four sections. The first provides an overview of the ethnic 'minorities' of Bangladesh. In the second section the predicament and deprivations of three ethnic communities, especially those of the Hill people of Chittagong Hill Tracts [CHT], the Garos and the Santals have been taken into account. It is, however, important to point out here that the plight of the other ethnic communities is no better, if not worse, than that of the three groups discussed here. The third section deals with the modes of resistance and protests of these groups. Finally the paper makes some recommendations for getting out of this majority-'minority'

¹ Quoted. from D.L. Sheth & Gurpreet Mahajan (eds), *Minority Identities and the Nation-State*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 272.

divide. The paper, therefore, consciously avoids the term 'minority', and instead refers to the various groups as non-Bengali communities (this excludes the Bihari community).

Methodology: The paper relies on primary as well as secondary sources. The author made an extensive survey on 100 persons belonging to the CHT in the districts of Rangamati, Khagrachari and Banderban. Besides in-depth interviews of a number of people were made, and the observation method has also been followed. In the case of the Garos and Santals 200 persons were surveyed, 100 belonging to each community. The areas covered are Mymensingh and Rajshahi. The author also interviewed a number of non-Bengali students studying at Dhaka University. Apart from this a thorough and detailed study of the available literature on the subject matter has been undertaken.

I The Non-Bengali Communities in Bangladesh

While writing about the non-Bengali communities in Bangladesh one is immediately struck by the paucity of literature and the general lack of awareness about them. The earliest written sources on them are the detailed accounts left by the British administrators of the colonial period.² Their writings however reflected the biases of the colonial

administration, were quite patronising and often maligned the local communities. But this could also be viewed as the intellectual limitation of those writers who failed to appreciate a different and non-technocratic tradition as 'civilised', and saw it as 'savage', 'nomadic', 'primitive' and 'wild'. On the positive side their writings (though unintentionally) also revealed the independence, military skills and organisational capabilities of these communities who refused to be tamed by the British. The revolts of the Hill people of CHT³, the famous Santal rebellion⁴, the revolts of the Manipuris⁵ and the Garos⁶ all attest to the above.

The later writings of the Bengali writers⁷ also reflect the same biases and limitations. Such accounts are dangerous on two counts: firstly, it stigmatises a society and reinforces the majority-'minority' constructions and divide; secondly, it rationalises the developmental paradigms of the modern state vis-à-vis the small communities. In other words, it gives substance to the hegemonic discourse of the nation-state.

² See T. H. Lewin, *Wild Races of South Eastern India*, London, 1870, Alexander Mackenzie, *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1884, G. A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, V. 1. Part. 1, Calcutta, 1927, R. H. S. Hutchinson, *An Account of the Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Calcutta, 1906, W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, V. 6. *Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Chittagong, Noakhali, Tipperah, Hill Tipperah, London, 1876, E. T. Dalton, *Tribal History of Eastern India*, Calcutta, 1872, Major A. Playfair, *The Garos*, London, 1909.

³ Sirajul Islam ed. *Bangladesh District Records Chittagong*, V. 1. 1760-1787, Dhaka, 1978, pp. 83-84.

⁴ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Delhi, 1983.

⁵ A. K. Sheram, *Bangladesher Manipuri Troee Sangskritir Sangame* (Bangladesh's Manipuris a trio cultural knot), Dhaka, 1996.

⁶ Subhash Jengcham, *Bangladesher Garo Sampradae* (The Garo community of Bangladesh), Dhaka, 1994, Willem van Schendel, "Madmen of Mymensingh: Peasant Resistance and the Colonial Process in Eastern India, 1824 to 1833", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, V. 22. No. 2. Delhi, 1985.

⁷ Abdus Sattar, *In the Sylvan Shadows*, Dhaka, 1983.

Number of Non-Bengali Communities in Bangladesh

Controversy exists as to the exact number of non-Bengali communities in Bangladesh.⁸ The Bangladesh Census Report 1991 puts the number at 29.⁹ Khaleque¹⁰ quite rightly points out that in the Census Report, in two instances, the same group has been listed as two separate ethnic groups. The Tipra and Tripura have been listed as two separate groups whereas they are the same people. Similarly, the Bongshi and Rajbongshi, though belonging to the same community, have also been listed as separate groups. This suggests that there are at least 27 non-Bengali groups in Bangladesh.

Members of the different non-Bengali communities, however, maintain that there are more than 45 different non-Bengali groups in Bangladesh, but the census report does not take the variations into account in order to project Bangladesh as an overwhelmingly Bengali nation.¹¹

Population and Spatial Distribution

According to the census of 1991, the non-Bengali population of Bangladesh is 1.2 million, which constitutes 1.13 per cent of the total population of Bangladesh. Gaps however exist

between the official figures and private estimates. Maloney¹² has pointed out that according to the Monthly Statistical Bulletin of Bangladesh (March 1991) the non-Bengali population in the five districts in Rajshahi division was 62,000, but various Christian missions in private censuses found the number to be just double. Members of these communities also see this as a government mechanism to establish them as numerical 'minorities'.

The non-Bengali communities of Bangladesh can be divided into two groups based on their geographical habitats: the Plains group and the Hill group. The plains groups live along the borders of the north-west, north and north-east of the country. For instance, groups like the Koch, Munda, Oraon, Paharia, Rajbongshi and Santal have been traditionally living in certain parts of Bogra, Dinajpur, Kushtia, Pabna, Rajshahi and Rangpur districts in the northern border. The greater Sylhet district in the north eastern border is the traditional area of the Khasi, Manipuri, Pathor and Tipra communities. The Garo, Koch and Hajong people live in Mymensingh and Jamalpur districts in the northern borders and in Tangail¹³ district in the north central region. Besides, scattered settlements of different non-Bengali people are found in Barisal, Comilla, Dhaka, Faridpur, Khulna, Patuakhali and other districts of Bangladesh.

The non-Bengali people of the Hill group live in the south-eastern part of the country i.e., the CHT. The inhabitants of this group again live in two distinct ecological zones: the ridge-top and the valley. The Chakmas, Marmas and Tripuras are valley-living people; while the Khamis, Mro, Mrong, Lushai, Banjogeas, Kukis, Tanchangya, Chak and Riang live on the ridges of the hills. This led the British administrator Lewin to categorise them as Khyountha and Toungha, which

⁸ For details of this controversy see the different articles in Mahmud S. Qureshi ed. *Tribal Cultures in Bangladesh*, Rajshahi, 1984. Also see a report by Philip Gain et. al Discrepancies in Census and Socio-Economic Status of Ethnic Communities, SEHD, Dhaka, 1997.

⁹ *Bangladesh Census Report*, 1991, V. 1. Analytical Report, Dhaka Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Govt. of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh, 1994, pp. 195-198.

¹⁰ Kibriaul Khaleque, "Ethnic Communities of Bangladesh," in Philip Gain ed. *Bangladesh Land Forest and Forest People*, SEHD, Dhaka, 1995, p. 7.

¹¹ This has been stated to the author by the Garo, Oraon students of Dhaka University.

¹² C. T. Maloney, "Tribes of Bangladesh and Synthesis of Bengali Culture", in M. S. Qureshi ed. *Tribal Cultures*, p. 8.

¹³ Kibria, "Ethnic Communities", 1995, p. 13.

in the Burmese-Arakanese language mean "children of the river" and "children of the hill" respectively.¹⁴

Ethnic Background

A brief account of the non-Bengali groups listed in the census report is given below.

(a) The non-Bengali communities of the CHT

Chakmas: At the time of the formation of CHT into a separate district in 1869 the Chakmas numbered around 25,000 people. Numerically it was the dominant ethnic group. The people lived in villages. They had hereditary chiefs. Each village was headed by a 'Dewan' or 'Talukdar'. This position too was a hereditary one.¹⁵ The Chakmas belong to the Mongoloid group, but their language is of the Indo-Aryan group. It is written in a variant form of the Burmese alphabet.¹⁶ They are regarded as an off-shoot of the 'Tsak' or 'Tsek' tribe of Arakan.¹⁷ The Chakmas are Buddhists. They are divided into 150 Gozas (communities). It is a patriarchal society, and is still the dominant group among the Hill people.

Marmas: In 1869, the Marmas had two clan chiefs, the Bohmang Raja of Banderban and the Mong Raja of Ramgarh. The Marma villages to the south of the Karnafuli river were headed by the Bohmang Raja and the villages to the north were under the Mong Raja. Each village had a headman called

Roaza, appointed by the chief. At times he was chosen by the villagers, but the final appointment was subject to the approval of the chiefs. But in most instances the position passed from father to son.¹⁸ The Marmas had come from Arakan. They speak the Arakanese language, and are Buddhists by faith. It is a patriarchal society.

Tripuras: In 1869 the Tripuras had a population of around 1500. They had no chiefs of their own. They lived in village communities within the jurisdictions of Marma and Chakma chiefs. Each village elected its own headman. The Tripuras believe that formerly they used to live to the south of the Matamuhuri river, under the leadership of two brothers, Kilay and Manglay, who were Karbaris (managers) on behalf of Tipera Raja Udaigiri.¹⁹ The Tripuras of CHT consider themselves to be the descendants of Manikya Raja. The Tripuras are Hindus. Their language belongs to the Bodo group.²⁰ They are a patriarchal people.

Tanchangyas: They are a major branch of the Chakmas. They came into the Chittagong hills around 1819, during the time of the Chakma chief Dhurum Bakhsh Khan. According to Lewin,²¹ at that time they owed their allegiance to a chief named Phahproo of Arakan. But Dhurum Bakhsh Khan did not accept this; consequently many of them went back to Arakan. In 1869 their population was around 2500. They are Buddhists and their rites and practices are similar to those of the Chakmas. Their language belongs to the Kuki-Chin group.²²

¹⁴ Lewin, *Hill Tracts*, pp. 67-68.

¹⁵ Lewin, *Hill Tracts*, pp. 67-68.

¹⁶ G. A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India: Bengal (Lower Provinces)*, Calcutta, 1898, p. 29.

¹⁷ Herbert Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal: Ethnographic Glossary*, V. 1. Calcutta, 1891, p. 168.

¹⁸ Lewin, *Hill Tracts*, 1869, pp. 36-37.

¹⁹ R. H. S. Hutchinson, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers*, CHT, Allahabad, 1909, p. 36.

²⁰ Grierson, *Linguistic Survey*, 1927, p. 64.

²¹ Lewin, *Hill Tracts*, 1869, p. 66.

²² Maloney, "Tribes of Bangladesh", p. 11.

Khamis: In 1869 their population was 2000. They owed their allegiance to the Marma Bohmang chief and paid a yearly tribute to him through their village headman.²³ They had come to the hills of Chittagong from the hills of Arakan and Akyab in the seventeenth century. They claim to be Buddhists, but their beliefs and religious rites are animist. They are divided into 'wife-giving' and 'wife-taking' clans. The eldest son inherits all the property. They have an oral language which belongs to the southern branch of the Kukish section.²⁴

Mros: In 1869 their population was 1500. They had no chief of their own and owed their allegiance to the Marma Bohmang chief of Banderban. Each village had a chief who collected tributes from each head of the family for the Bohmang chief. The village chief's position was hereditary.²⁵ Lewin²⁶ and Hunter²⁷ maintain that the Mros had taken refuge in the hills of Chittagong after being defeated by the Khami tribe of Arakan. They have a clan system. They are animists. They have an oral language which belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese linguistic family.²⁸ Shafer²⁹ however considers it to be a category by itself.

Lushats: They migrated into the Chittagong hills from the Lushai hills of India some 150 years ago. Before the British conquest of the Lushai hills in 1892, the Lushais were extremely ferocious. There were internecine group feuds, and

head-hunting was considered to be a sign of valour. They chose mountaintops as their abodes. Entrance to the village was heavily guarded. Village chiefs known as 'Lals' were elected by the villagers. The Lal led the villagers during wartime and on important social occasions; otherwise there was no difference between him and the villagers.³⁰

They are animists. The Lushais are divided into different sects. It is a patriarchal society; the youngest son inherits all the property of the father. They have a language of their own, known as 'Lushai' or 'Dolne'.³¹ During the British administration missionaries were active among them, as a result most of them took to Christianity. Their language too can be written in Latin script. They lost their martial traits after their pacification by the British in 1892.

Khyangs: Lewin's³² account tells us that in 1869 the Khyangs were a small group of people. Their social organisation was similar to those of the Mros and Khumis. They owed their allegiance to chiefs in Burma.

The Khyangs call themselves 'Hyou'. They believe that some 200 years ago their chief had sought refuge in the hills of Chittagong from Burma, during wartime. They have no sub-castes or sects. They are Buddhists but they also pay homage to 'Nada Ga' (household deity) and 'Bogley' (water deity). Their language belongs to the Kuki-Chin group.³³

Pankhos: The Pankhos believe themselves to be the descendants of the 'Shan' nation of Burma.³⁴ The word

²³ Lewin, *Hill Tracts*, 1869, pp. 87-88.

²⁴ Robert Shafer, "Classification of the Sino-Tibetan Languages", Word No. 19. 1955, p. 105.

²⁵ Lewin, *Hill Tracts*, 1869, pp. 86-88.

²⁶ Lewin, *Hill Tracts*, 1869, p. 29.

²⁷ Hunter, *Statistical Account*, p. 56.

²⁸ Lucien Bernot, "Ethnic groups of CHT", in Pierre Bessaignet ed. *Social Research in East Pakistan*, Dhaka, 1964, p. 159.

²⁹ Shafer, "Sino-Tibetan Languages", p. 107.

³⁰ Lewin, *Hill Tracts*, pp. 99-101.

³¹ Shafer, "Sino-Tibetan Languages", p. 107.

³² Lewin, *Hill Tracts*, p. 94.

³³ Shugata Chakma, *Parbattya Chattagramer Upajati 'O Sanskriti* (The tribes of CHT and their culture), Rangamati, 1993, p. 78.

³⁴ Grierson, *Linguistic Survey*, 1927, p. 144.

'Pankho' means 'Shimul flower', and 'Khoa' means village. They are divided into two sects: Pankho and Vanzang. Formerly they were a ferocious people who built their houses on mountain-tops. Their villages were very heavily armed and guarded. They, however, lost their military skills after their annexation by the British. They were animists. But due to missionary activities during the British period, most of them took to Christianity. Their language has strong resemblance with the Lushai language. It belongs to the 'Kuki-Chin' group.³⁵

Saks: The Saks are considered to be a sub-group of the Chakmas.³⁶ Their language has similarity with the Kadu language which is spoken in the Myitkhyina district of northern Myanmar, and also with the Andro, Sengmai languages of Manipur district in India. The Saks are divided into two sects: Ando and Ngarek. They are Buddhists.

Mrong: The word derives from the Tripura language and means 'clan', and is only applicable to a sept of the Tripuras. They have a clan system, and most of their names have a meaning in the Tripura language; that is why they are considered to be a part of the Tripuras.³⁷

Bawm: The Bawms had come to the Chittagong hills from Arakan under the leadership of their leader Liankung, around 1838-39. They are settled in the Banderban district. Their language belongs to the Kuki-Chin group.³⁸ They are mostly Christians.

³⁵ Shugata Chakma, *Parbattya Chattagramer*, p. 78.

³⁶ Lewin, *Hill Tracts*, p. 65.

³⁷ Maloney, "Tribes of Bangladesh", p. 14.

³⁸ Shugata Chakma, *Parbattya Chattagramer*, pp. 87-92.

(b) *The non-Bengali communities of the plains*

Garos: The original home of the Garos is in the Hills in north-east India, in the state of Assam, which now constitutes the separate state of Meghalaya in India.³⁹ The Garos however believe that their ancestors lived in a province of Tibet named Torua.⁴⁰ They derive their name from the Garo hills. The Garos however prefer to call themselves A chik (hill man) or Mande (the man).⁴¹ Their language is grouped within the Bodo group.⁴² Their traditional religion is known as Songsarek, in which they believe in supernatural beings whom they call Mite. Now, however, 90 per cent of them in Bangladesh have taken to Christianity.⁴³ They are a matrilineal people.

Santals: Hunter,⁴⁴ and Risley⁴⁵ maintain that the Santals had emigrated from Australia and its adjacent areas. They originally came to Bangladesh to clear land, build railroads and do other labour. They are animists, though now some of them have converted to Christianity. They have their own language which is regarded as an offshoot of Kol. Grierson, however, believes it to be a sub-group of Mundari.⁴⁶

³⁹ Zahidul Islam, "Social Organization among the Garos in Bangladesh: An Overview", *Social Science Review, The Dhaka University Studies*, Part-D, V. IX, No. 2, Dec. 1992, p. 106.

⁴⁰ Playfair, *The Garos*, p. 9.

⁴¹ Playfair, *The Garos*, p. 9.

⁴² Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, V. III, quoted in Kibriaul Khaleque, "Adoption of Wet Cultivation and Changes in Property Relations Among the Bangladesh Garo", *The Journal of Social Studies*, No. 20, 1983, p. 80.

⁴³ Kibriaul Khaleque, "Adoption of Wet Cultivation", p. 88.

⁴⁴ W. W. Hunter, *The Annals of Rural Bengal*, London, 1868, p. 181.

⁴⁵ H. H. Risley, *People of India*, Calcutta, 1887, p. 46.

⁴⁶ For details see, M. A. Jalil, *Bangladesher Santal Samaj 'O Sanskriti* (The Garo community of Bangladesh and their community), Dhaka, 1991.

Khasis: The Khasis derive their name from the hilly regions of Khasia. The original Khasis lived in the Khasia-Jainta hilly recesses of Assam. The Khasis came to Sylhet more than 500 years ago.⁴⁷ The Rev. H. Robert believed that the Khasis had originally come from Burma, while another tradition points to the north as the direction from which they migrated into Sylhet.⁴⁸ Their religion may be described as animism or spirit worship. They have their own clan system. Marriage cannot take place within the same clan. It is a matriarchal society; the youngest daughter inherits the property. They have their own language which belongs to the Austroasiatic group.⁴⁹

Manipuris: The Manipuris in Bangladesh had come from the Manipur kingdom in India. The Manipur-Burma seven years' war (1819-1826), had forced the Manipuri king and the Manipuris to flee and take shelter in Assam, Kachar, and Sylhet.⁵⁰ Dalton⁵¹ maintains that the Manipuris are connected with the Nagas and the Kukis. Shakespear⁵² holds that they belong to the Kukis of Assam. The Manipuris however consider themselves to be descendants of Arjun of Mahabharat.⁵³ Their language is called Meithei, and it is written in a script similar to Assamese. They are Hindus of the Vaisnavite division.

Paharias: The original homeland of the Paharias is in the Santal Parganas in the eastern district of Bihar. Population pressure drove them to the plains of Bengal and Bihar. They are mostly concentrated in the Rajshahi district. There is no clan division among them. They are divided into two groups -

⁴⁷ A. Sattar, *In the Sylvan Shadows*, p. 130.

⁴⁸ P. R. T. Gurdon, *The Khasis*, Delhi, 1975, p. 10.

⁴⁹ Maloney, "Tribes of Bangladesh", p. 17.

⁵⁰ Sheram, *Bangladesher Manipuri*, pp. 21-22.

⁵¹ Dalton, *Tribal History*, p. 48.

⁵² Col. J. Shakespear, *The Lusei-Kuki Clans*, London, 1912, p. 150.

⁵³ Dalton, *Tribal History*, p. 48.

Sauria and *Mal*. The *Kumar* or *Kumarbhag* is an offshoot of the *Mal*. This division, according to the Paharias, is based on differences in language and food habits. They are Dravidian-speaking people. About half of them have become Christians, and the rest follow their own religion with some Hindu admixtures.⁵⁴

Rakhaines: The Rakhaines are settled in the Patuakhali district, Cox's Bazaar and Ramu. They came to Bangladesh about 200 years ago from Arakan. In Myanmar the Arakanese are known as Rakhaines, so the Rakhaines in Bangladesh too prefer to call themselves Rakhaines. They belong to the Mongoloid race, and are Buddhists by faith. They have their own Rakhaine language which is similar to the language of the Rakhaines in Arakan. It belongs to the Bhot-Brahmo category.⁵⁵

Rajbansis: They are descended from the Koch people, who later on converted to Hinduism, and some of them became Muslims as well. The Rajbansis however claim that they are kinsmen of the Raja of Chota Nagpur, hence the epithet, Rajbansi.⁵⁶ Maloney⁵⁷ maintains that their language belongs to the Bodo group, though now they have completely lost their original language. They speak a variant form of Bengali.

Koch: Dalton⁵⁸ regards them to be one of the most ancient peoples in India. They had their own kingdom in Kooch Bihar. Their original language belongs to the Bodo group, though later many have taken up Assamese, Hindi, or Bengali. Originally they were matrilineal.

⁵⁴ Father Stephen G. Gomes, *The Paharias*, Dhaka, 1988.

⁵⁵ Mostafa Mojid, *Patuakhali Rakhaine Upajati* (The Rakhaine tribes of Patuakhali), Dhaka, 1992.

⁵⁶ Dalton, *Tribal History*, pp. 135-136.

⁵⁷ Maloney, "Tribes of Bangladesh", p. 16.

⁵⁸ Dalton, *Tribal History*, p. 89.

Oraons: The Oraons believe that they came to Bangladesh from Ranchi, in southern Bihar. They speak the Kurukh language and some also speak Sadri. They are animists, though some of them have converted to Christianity. They are divided into three groups: *Hath Sangia*; *Upersangia*; and *Katrio*.⁵⁹

Hajongs: Dalton⁶⁰ maintains that the original home of the Hajongs was in Assam, and they are descendants of the Kachari race of Goalpara in Assam. They are sometimes called Plains Kacharis. Most of them have taken to Hinduism. Their language belongs to the Bodo group. They are divided into two clans: *Byabcharis* and *Paramarthis*. The latter is regarded as the high born.

Mahats: According to Maloney,⁶¹ they are an Indo-Aryan speaking group. They are a large caste-cluster found in West Bengal. In Bangladesh, they are settled in Dinajpur and speak Shadri.

Mundas: Dalton⁶² maintains that the Mundas or Mundaris were once located in Magadha, and were still there when Gautama was born. They later settled in Chota Nagpur. According to the Mundas, at that time they did not have any Raja. Each village had its own chief called a Munda, which means 'a head' in Sanskrit. A village often consisted of only one family, so all the inhabitants were Mundas; hence the entire community came to be known as Mundas. They came to the Bengal plains during the British period from southern Bihar. They speak the Munda language.

⁵⁹ Budla Oao, "Oraons Among the Bangladesh Aborigines" in Mahmud S. Qureshi ed. *Tribal Cultures*, p. 131.

⁶⁰ Dalton, *Tribal History*, p. 87.

⁶¹ Maloney, *Tribes of Bangladesh*, p. 22.

⁶² Dalton, *Tribal History*, p. 163.

The names of the **Bunas**, **Harizons**, and **Uruas** have been mentioned for the first time in the 1991 Census. No information could be found about these communities.

Occupations and Economy

Most of the non-Bengali communities in Bangladesh are agriculturists. The ethnic communities in the northwestern districts practise wet-rice agriculture. In Sylhet the Khasis have traditionally been involved in trading across the border. This is their main occupation, and agriculture is secondary. The Manipuris are traditionally craftsmen, like carpenters and jewellers. The Garos used to practise jhum cultivation, but due to government restrictions they have now settled down to wet-rice cultivation. They have also taken to pineapple gardening.

In the CHT jhum was the main mode of cultivation, but due to government restrictions on jhum and acquisition of land and forests, it is increasingly becoming difficult to continue with jhum. In the valleys people have adopted wet-rice cultivation but jhum is still practised in the ridge-tops.

In the past, most of the ethnic communities had a subsistence economy, but with the intrusion of the 'state' they have now become integrated with the market economy.

II The State and the Construction of 'Minorities'

Political: The Bangladesh state was predicated on the ideals and spirit of Bengali nationalism. It is argued here that the state by its very ideals alienated the non-Bengali population of the state and hence constructed political 'minorities'. The state failed to present itself as an emancipatory force; rather by institutionalising the ideals of nationalism in its constitution it became an instrument of hegemony and domination. The state constitution and the institutions following from it did not create any space for the 'minorities'. The following will make this clear.

Ideals of Bengali nationalism were incorporated into the constitution. Article 9 defined Bengali nationalism as:

The unity and solidarity of the Bengali nation, which, **deriving its identity from its language and culture**, attained sovereign and independent Bangladesh through a united and determined struggle in the war of independence, shall be the basis of Bengali nationalism (emphasis added).⁶³

Article 6 Part 1 declared that the citizens of Bangladesh were to be known as Bengalis. The imposition of these clauses upon the entire population of Bangladesh turned the non-Bengali population of the state into ethnic 'minorities', for Bengali, after all, is a cultural category, and Article 9 made it explicit that Bengali nationalism was rooted in the **culture and language** of the people. Through Article 3 Part 1 Bengali was adopted as the state language. This turned the non-Bengali population into linguistic 'minorities' as well.

The change from Bengali to Bangladeshi nationalism further marginalised and alienated the ethnic communities. Bangladeshi nationalism was based on the elements of race, the war of independence, the Bengali language, culture, religion (in this instance Islam, the religion of the dominant community), land (geographical area) and economy. The state also moved towards an Islamisation process. By the proclamation of Order No.1 of 1977, "Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim" (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) was inserted at the beginning of the constitution, before the preamble. Through the same proclamation the principle of secularism, previously set forth in Article 8 as one of the state principles, was dropped from the constitution and was replaced by the principles of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah.

⁶³ *The Constitution of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh*, Dacca, Govt. of Bangladesh, 1972, p. 5.

Through the Eighth Amendment to the constitution on 7 June 1988, Islam was declared the state religion of Bangladesh (Article 2 Clause A). Bengali nationalism had turned the non-Bengali population into ethnic 'minorities' while Bangladeshi nationalism with its emphasis on Islam took it further and turned them as well as the Bengali Hindus into religious 'minorities'. Now the state has ethnic, religious as well as linguistic 'minorities.'

The Bangladesh state does not officially recognise the existence of any ethnic communities. In 1992 it refused to celebrate the UN Year for Indigenous People on the ground that Bangladesh is a homogenous state. The constitution has given no space or recognition to the cultural distinctiveness or special rights of the non-Bengali people. The only provision that the policy-makers often refer to in this context is Article 28 Clause 4, which states:

Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens.⁶⁴

The implications of the above provision are very ambiguous and derogatory. It does not in any way specify who or what constitutes 'backward'. Even if one is to accept that backward sections constitute the 'minorities', then one has to accept that the Bangladesh state is an hegemonic institution that accepts certain notions of 'development' which relegate those who do not satisfy it to the periphery as backward. Such insertions only stigmatise a people and rationalise the development paradigms of the state that more often than not cater to the needs and priorities of the majority or the dominant group i.e., the 'nation'.

⁶⁴ *Constitution of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh*, Dhaka Govt. of Bangladesh, 1996, p. 18.

At the highest institutional level also there is no space for the non-Bengali communities. The national parliament is supposedly the most important institution of the state and stands as the symbol of the sovereignty of the people. The constitution of Bangladesh has invested the legislative powers of the Republic in the parliament. It is a three hundred-member body who are elected directly by the people; besides, thirty seats have been reserved exclusively for women members, who are elected by members of the parliament. There is no provision for the reservation of seats exclusively for the non-Bengali communities. Three seats have been reserved for the CHT. One, however, has to be mindful of the fact that the seats are for the geographical constituency of the CHT, and **not** for the Hill people alone. Due to deliberate government policy of Bengali settlement in the region, a demographic shift has taken place in the region and Bengalis today constitute almost fifty percent of the population of the region. It is a well-known fact that the present electoral process is a game of numbers and money. It is, therefore, no wonder that the elected representatives from the CHT, though belonging to the non-Bengali communities, have been elected from the mainstream parties. More importantly, even if the three seats are reserved exclusively for the Hill people, there is hardly any scope for the three members to do anything substantial for their own people in a House of three hundred members, if it clashes with the interests of the majority. Thus, despite the strong protests of Manobendra Narayan Larma (the lone member from the CHT in 1972) against the imposition of Bengali nationalism upon the entire population of Bangladesh, the constitution was passed without making any provisions for the non-Bengali communities.

Members of different ethnic communities strongly feel and resent the fact that there is no scope for them either to participate or voice their opinions at the highest decision-

making levels.⁶⁵ In other words, the electoral process as well as the national parliament only reproduces the hegemony of the dominant or the 'nation'.

There is no separate ministry for the non-Bengali communities. After the signing of the CHT Peace Accord a separate ministry for CHT affairs has been set up. It is still not very clear what would be its actual role and power, and more importantly, how it is going to co-ordinate its activities with the Regional Council instituted in the CHT after the Accord. It is argued here that the ministry has been set up deliberately by the government to act as a watchdog upon the regional council and to maintain the dominance of the government in the affairs of the CHT. The present minister in charge of the CHT Affairs ministry is from the Awami League, while the regional council is headed by Shantu Larma, the former rebel leader of the PCJSS. The PCJSS has now been dissolved and turned into a regional democratic party. Allegations are there of the non-cooperative attitude of the ministry as well as the government towards the regional council.⁶⁶ The formation of a separate ministry for the CHT has also led to resentment among the other non-Bengali communities, who maintain that there should have been a ministry for Adivashi affairs instead of CHT alone.

Thus, at the constitutional and institutional levels the non-Bengali communities remain unrepresented and unheard. Despite the signing of the CHT Peace Accord the Hill people's

⁶⁵ These feelings were expressed to the author during her interviews of the Hill people in 1992, 1993 and again in 1997, 1999. Same were expressed by the Garos, Santals, Oraons and other in 1999.

⁶⁶ Stated to the author by members of the RC (names cannot be disclosed). This was also the feeling of the general people during the author's visit to Rangamati in April 1999 on an invitation by the Rangamati Tribal Institute in observation of the New Year.

political representation has not changed at the national level. The Accord has not been integrated as part of the constitution, which had been a long standing demand of the PCJSS.

The non-Bengali communities of Bangladesh feel most deprived of their rights at the economic level. The exposition below would make this clear.

[b] *Economic*

The non-Bengali communities in Bangladesh have their own notions of economic rights and laws, which are often at variance and in conflict with the dominant or mainstream paradigm. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities⁶⁷ makes it obligatory on the part of the states to encourage conditions for the promotion of the identity of these communities (Article 1 clause 1), and bestows upon them the right to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life (Article 2 clause 2). Bangladesh, being a signatory to the above, is bound by the above conditions. Bangladesh is also a signatory to the ILO Convention 169 of 1989 called 'Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries'. Among other things it includes: [a] recognition of collective land rights; [b] rights of ownership and possession; [c] rights to natural resources pertaining to the lands with provisions relating to cases where the state retain the ownership of these resources; and [d] rights in connection with the removal and relocation from lands.⁶⁸

One may therefore argue that due to these international commitments Bangladesh is constitutionally bound to respect the above. But the state does not make any special provision

⁶⁷ See D. L. Sheth et. al, *Minority Identities*, pp. 269-270.

⁶⁸ Cf. in Mohiuddin Farooque, "Traditional Land Rights: Conflict of Traditions", in Philip Gain ed. *Bangladesh Land Forest*, p. 109.

for the customary rights of the non-Bengali communities. More importantly, the state does not even recognise the existence of indigenous people in Bangladesh.⁶⁹ Constitutionally, Bangladesh is a homogenous country. As pointed out earlier, the regime of Khaleda Zia refused to observe the International Year for the Indigenous People; the present regime also does not recognise the existence of Adivashis in Bangladesh. Sk. Hasina, the present Prime Minister, concedes that there are some *Nritattik janagoshti* in Bangladesh. It is quite puzzling to understand the actual connotations of the expression, its nearest English equivalent would be 'ethnographic people'. Without delving much into the semantics of the above I would like to argue that it is more important to look at the politics behind this refusal. The recognition obviously would entitle the non-Bengali communities who look upon themselves as Adivashis to certain special rights and privileges that the state is unprepared to concede as it conflicts with the dominant or mainstream rights.

It is also significant to note here that the CHT Peace Accord recognises the CHT as a tribal-inhabited area. Rupayan Dewan, a member of the Presidium Committee of the now defunct PCJSS, told the author that they had to concede the term 'tribal' under tremendous pressure for the sake of the Accord, though they had wanted recognition as Adivashis, if not nation, since their struggle was based on the contention that they too constitute a nation which they had termed Jumma.

⁶⁹ The state as well as a dominant section of the Bengali population maintains that there is no way of ascertaining as to who is indigenous to the land, whether it is the Bengali population or the other groups. The word, however, is used by the ethnic communities in a political sense rather than anthropological. They maintain that this recognition would entitle them to certain rights and privileges and would allow them to retain their distinctiveness. It is invoked especially in relation to their land rights that the state denies.

The government, it is argued here, refused to do so, for the recognition of the Hill people as Adivashis would have put it under pressure to give the same status to the other communities that have been demanding so through various forums of their own. It is also interesting to note that the CHT has been recognised as a tribal inhabited area. The implications of the emphasis on the spatial cannot be lost upon any political observer. The other non-Bengali communities are scattered all over Bangladesh and live along with the Bengalis, no other region in Bangladesh can be identified as tribal-inhabited, so the government cannot be compelled to bestow the same recognition to any other area. The CHT Accord thus has implications not only for the Hill people but also for the other non-Bengali communities in Bangladesh.

The state has encroached upon the traditional rights of the non-Bengali communities, especially pertaining to land and forests, in the name of 'national development'. Though this applies to a large extent in the context of all the communities, the paper however would restrict itself to the cases of the Hill people in CHT, the Garos and the Santals.

Land: Land alienation of the non-Bengali communities is one of their major grievances. They allege that they have been dispossessed from their lands through a deliberate government policy of non-recognition of their customary rights over land, which they perceive as a ploy to disempower them. In the CHT the Hill people have been dispossessed from their land through government policies of settlement of Bengalis in the CHT, government acquisition of land on the plea of *khas* land or government land, reservation of forests into different categories like Reserve Forests [RF], Protected Forests [PF], and Unclassed State Forests [USF], and also acquisition of land by the military for the construction of camps and cantonments. The Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board [CHTDB], the agency responsible for the economic development of the region, also acquired land in the name of

development for projects like construction of schools and bazaars. The Board until recently was under the chairmanship of the GOC Chittagong Division. The Hill people had strong reservations about the development endeavours of the Board, and alleged that it benefited the Bengali settler community rather than the Hill people.

The single most important factor behind land alienation of the Hill people is the non-recognition by the state of their traditional rights over land. Jhum had been a dominant mode of cultivation in the Hills. This was a community effort, and as such, the Hill people did not have the conception of private ownership of land. According to their belief system the land belonged to the community, their ancestors and even the spirits, so land was sacrosanct, not a commodity. This notion first came to be attacked under the British when the colonial state declared all land in the CHT to be government property; the indigenous people were given tenancy rights. But this did not create any conflicts as, according to the notions of the Hill people, individuals and individual families do not own land; they only use them. Besides, through the CHT Manual of 1900 adequate protective measures were provided to the Hill people concerning the land issues. Through Articles 34 and 36 of the Manual sale of land and settlement of non-residents in the CHT without prior approval from the District Commissioner [DC] were prohibited. The situation remained more or less unchanged during the Pakistan period, though with the construction of the Kaptai dam 100,000 Hill people were displaced from their land, and forty percent of the prime land in the Rangamati district went under water.⁷⁰

The state of Bangladesh, however, chose to ignore these protective devices, which the Hill people regard as a violation of their rights. In 1979 the government, through an amendment

⁷⁰ For details see Amena Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism: The Case of the CHT*, Bangladesh, Dhaka, UPL, 1997, pp. 111-120.

to Rule 34 of the CHT Manual, did away with restrictions against settlement of CHT lands by non-residents. According to one estimate, between 1979 to 1984 400,000 Bengalis were settled in the CHT through government sponsored policies of settlement.⁷¹ The government argues that the Bengalis have been settled in Khas land, but the Hill people regard these Khas lands as their communal or traditional land. Significantly enough, these settlements were also a violation of Rule 39 of the CHT Manual, according to which the government representative, the DC, was obliged to consult the chiefs on important matters affecting the administration of CHT. The issue of settling 400,000 Bengalis was indeed an important matter, but the chiefs were never consulted. This was also in violation of a fundamental state principle which prescribes that:

The state would endeavour to adopt measures to conserve the cultural tradition and heritage of the people.⁷²

The state obviously chose to ignore the above, and instead contended that the constitution ensures free movement of all its citizens within the state of Bangladesh. The move of the state regarding Bengali settlement was deliberately deceptive. Its actual intent was to bring about a demographic shift in the region. Due to this policy again 100,000 Hill people had become dispossessed. About half of them went to India as refugees, while the rest scattered in the CHT and lived as internal refugees.

The CHT Accord has set up a Land Commission for the settlement of the land issue. According to the provisions of the Accord the customary rights of the Hill people are to be respected. The Accord makes no provision for the withdrawal

of the Bengalis from the region. It is quite difficult, therefore, to visualise how the land issue could be settled. According to a survey carried out by this author in August-September 1999, among 100 Hill people in the districts of Khagrachari and Rangamati, only 4 percent of the respondents felt that the Accord would settle the land issue. In another survey during the same period among 100 repatriated refugees, the author found that 65 percent of the refugees had not got back their land. They also did not believe that they would get back their land later on.

The land problem of the non-Bengali communities of the plains differs from the Hills, due to differences in their agricultural practices; their concentration either in the midst or vicinity of the Bengalis; the nature of external political control; and more importantly, in the context of the Garos, the matrilineal nature of their society.

The non-Bengali people of the plains have in general been alienated from their land. The chief protection of their land is provided by the 'Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act of 1908', which prohibits the transfer of tribal lands to non-tribals without the permission of the DC. The government of Bangladesh recognises special tenurial status of lands falling within the traditional domain of aborigines [SAT 97]. This section empowered the government to declare by notification any aboriginal castes or tribes 'aboriginal' for the purpose of the section, but it did not define the term 'aboriginal'. Sub-section 2 of SAT 97 provided that:

no transfer by an aboriginal raiyat of this right in his holding or in any portion thereof shall be valid unless it is made to another aboriginal domiciled or permanently residing in Bangladesh.⁷³

⁷¹ *The Guardian*, 6.3.1984.

⁷² Mohiuddin Farooque, "Land and the Law", *Courier*, Dhaka, 20.8.1993.

⁷³ Ct. in Farooque, "Traditional Land Rights", p. 112.

In cases where the transferee is not an 'aboriginal' a written permission of the Revenue Officer would be required. This provision, though meant to protect the non-Bengali people, does undermine their right of free transference of their property. But the important point to bear in mind here is that the non-Bengali communities are not even aware of these protective devices. They have little conception of title deeds of lands. Most of the Santals lost their land to usurious moneylenders who used forged documents or other tricks. They have also lost land due to the Vested or Enemy Property Act, which was instituted by the Pakistan state during the 1965 war between India and Pakistan. The state of Bangladesh is yet to repeal it. The very continuance of this Act is contradictory to the principles of justice and equality, and is a major instrument of discrimination. At a humorous level one can even argue that the Act implies that Bangladesh is in a state of war with India.

The Santals are unable to initiate legal procedures on their own, for they lack the capital and are as well unaware of the legal procedures. Many of them have migrated to India; this is indicative of their dispossession and disempowerment. No official figures exist to quantify the amount of land lost by the Santals; they, however, maintain that they have lost 80 percent of their land.⁷⁴

The Santals, Garos as well as other non-Bengali communities allege that it is quite common for the Bengalis to obtain false registration papers from the land registry office, which are often predated. They also allege that the land revenue office often refuses to take land tax from them with the ultimate objective of dispossessing them from their land.⁷⁵

It is indeed difficult to substantiate the above allegations, but the important point here is that such

perceptions and grievances do exist among the non-Bengali communities, which makes the need for their full and effective participation in economic affairs more pertinent. The state ought to take cognisance of this situation by building institutions to look after these issues with the full participation of the non-Bengali people themselves.

The Garo community has been quite hard-hit by state intervention into their economic lives. It is gradually altering the basic structure of their society. The Garos who settled in north Mymensingh and Madhupur Garh forests had to adopt wet rice cultivation along with jhum. Gradually the state began to settle the areas with Bengalis, the population pressure created ecological pressure on the land, so the Garos moved to wet rice cultivation. This introduced the conception of private ownership of land, so the Garo society moved away from the notion of communal ownership of property. This has also weakened the matrilineal basis of their society as land is often registered in the names of the male members.

Forests

Forests constitute an integral part of the lives and belief system of the different non-Bengali communities in Bangladesh. In the CHT forests constituted about 82 percent of the total land area. The Hill people had traditionally been using the forest resources for domestic purposes. These resources were also bartered with the Bengalis. Jhum cultivation was also practised in these forests. But this was not done randomly, and was regulated by community sanctions, for forests were considered part of the community property. But the notion of social forestry was changed into that of commercial forestry by the colonial state. But the specific interests of the local population were never overlooked, and the colonial administration recommended the preservation of local rights.

For instance, the process of declaring RF is started by a notification under Section 4 of the Forest Act of 1927. It

⁷⁴ *Earth Touch*, SEHD, Dhaka, Feb. 1997, p. 16.

⁷⁵ Philip Gain & Shishir Moral, "Land Right, Land Use and Ethnic Minorities of Bangladesh", *Land* V. 2. No. 2 Dhaka, 1995, p. 53.

identifies the lands concerned, and after inquiry, all or part of these lands are constituted into RF by another notification under Section 20 of the Forest Act. After a notification served under Section 4, a Forest Settlement Officer [FSO] is appointed. Then the FSO must [i] proclaim the notification in the Bengali language in every town and village in the locality; [ii] the notification must specify the area of the land; [iii] the notification must specify the consequences of the reservation; [iv] at least three to four months time must be provided to the affected people to put forward their claims in writing, including claims relating to jhum cultivation, rights of pasture or to forest produce and claims for compensation to the FSO. The FSO may accept or reject the claims. An appeal against the FSO's orders may be made with the Divisional Commissioner within three months of the date of the order. The government may revise the Commissioner's order.⁷⁶

These provisions have however been neglected most of the time. The announcements are not made properly. The local people in many instances don't understand the language, and more importantly, they are unaware of the legal procedures. In the CHT many of the forests were declared reserved in 1992 when most of the people were displaced.

In principle, public forests are owned by the state on behalf of the people. However, the agencies administering them have to ensure that they serve the local and national needs, environment, ecology and economy in general, including the special interests of the forest dwellers.

As for the Garos, during the British period the whole forest area of Madhupur Garh was a part of the estate of the zamindar of Natore. The Garos were allowed to live and cultivate there on the condition that they would take care of the forest and pay an annual rent to the zamindars.⁷⁷ The Hindu

zamindars of North Bengal also allowed the Santals to live in the forests in exchange for clearing lands.

The process of acquisition of forests by the state continued during the Pakistan period, and the state also abolished the zamindari system. Consequently the communities living in the forests and dependent on its resources were hard hit and found themselves to be landless. The situation was aggravated by the settlement of Bengalis in these areas. The fate of these communities further aggravated in the state of Bangladesh.

The special interests of the forest dwellers have seldom been taken into account. The state has banned jhum cultivation in the forest on the ground that it is environmentally harmful. The truth of the matter is that the forest dwelling people, due to their indigenous knowledge, are fully conscious of the environmental hazards and followed the fallow periods quite rigorously. Later on, fallow periods shortened due to pressure on land, as these areas came to be settled with Bengalis and the state kept on acquiring forest land.

It is also important to note that much environmental damage has been caused to the forests due to state-sponsored plantation projects. For instance, in 1980 the government undertook a scheme of rubber plantation in the CHT. Accordingly it allotted more than 550 plots of 25 acres each on a trial basis to Bengali entrepreneurs, on the understanding that further land of up to 100 acres or more would be granted on successful performance on the first 25 acres. In this way more than 14,000 acres of forest hilly land were allotted to Bengalis in the district of Banderban. The allotment policy clearly favoured the Bengalis; for instance between 1980-1986 a total of 64 plots was allotted in four mouzas of Banderban. Out of these 64, only one belonged to a hill man.⁷⁸ Besides,

⁷⁶ *Earth Touch*, SEHD, Dhaka, Oct. 1999, p. 30.

⁷⁷ Kibriaul Khaleque, "Change in Social Organization", p. 99.

⁷⁸ Mufazzalul M. Huq, "Changing Nature of Dominant Social Forces and Interventions in the CHT", *The Journal of Social Studies*, No. 56, Dhaka CSS, 1992, p. 86.

rubber plantation is also a prime cause of soil degradation. Rubber is a mono-culture crop, which leads to cutting off of coppices that regenerate natural forests, and forests are consequently destroyed. In the CHT forests had also been destroyed by the military in the name of counter-insurgency. The Santals and Garos have also been affected by the acquisition of forests. It has affected their traditional way of living and turned them into dependent and disempowered people. In 1987 the Second Development project for rubber plantation began in the Madhupur Garh, the traditional habitat of the Garos. This plantation project did not involve the local people; on the other hand it has taken away not only their prescribed lands but also land registered with the Revenue Department. The introduction of commercial forestry has not only evicted the forest dwellers from lands upon which they perceive themselves to have traditional rights and which are a part of their traditional way of life and cultural heritage; it has also impacted upon biodiversity in a negative way.

The dispossession and displacement caused due to the above policies have impacted upon the women most severely. In forest economies women occupy a central position. They not only participate with the men on an equal footing in the agricultural activities but also collect different resources like fuel wood and food items etc. from the woods that constitute an important part of their household economies. Now they have to walk longer distances and work harder to collect fuelwoods and other resources that are so vital to them. The Garo women have been most badly affected, as the society is gradually moving towards a patrilineal one; they have lost their traditional status in the society. In many instances the women have to undertake unfamiliar economic activities, for instance in the Gulshan Baridhara areas of the Dhaka city many Garo women work as housemaids. This is quite strongly resented by members of the Garo community. They allege that their

womenfolk have been dispossessed of their traditional land, hence they have been compelled to come to the Dhaka city and adopt such means of livelihood.⁷⁹

The non-Bengali communities in Bangladesh regard dispossession and non-recognition by the state of their traditional rights over lands and forests which they had been inhabiting for centuries as the main cause of their disempowerment and deprivation. In taking over the forests the state has overlooked not only the interests of the dwellers but also the ecology of the region.

[c] *Cultural*

The non-Bengali communities in Bangladesh also feel marginalised and deprived at the cultural level. This arises out of the non-recognition by the state of the cultural distinctiveness of its ethnic communities. As pointed out earlier, the constitution of Bangladesh declares Bangladesh to be a homogenous state. The CHT Accord recognises the CHT as a tribal- inhabited area. It needs to be pointed out here that 'tribal' is a derogatory category and has important political implications within a modern state. Even if one accepts the argument that at least it does recognise the cultural distinctiveness of the Hill people, one has to keep in perspective that the Accord has no constitutional validity.

On the other hand, the state has consciously adopted measures to develop the language and culture of the dominant community or the 'nation' i.e., the Bengalis. Part 1 Article 3 of the constitution states that the state language of the Republic is Bengali. Article 23 states:

The state shall adopt measures to conserve the cultural traditions and heritage of the people, and

⁷⁹ Stated to the author by Garo students of Dhaka University during personal interviews in Oct. 1999.

so to foster and improve the *national language*, literature and the arts that all sections of the people participate in the enrichment of the *national culture* (emphasis added).⁸⁰

For the development of Bengali language, literature and culture the Bangla Academy has been set up, but no such institution exists at the state level for the development of the languages and cultures of the non-Bengali communities. The Hill people allege that the Tribal Institute in Rangamati caters to the tourists; more importantly, the Institute does not make any endeavour for the preservation and development of the local languages. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Minorities in its Article 4 Clause 3 declares:

States should take appropriate measures so that, wherever possible, persons belonging to minorities have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue.⁸¹

The Bangladesh state has made no such endeavours. On the contrary Bengali, being the state language, is also the medium of instruction and the language for official purposes as well. This certainly puts the non-Bengali population of the state at a disadvantage. Students of these communities allege that they find it difficult to compete with the students whose mother tongue is Bengali. The dropout rate among the students of these communities is also very high. The schools as well as the teachers expect the students to conform to certain conventional norms and patterns that the students from the other communities find difficult to adapt to.

The students also feel depressed at the state of their own languages, which are often referred to as dialects in the mainstream discourse. Many of the students also allege that the academic curriculum at the school and college levels is heavily biased towards the dominant community. They feel depressed and quite alienated when they don't see their own history, their lives, or any role models of their communities in the national curriculum. The Garos and Santals had fought in the liberation war of Bangladesh, yet no recognition has been given to this. The Hill people had also participated in the liberation war. During the course of my own research I found that in the CHT 400 women were raped by the Pakistan army and their collaborators, but no recognition has been given to the above.⁸² The discourse on the liberation war is absolutely silent about the sacrifices and contributions of the different ethnic communities.

Besides, Article 17 Clause A of the constitution calls for the establishment of a *uniform* system of education. This uniformity hinders diversity on the one hand, and on the other it is problematic as well, for the constitution itself promotes a particular culture. This then is regarded as the *high culture*, while the rest are relegated to the periphery. This has happened in Bangladesh.

The deprivations of the non-Bengali communities and the silence of the state on the distinctiveness and rights of these communities, on the one hand, alienates them from the mainstream community or the nation; on the other hand, it helps them to 'imagine' and construct their own identities, and adopt their own modes of resistance to the hegemonising and homogenising tool of the 'nation'. It is to a discussion of this that we now turn.

⁸⁰ Constitution, 1996, p. 16.

⁸¹ Cf. in D. L. Sheth et. al ed. *Minority Identities*, p. 271.

⁸² The research project entitled "Women and War" was sponsored by the ASK, Dhaka in 1997-1998.

III Identity Construction and Resistance by the Non-Bengali Communities

The non-Bengali communities in Bangladesh are aware of the state violations of their rights and the discrimination against them. In a survey carried out by the author among the Garo and Santal communities in the Dhaka and Rajshahi Divisions respectively in August 1999, 95 percent of the Garo respondents felt that they had been discriminated against, while 80 percent of the Santals expressed the same. 100 percent of the respondents in both the Garo and Santal community held that the state was responsible for this state of affairs. In this context they pointed out that their major grievances centred round their dispossession from the land and forest resources, lack of opportunities in the job market; and the lack of space for them in the political and cultural sphere of the state.

The respondents also felt that this discrimination has distilled down at personal levels. Only 30 percent of the Garos had good relations with the Bengalis, in the case of the Santals it was 32 percent. Many of the Garos maintained that they had been denied jobs because of their flat noses. Members of the different ethnic groups also maintained that in the local hotels and restaurants they were served in separate teacups from those used by the Bengalis. These perceptions speak of the deep misgivings of the non-Bengali people about the dominant Bengali 'nation'.

They also felt that a process of assimilation with the dominant community was underway because of their cultural and economic plight. In the survey area 40 percent of the Garos had matrimonial relationships with the Bengalis and 53 percent of the Santals had the same. They maintained that many of their women were marrying Bengali Muslim men after conversion to Islam. These marriages are held according to Bengali and Muslim ceremonies. They felt that the marriages were mostly the outcome of extreme poverty within these communities. At times the women after acquiring education

also marry Bengali men. The cases of Garo and Santal men marrying Bengali women are very rare. They expressed their concern at this process and felt that their people would ultimately become extinct.

The case of the CHT is even more alarming. The state tried to bring about an assimilation through settling Bengalis in the region. The *Dhaka Courier* reported⁸³ that in the military-controlled areas Muslim young women were being married to local youths after converting them to Islam. According to military sources, the Bangladesh government had secretly circulated a letter to the security personnel stationed in the CHT, encouraging them to marry Hill women after converting them to Islam.⁸⁴ The number of mosques and madrasahs (Islamic schools) also increased alarmingly. In 1961 there were only 40 mosques and two madrasahs in the region, whereas by 1981 the numbers rose to 592 and 35 respectively. There were also allegations of forced conversion to Islam. The Hill people feared that they would have met the fate of the American Indians if they had not resorted to armed struggle.

The state policies have their ramifications at individual levels. While in the HT the relationship between the Adivashi Bengalis⁸⁵ and the Hill people are quite cordial, the relationship between the settler Bengalis and the Hill people is marked by animosity and deep mistrust. The Adivashi Bengalis too are opposed to the settler Bengalis. In the survey carried out by the author among 100 hill people, none of the respondents appeared to have good social relations with the settler Bengalis.

⁸³ *Courier*, 8.7.1994, Dhaka, p. 20.

⁸⁴ This was stated to the author by members of security personnel who had served in the CHT.

⁸⁵ These are Bengalis who had gone and settled in the CHT in a natural way since 1947. A distinction is made in the HT between Adivashi Bengalis and Settler Bengalis, the latter being the ones sponsored and settled by the state since the 1980s.

The communities have adopted their own modes of protests and resistance against what they perceive as state violations of their rights and attempts at marginalisation. These protests take place at various levels and acquires various forms. On the one hand a process of identity construction is under way. The non-Bengali communities of the plains at the individual levels identify themselves by their own group or ethnic identities; for instance, 90 percent of the Garo respondents whom the author interviewed see themselves as Garos within the state of Bangladesh; in the case of the Santals the number is 85 percent. Again, at a collective level they see themselves as Adivashis and endeavour to establish their special relationship with the land that they felt they have lost due to state encroachment. The status of Adivashis, they believe, would force the state to recognise their customary rights over land and forests. They resist the idea of Bangladeshi nationalism or nationality as they identify it with Bengali culture, language and Islam. But they do perceive themselves as Bangladeshi citizens; in this context they frequently refer to their role in the liberation war of Bangladesh. By their resistance to cultural assimilation and by making the distinction between citizenship and nationality they are taking a conscious political stand. It is posited here that within this framework lies one of the important ways for reorganising the present hegemonic state.

The Hill people also had constructed for themselves the identity of Jumma. Jumma nationalism was the main counter-hegemonic tool for the Hill people. They had counterpoised it to Bengali nationalism. Manobendra Narayan Larma had protested against the imposition of Bengali nationalism, and had retorted in the parliament during the constitutional debates in 1972 that he was a Chakma national, not a Bengali, though he was a Bangladeshi citizen.

Crossing over to the other side of the state boundaries is also a form of protest and resistance to assimilation. In the case of the non-Bengali communities in Bangladesh the

process of migration to India is going on. The Garos have migrated to India⁸⁶; the same holds true for the Santals. This indeed attests to the failure of the state to hold its diverse population together within a plural structure. While the number of the plains-land ethnic people migrating to India is unknown, the case of the CHT for obvious reasons is more clear-cut. In the 1960s 40,000 people had crossed over to India after the Kaptai debacle, and they are still living in the Arunachal Pradesh as stateless persons. After the creation of Bangladesh another 100,000 became homeless due to military atrocities and Bengali settlement. About 54,000 of them became refugees in India and the rest scattered in the interiors of CHT as internal refugees.

After the signing of the CHT Accord the refugees have come back, but they have come back to very uncertain and polarised conditions. According to a human rights activist in India, the Chakma women refugees were most reluctant to come back for security reasons.⁸⁷ The survey carried out by the author among a total of 100 returnees only corroborates the above, as 96 percent of them stated that they had crossed over to India due to military atrocities, and the rest four percent said that it was due to the war between the military and the Shanti Bahini. 92 percent of them felt that the situation was still uncertain and unstable; eight percent felt that it was bad. An important point to bear in mind here is that none of them felt that the situation had settled down for them. There appears to be no easy way out and respite for the refugees!

The non-Bengali communities have also formed their own associations to realise their demands and protest against violations of their rights. These associations have their own

⁸⁶ For details see Robbins Burling, *The Strong Women of Madhupur*, Dhaka, UPL, 1997.

⁸⁷ This was stated to the author by Asha Hans of India. She had visited the Chakma refugee camps after the CHT accord was signed in Dec. 1997.

publications, and from time to time they have organised seminars and protest movements as well. In this context mention may be made of the protest meeting organised by the Bagachash in August 1999, to condemn and demand justice for the rape and murder of Levina Howee, a Garo girl. Levina was a domestic aide in the house of a veterinary surgeon in Mymensingh. She is alleged to have been raped and then murdered by her employer.

This author in her survey found that 75 percent of the Garo respondents took part in the various protest movements, while 78 percent of the Santals did the same. The plainland non-Bengali communities, however have not formed any political party of their own. They feel that since they are spatially scattered and live in the midst of Bengalis, so when elections are all about numbers the attempt is simply futile.

The case of the CHT is, however, quite different. Being settled in one place, the Hill people had attempted to organise themselves politically with their own political platform. The PCJSS had originated in the CHT to realise the autonomy demands of the Hill people. It has recently transformed itself into a political party. There were also different student organisations like the Pahari Chatra Parishad (PCP) and Hill Women's Federation (HWF). When the PCJSS was banned in the CHT, these organisations had carried out the political movement within and outside CHT for the realisation of the Hill people's demands. A group of these organisations have rejected the CHT Accord as a compromise formula and have formed a political party of their own known as the United Democratic Peoples Party. The party has vowed to carry out the movement for the realisation of autonomy in the CHT.⁸⁸

Resort to armed struggle is the ultimate form of protest. In the CHT the PCJSS had carried on an armed struggle for

about two decades. The Shanti Bahini was added as the armed wing of the PCJSS in 1973. After the political change-over of 1975 the PCJSS leadership crossed over to India and carried out their operations from there. The CHT underwent full-scale militarisation after 1977 and the region was placed under the control of the GOC of Chittagong Division. The military controlled the political and economic life of the region. During this period widespread human rights violations took place that ranged from forced eviction, arrests, tortures, forced religious conversion to rapes and massacres.⁸⁹

Finally, a Peace Accord has been signed between the PCJSS and the government of Bangladesh on 2 December 1997. This has brought the armed insurgency to an end, but peace is still to be attained. It is posited here that the two most critical issues, the land question and the issue of Bengali settlers, has deliberately been left quite ambiguous. The resolution of the CHT issue would ultimately depend upon the resolution of these two questions. Nonetheless, signing of a peace accord, or for that matter signing of any contracts between members of non-Bengali communities and the government, is not the solution to their problems, nor do these documents ensure them their rights. The latter requires creation of spaces, and a truly democratic environment and institutions. This requires the creation of consensus and understanding between the Bengali and the non-Bengali population of the state.

The Bengali civil society has remained largely silent, and to a large extent ignorant, about the plight of the 'minorities'. None of the mainstream political parties have criticised the role of the military in the CHT. Criticism has come from some left-leaning political-cum-cultural organisations like the Chatra Federation, Lekhok Shibir. With

⁸⁸ For details see Amena Mohsin, "The CHT Peace Accord: Looking Ahead", *The Journal of Social Studies*, V. 82, Oct. 1998, Dhaka.

⁸⁹ See Amena Mohsin, "Military Hegemony and the CHT", in Subir Bhaumik et. al eds. *Living on the Edge: Essays on the CHT*, SAFHR, Kathmandu, 1997, pp. 17-45.

the instalment of civilian regimes a gradual interest is rising within the civil society. Women organisations like the Sammilita Nari Samaj have of late protested the violations of 'minority' women. The Ain 'O Shalish Kendra (ASK) has documented human rights violations of the 'minorities'. But this is not enough. The silence of the civil society is largely due to its ignorance, as the state has not made any endeavours to project the non-Bengali communities. The NGOs however had been involved in 'development' activities for them. This, however, did not necessarily bring about a positive change; as a Garo student of mine had put it to me once, "The Hill people are lucky, the NGOs have not gone there, we have been turned into a dependent people due to NGO activities." It is therefore imperative to monitor NGO activities. The non-Bengali people also resent the fact that their plight has become an issue of consultancy. This is particularly evident in the backdrop of the CHT peace accord. It is important that such matters are dealt with utmost sensitivity and with the full consent and participation of the local people.

The creation of a truly non-hegemonic society, it is argued here, requires us to go beyond our present conception of the nation-state, and towards this endeavour the paper suggests the following measures.

IV *Beyond the Nation-State*

It has been the contention of this paper that the modern state is a hegemonic construct. The idea of nation with its homogenising thrust appears as a hegemonic tool upon the communities that do not belong to this nation, and thus politicised minorities are created. To begin with, therefore, the state needs to be reorganised. For this the following measures are suggested:

a. The politics and society of the state has to be democratised. The Bangladesh polity has to accept the fact that a singular,

culturally homogenous population is not necessarily the basis of a state; rather, there can be several culturally homogenous communities within a state.

b. In this formulation the concept of citizenship would gain more salience. The entire population of Bangladesh would be known as Bangladeshi citizens, at the same time the different communities would also be recognised in the constitution. In other words the state would seek its unity through common citizenship, and at the same time the cultural identities of the different groups would also be retained. This, it is argued here, would do away with the threat of Bengali hegemony. Besides it is also a more practical and enduring basis of keeping the people united, as the concept of citizenship is less prone to evoke emotions.

c. The above change should be incorporated into the constitution. The constitution has to recognise that Bangladesh is not a homogenous but a multi-cultural or plural state. In other words the constitution has to be democratised.

d. The constitution must explicitly recognise the customary rights and privileges of the different communities. In case the customary rights marginalises the women (as it does in case of Muslim and Hindu laws), then, in consultation with members of the community concerned, necessary amendments ought to be made to those laws. But this has to be done with the full consent and participation of the community concerned.

e. The parliament needs to be democratised. In its present state it not only under-represents the women, who constitute almost half of the total population of the state, but also the non-Bengali communities. One way of doing it is through decentralising the parliament as suggested by Imtiaz Ahmed.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Imtiaz Ahmed, "Electoral Process in Bangladesh: Rationales for Reform", in Devendra Raj Panday et. al eds. *Comparative Electoral Processes in South Asia*, NESAC, Kathmandu, 1999, pp. 28-29.

He proposes the creation of at least one parliament for each Division. At the central level there would be a federal parliament with coordinating powers and functions. The Divisional parliament would be vested with more power than the Federal one in this framework.

f. Democratisation of the administration has to be ensured. The different ministries (especially land, forest, law and parliamentary affairs, cultural affairs and defence) ought to have representation from the different communities.

g. There ought to be a separate ministry for Adivashi affairs to be headed by members of the same community. In order to avoid any misgivings, the minister in charge must have the rank and status of full minister.

h. There ought to be decentralisation of power and responsibilities. Local government institutions have to be strengthened. These must ensure non-Bengali representation. They should be capable of generating their own financial resources and have control over those resources and their allocations as well.

i. The local governments should have full power over the judicial and administrative affairs of the locality. More importantly, these bodies ought to have land and judicial commissions to deal with the land rights and disputes of the non-Bengali people whose conceptions of land ownership might be at variance with the Bengali population.

j. Instead of Bangla Academy, we need a Bangladesh Cultural Academy that would conduct research and work for the creative development of all the cultures and languages in Bangladesh. The management of the Academy ought to be a democratic one; especially the higher echelons of the body must have ethnic representation.

k. The state cultural programmes must reflect the plurality and diversity of cultures in Bangladesh. *Eikush* (21st)

February⁹¹ is observed with much fanfare every year; but amidst this fanfare the true spirit of *Eikush* seems to have been lost. *Eikush* stands for plurality and freedom to speak in one's own language. The celebrations of *Eikush* must reflect this spirit by focusing not on Bangla language and culture alone. The cultures and languages of the other communities must also be reflected in these celebrations; only then we can expect the entire population of Bangladesh to see themselves as part of the cultural life of this state. The need for this plurality has become more pertinent now that the day has been declared as the International Mother Language Day by the UNESCO.

l. The history of the liberation war of Bangladesh has largely been constructed and deconstructed till now. It has silenced many voices and many histories. Any objective history of the liberation war ought to take into account the sacrifices and contribution of the different ethnic communities in Bangladesh.

m. There should be the opportunity and option for the non-Bengali communities to pursue their education, at least at the primary level, in their own mother tongue. The academic curriculum ought to be democratised. It must speak of the different cultures, histories and different forms of knowledge. A judicious balance ought to be achieved so that the children grow up learning as well as respecting each other's culture.

n. The universities ought to introduce a separate department on cultural studies focusing on the lives and cultures of different communities.

o. The non-Bengali communities ought to have their own channels of radio and television. These channels must be autonomous.

⁹¹ On this day in 1952 the Pakistan authorities opened fire on the people who were protesting the imposition of Urdu language as the state language of Pakistan. The day is celebrated as the *Shaheed Dibash* (Martyrs Day) in honour of the martyrs of this Language Movement.

The above changes indeed are not easy to come by. But what is most encouraging and indicative of the forthcoming change is that a space is being created within the civil society for the imperative for such a change. It is hoped and expected that this space and force would ultimately compel the political society to acknowledge the reality and the necessity for change towards a humane society.

(Where) Language Acts in *When Memory Dies*

Sonali Perera

...Communal war, between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, that is what he said. He said it was already there, written into the constitution...

-- *When Memory Dies*¹

...the "speech" of the state often takes a sovereign form, whereby the speaking of declarations are often literally, "acts" of law...

--*Excitable Speech*²

If we concern ourselves over the narrative logic of Ambalavener Sivanandan's *When Memory Dies*, we would notice that the final scene is structured as a repetition of an earlier event. Is there something to be understood by this structure of repetition? "You have killed the only decent thing left in this land...we'll never be whole again"(WMD, 411): In context, these words of summation are spoken by the character Meëna, as she cradles the dead body of Vijay, the final

¹ Ambalavener Sivanandan. *When Memory Dies*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1997.

² See Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge, 1997 for an extremely productive exposition of the politics of the performative.

protagonist³ of the novel who is gunned down by the LTTE. We have, however, heard these words before, the wording of this closing speech is almost exactly anticipated in a letter sent out at a key moment in Book 2. There, the character Lal writes to Rajan on the occasion of the organized Left parties abandoning their position with regard to the parity of status of Tamil and Sinhala languages. The letter reads: "We are dead Rajan, ...socialism is dead; *the only decent thing in our lives is dead.*"⁴ We'll no longer be fighting injustice but each other...Language and religion: Banda has found the perfect formula for a ready-made majority, God knows what will happen next..." WMD, 203-204). According to the sequencing of the story, the passage of the exclusionary, Sinhala Only Act marks a crucial turning point in the staging of the history of Sri Lankan socialism. It anticipates the violent end-of-story as a foregone conclusion.

Marxist social historians, Kumari Jayawardena and Ranjith Amarasinghe⁵ have theorized the passage of the 1956 Sinhala Only Act in relationship to the failure of left party politics in Sri Lanka. In "The National Question and the Left Movement", for example, Jayawardena frames what was at stake with the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam pact with a view to understanding the present history of Sri Lanka. Her piece ends with an address to the left parties to confront their past

history of chauvinism and rededicate themselves to the socialist, inter-nationalist values and ethics that informed the "parity of status" slogan.

Clearly Sivanandan's dramatizations of the events of 1956/58 might be read as verifying the theses and interventions of Sri Lankan Marxist historians. (The writer, Ambalavener Sivanandan is, of course, himself (also) a Marxist critic/journalist) The main objective of this essay however, is to demonstrate a method of reading literature --not as sociological evidence -- but explicitly *for* its literariness, that works to actively supplement the conditions and constraints of historical scholarship -- history as discipline.

How do we begin to write a "history of the present" without becoming caught up in the claims and counter-claims that structure the base terms of the nationalist contest? Radhika Coomaraswamy takes aboard this question in an early piece titled "Myths without Conscience: Tamil and Sinhalese Nationalist Writings of the 1980's" There, she observes that "...the issues of justice and oppression get lost in a discourse of fact and counter-fact. Ironically, in this struggle for the 'correct' interpretation other more social values are forgotten"⁶ It is a problem built into the mode of history writing- as-a-discipline that Coomaraswamy directs our attention towards: often, the ethics of a situation are lost in the protocols of producing evidence to substantiate current political claims.

Counter to the discipline of history, the institution of literary studies is categorically not about producing the singular, 'correct' interpretation. Moving beyond this basic observation about the philosophy of literature, can we press this definitive property of literature and literary text into the service of an anti-essentialist, Marxist "history" of the present? Focusing on a key episode in Sivanandan's novel, I will attempt to demonstrate how "the other"/ethical calculus of events is

³ As with other writers of socialist fiction, Sivanandan puts together a collective, rather than individual, subject for his novel. It cannot go unnoticed by the feminist reader however, that women do not function as subjects in the narrative but rather "figure" as the spaces of oblivion/memory that make up the back/ground, if you will, of *When Memory Dies*.

⁴ Emphasis mine

⁵ Mainly, Kumari Jayawardena. "The National Question and the Left Movement in Sri Lanka"(243-260) See also, Y. Ranjith Amarasinghe. *Revolutionary Idealism and Parliamentary Politics*. Colombo: SSA 1998.

⁶ Radhika Coomaraswamy. "Myths Without Conscience: Tamil and Sinhalese Nationalist Writings of the 1980's"(97).

figured into the narrative logic of the text. But first, as a way of orienting ourselves within the book -- a schematic overview.

The plot traces the biography of a collective subject -- father, son, (adopted) son -- over a period extending from the 1920s to the contemporary moment. The historical backdrop changes from early anti-colonial struggles to the rise (and decline) of the trade union movement, to the compromises of post-independence left party politics, to the institutionalization of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, to LTTE violence. My reading begins by noticing the planned symmetry of two chronologically, logically separate events: the final scene, and the scene dramatizing the violence of the Official Languages Act.

For Rajan, the (second) narrator-subject of the book, this historic event of the failure of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam pact is overwritten by the situation of a personal tragedy: "On April 9th it came: there was going to be no pact with the Tamils, the country belonged to the Sinhalese. Official. April 9th was the day my mother died"(WMD, 222). There is no breathing space between these two sentences/narratives. The register shifts from straightforward, narrative prose to figural language, seamlessly. "As my mother's cortege left the house, the prime minister was laying a wreath on the pact. I cried inconsolably but for which death I did not know, there was so much dying that day." At the level of narrative chronology, the confusion is signified in terms of a parallelism. One scene becomes continuous with the other. On the other hand, however, this doubling/othering of the historical event is rendered in the register of the interference of two differently oriented speech acts. The speech act itself becomes de-linked from the narrating subject and language is given agency.

The constitutive violence of the Sinhala Only policy is represented in the text as an illocutionary act, "itself, the deed it effects" As it occurs in the book, the racist chants of Sinhala demonstrators ("Death to the Tamils") protesting against the pact, intrude into the funeral house:

I gave up trying to find her in me and listened instead to what the odd assortment of mourners who had come to her wake had to say of her. But their conversation kept alternating between my mother and the demonstrators at Rosmead place...Among the mourners that afternoon were the pedlars and mendicants and fortune-tellers and beggars who came to my mother's door...Sinhalese most of them. And yet it was these same people who were encamped outside the PM's residence, shouting "Death to the Tamils." This Tamil was already dead, she who spoke Sinhala better than they..."(WMD, 223)

The language act takes effect instantaneously: "Death to the Tamils. This Tamil was already dead." As it is constructed, the interference of two differently oriented speech acts (racist chants and funeral rites) ultimately coheres into one system of meaning. Sivanandan, the novelist, constructs an immediate logical connection between exclusionary laws and embodied violence. In this strange, time-lapse moment in the text, history is brought up to speed with the present. In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*,⁷ Volosinov has explained the phenomenon of speech interference as a register of textuality in which "two intonations, two points of view, two speech acts converge and clash." For Volosinov, this occurrence is emblemized in the moments where a reported message resists

⁷ V.N. Volosinov. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973.

its authorial context; in my reading of WMD, however, I have attempted to build upon a more general understanding of this term as the clash of two differently oriented speech acts.⁸

Through the staging of interference and parallelism this episode in the story signals a crucial moment in this tightly structured novel of genealogy and numbered books where sequence breaks down and language is given free agency. It marks a place where (official) language acts, silencing the narrating subject, crashing into the sanctity and silence of the funeral house --- enacting in effect, a matricide.

I return now, by way of the implications of this reading to my earlier question: Can the literary analysis of narrative contribute something of significance to the larger project of an anti-essentialist, non identitarian praxis of Sri Lankan Marxist historiography? I suggest that something like an answer is to be found in sorting out the figural syntax that associates the Sinhala Only Act with a mother's death. As the narrator puts it in the text: "I found myself piecing together in monstrous collage a picture of my mother and the events of the day" (WMD, 223). For now, I submit that in Sivanandan's novel, the simultaneous staging of the "loss of language" alongside interrupted funeral rites for a mother perhaps attempts to articulate the vast categorical difference between [a] national language and [b] *mother* tongue.

For the anti-essentialist, feminist reader, the name "mother" also signifies the *matrix* by which linguistic subjects enter into this world. For her, the critical terrain of "mother

⁸ In taking into account the "philosophy of language" I have not taken the next step in this short essay, which should be to examine the literary production of socialist intellectuals writing about the language debates in Tamil and Sinhala languages.

tongue" is radically resistant to the sort of territorial limits and contests that the conceptualization of national language gives rise to.⁹

In the context of contemporary war-torn Sri Lanka, the question of the parity of status of languages is not an episode in history but very much part of the present. Ultimately, this essay is at minimal best, merely an exhortation to learn from socialist writers and thinkers as the terms of/for nation and constitution continue to change and change -- amidst unceasing violence.

⁹ In the interest of rushing off this article I have not elaborated the theoretical links that undergird this reading. For now, I direct the reader towards Gayatri Spivak's argument in "French Feminism Revisited" where she makes a case, through an interventionist reading of Cixous, for the conceptualization of "the moment of the mother and of plurality" See Gayatri Spivak. *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. New York: Routledge, 1993. For sustained work and insight into the cultural codings and markings of the social construction of "motherhood" specifically in Sri Lanka, I turn to the work of Malathi De Alwis.

Son

D.S.S. Mayadunne

'Two nought double three.'

'Is two nought double three there?'

That is my number. Presumably there is a letter for me. I got up and walked to the door.

'Are you two nought double three?' the prison guard who was there asked me sharply.

'Yes,' I said.

'Who's Chandra to you?'

'She's my wife.'

'Come with me.'

I followed him to the visitors' room. He left me in charge of the middle-aged guard and went out to bring the visitor. I waited.

My wife's visit didn't arouse any particular feeling in me. Two days before my arrest there had been a vicious row between her and me over financial problems. In my schooldays I had given myself three promises. The first was that I would never drink. The second was that I would never smoke. The third was that I would never commit suicide, whatever the provocation. However, that last quarrel had made me wonder whether I would have to break the third promise.

When I had been taken to the fourth floor of the CID for questioning, she came there to see me. I was indifferent to her tears.

I hadn't saved anything to be used in the kind of situation I was placed in. However, I felt her brothers and sisters would be able to look after her and the children for the time being. Anyway, my arrest brought me one relief. At least, as long as I was there, I wouldn't have to face her quarrelling. I thought this would be a good lesson to her.

A little while after I sat down in the visitors' room, she came in. She wasn't alone. My elder son was with her. He was ten years old. His lean and erect body reminded me of what my mother had told me about myself. She had said that I was as straight as a ruler when I was young. His chin was raised, and his tightly closed lips gave him an appearance of even greater determination than normal. This I saw only for a moment, for he started crying as soon as he saw me. That surprised me because it was unusual. At home he frequently paid no heed to what I said. Even when I told him something seriously, he used to laugh it off. Often everything was a joke to him, and I had thought that I myself was a joke to him. I hadn't known that he was capable of feeling sorry for me or of crying because of me. Perhaps it was my swollen face and the reddened and half-closed eyes, resulting from police assault, that grieved him.

His crying couldn't be stopped for several minutes. I felt a lump in my throat. The elderly prison guard too appeared to be moved to pity. 'These fathers get involved in various things and the children have to suffer,' he said. I noticed some other remand prisoners gazing at us from a distance through the window of the room.

'Don't cry, son, I'll be coming home in a few days.' I told my son, stroking his head. After some time he stopped crying. 'Prepare yourself well for the scholarship exam,' I said. He nodded his head, as if to say he accepted what I said.

My wife and son had brought with them some hoppers and plantains, two buns, and tooth powder. The guard had a brief look at them and permitted me to take them.

'You've stayed enough. Now you may go,' he said soon after. My wife and son got up and prepared to go.

'Study hard, son,' I said to him on parting.

'Yes.'

The two of them left the room. While passing through the door, they turned their faces towards me. The tears in her

eyes were familiar to me. But his weren't; therefore, they moved me.

I couldn't fall asleep that night. Sleeping on the floor of that ward, leaning against each other for lack of space, was difficult anyway. The place was so overcrowded that one prisoner spent the whole night standing since he could neither lie down nor even sit.

I recalled the time when my elder son was in his mother's womb. Although I usually came home every day after work, I couldn't do so the day he was born. I remembered how everybody said he was exactly like me. I recalled his infancy and childhood. I remembered how once, when he was ill, my wife and I travelled fifty miles to consult a famous child specialist. How, not long after he was sent to school, he lay down in the compound, refusing to go to school. How, more recently, I asked him to go to the market to buy something and he refused, and when he continued to refuse in spite of my repeated requests, I flew into a rage and beat him mercilessly with a footruler. How, before starting to cry, he looked into my eyes in surprise. Later I was sorry that I beat him without asking him why he refused. Perhaps it was the unexpectedness of my action in beating him that surprised him. I remembered how, when some neighbours laughed because I was trying to make a climbing frame for passion fruit creepers, using coconut branches because I had nothing better, my son came to help me, saying, 'Father, let's do this to a finish, especially because they're laughing'.

It is said that childhood must be happy. But how can my children and Wimalasena's and other such children have a happy childhood? My wife had told me that when the news of my arrest reached them, my two children were terribly frightened.

I was arrested on the ground that I had supported a terrorist group. I didn't like Nanda who was a member of that group. I thought he wanted to exercise an ideological dictatorship over the group, and that he craved leadership.

After my son had come and gone, I felt that all these thoughts were trivial. What did it matter whoever became the leader? How unimportant and insignificant were the rows between my wife and me that occurred so often!

When dawn was approaching my eyes were closing with drowsiness. My eldest son's face, wet with tears and drawn by crying, appeared to me. A moment later I saw both my sons running through a rain-swept rubber plantation, laughing merrily.

The faint sound of a bell, and the words, 'Where are these fellows? Queue up! Queue up!', louder... That was for the morning count. I got up and walked towards the gate.

(Translated by the author from his Sinhala)

Festina Lente*

An enormous tortoise
wandered into my garden
and settled to a feast of greenery.

We established a relationship at our first meeting.
When I lifted the magnificent creature
in its diamond-pattern housing of ochre and bronze,
the swift reptilian head stretched towards me
and its clever eyes met mine.
Nor did it withdraw into the carapace. What a burden,
I thought, those horny plates of bone
to carry for ever on your back.

The book says though you tear a tortoise from its shell
it will still creep away,
and even when the flesh is cut from the living body
the head continues to move.
It is linked to all the elements - especially earth,
water and stone
and, like a poem, lives on almost nothing -
except air and leaves.

But needs warmth, or it will die.

The tortoise IS,
silent, heavy, prehistoric.

The curse of Zeus, according to Aesop,
has pursued it through the millennia. Like me,
it carries its weight
of ancient memories.

- *Anne Ranasinghe*

* Hasten slowly: motto of a Renaissance emblem bearing a Winged Tortoise.

'I am Not What I am'

- *for Ruwanthie*

You are the real Autolycus, the artful trickster
who's fooled us four centuries. Just when we think
we've pinned you down, you've wriggled smoothly out of our
clutches,
changed your mask, shed your beard, and in a wink

switched sides. Are you with Hal or Falstaff? Shylock
or Antonio? Prospero or Caliban? That's just the trick:
to keep us guessing. Master of equivocation, tease,
flirting with your master-mistress but stopping at his prick:

no wonder you could throw everything away on a pun.
While the dons wrangle, the directors and critics weave
their spiders' webs of interpretation, you, old rascal,
are somewhere laughing quietly and slyly up your sleeve.

- *Regi Siriwardena*

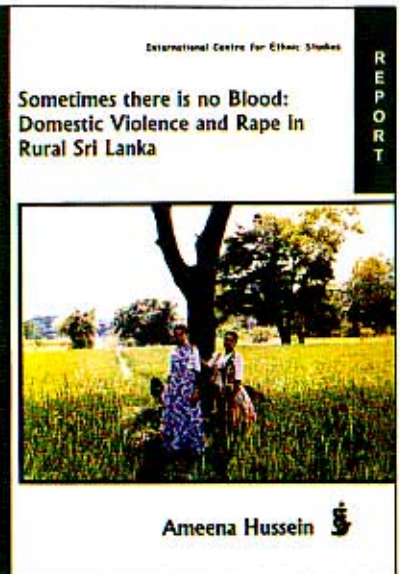
Sometimes There is No Blood: Domestic Violence and Rape in Rural Sri Lanka

Ameena Hussein

For years the efforts of women's rights activists to combat violence against women in Sri Lanka have been curtailed by the debilitating lack of information and awareness about the issue. *Sometimes There is No Blood: Domestic Violence and Rape in rural Sri Lanka* addresses this lacuna and provides readers, both activists and others, with a comprehensive and thorough assessment of the situation and puts forward practical and feasible recommendations for change.

The volume, which is based on extensive and comprehensive data gathered during research in rural Anuradhapura, Nuwara Eliya, Matara and Kandy, illustrates the widespread manifestations of violence against women in Sri Lanka. Hussein's work, through the presentation of hard-hitting and most often heart-wrenching evidence, stresses the urgency for legal reform, gender sensitizing and training.

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