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# **MUST SRI LANKA SPLIT?** **and** **THE WAY OUT**

by K. NESIAH

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Must Sri Lanka Split?

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# Must Sri Lanka Split?

K. Nesiah\*

## Part One

### 1. The Nation-Making Era and the role of the Tamils

It was not an independence struggle but a luke-warm Reform Movement, confined to the English educated elite, that commenced in Sri Lanka at the conclusion of World War I. "Ceylon does not ask for independence"...but for some reforms, "as a step towards the realization of responsible government as an integral part of the British Empire". A quarter of a century later, towards the end of World War II, the ministers and members of the State Council elected by universal suffrage were still prepared to consider an offer by the British Government, "to grant to Ceylon by Order of His Majesty in Council full responsible government under the Crown in all matters of internal civil administration". Perhaps following Indian events, it turned out that Ceylon achieved full Dominion status by the Ceylon Independence Act, 1947.

It may, however, be claimed that it is the Tamil leadership, that, touched by the Indian and Gandhian awakening, dared to think in terms of a liberation movement and all its many ingredients. Was it not Ananda Coomaraswamy who first recalled the cultural heritage of this country and publicly protested against the dropping of the teaching of Sinhala in the higher classes in Buddhist Schools, like Ananda College, in 1905? Earlier, was it not a Jaffna Committee alone that urged before the Morgan Committee (1867) that an individual should be "well educated in his own language"? Was it not Arunachalam who made a forthright case for the mother tongue medium before the Macleod Committee (1911)? Prof. J. E. Jayasuriya must have had these things in mind when he said: "At a time when the Sinhalese were prepared to do without Sinhalese, the battle for Sinhalese and Tamil was fought by Tamil leaders, helped in some measure by Englishmen, like the Rev. A. G. Fraser". Jayasuriya also pays a tribute to educationists in the North, making a kind reference to me by name, who joined in this battle during the pre-Independence era. He may have had in mind things like my "Report

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on H. S. Perera's Report" (1941) and "The Mother Tongue in Education" (1945). The interest of Tamil scholars was by no means confined to language and culture. Arunachalam was the father of the Ceylon University Movement (1906) and the founder-President of the Ceylon National Congress (1919).

Other Tamil leaders too played a key role in this nation-making period. Perhaps the first group in this country which dared to think in revolutionary terms was the Jaffna Youth Congress. It is this body that invited Mahatma Gandhi to our shores in 1927. The admission of Harijan students in large numbers to the big schools of the North must be attributed to the mass upsurge flowing from the activities of the Youth Congress. It is this group that prompted some of the schools here to refuse to observe the King's Birthday. It is the 1931 Annual Session of the Congress that organized a (partial) boycott of the elections to the first State Council on the score that the Donoughmore Constitution did not concede full responsible government. It is too this Congress that dared to fly the tricolour of Saffron, Red and Green heralding the nation's independence to be, on the Jaffna Esplanade on April New Year's Day, 1932. No less, it is members of this group that strove to preserve national unity even unto the moment of Independence.

## 2. After Independence

Freedom Day arrived, appropriately enough, in the year when the U. N's Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family. Alas, as we recede from that fateful year, 1948, it looks more and more that Sri Lanka's nationhood is but a coat of paint. Are we not essentially a no-nation if the majority ethnic group thinks that it can lord it over the others and if, for many in every group, the fictitious kinship of race constitutes the real fatherland? Nor should the forms of parliamentary democracy blind us to the absence of an unwavering commitment to human rights and the spontaneous fellowship of those so committed.

The first crack in the wall appeared when the self-same Ministers, who had indicated to the Soulbury Commission a scheme of delimitation by which the Tamil speaking minorities would secure 37 seats (Ceylon Tamils 15, Indian Tamils 14, Muslims 8), making,

with six nominated seats, a minority representation of 43 as against 58 Sinhalese seats in a House of 101, were without any previous hint to withdraw the citizenship and franchise from Indian Tamils, and bestow a heavy weightage on the Sinhalese majority by still retaining the count of the Indian population for delimitation of seats. So that in the last National State Assembly of 151 elected members, 124 were Sinhalese—a little over 70 per cent of the population having well over 80 percent representation!

Not content with depriving one half of the Tamil people of their citizenship and franchise rights, the ministers have been promoting planned and state-aided Sinhalese colonisation in traditional Tamil areas and large scale regularisation of Sinhalese encroachments in such areas, calculated both to get a foothold in Tamil homelands as well as to give Sinhalese colonists the benefits of land development in these areas. The creation of Sinhalese constituencies in the Tamil-speaking Eastern Province, and later in the other Tamil speaking Northern Province, was obviously part of the plan.

The All-Ceylon Tamil Congress had been formed under the leadership of Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam in anticipation of the Soulbury Commission (1944-45). The Congress mobilised Tamil support for a scheme of 'fifty-fifty' balanced representation for the majority and minority communities. The scheme was not accepted by the Commission. When the Tamil Congress leader joined the D.S. Senanayake Cabinet and voted for the disfranchisement of the Indian Tamils, a break-away group under the leadership of Mr. S. J. V. Chelvanayakam formed the Federal Party, which gradually became the main spokesman of the Tamils.

### 3. 'Sinhala Only' and 'Sinhalese Only'!

The Official Languages Resolution, favouring Sinhalese and Tamil as official languages on equal terms; had been adopted by a large majority in the State Council in 1944. Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike had warmly supported the resolution. But, kept out of the succession for the Prime Ministership, he adopted the 'Sinhala Only' platform and won the General Election of 1956. It was a fateful night, the 14th of June, 1956, and the day was breaking when the House of Representatives adopted by 66 votes to 29 the Sinhala Only Act which read: "The Sinhala language shall be the one official language of Ceylon". Every Tamil vote was cast against it; the redeeming feature, the Leftists, 15 in all, voted with the Tamils.



Bandaranaike tried to assuage Tamil feeling by a compromise pact with Chelvanayakam (1957) recognising Tamil as the language of a national minority and the language of administration in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and providing for regional councils with power in the fields of Agriculture, Colonization, Industries and Education. But, bowing to militant Buddhist opposition, he unilaterally abrogated the pact.

That 'Sinhala Only' was meant to be an instrument of 'Sinhalese Only' was dramatically shown in the Kodiswaran Case. Kodiswaran, a Tamil in the executive clerical service, declined to sit the Sinhala proficiency test and in 1962 his increment was stayed. The District Judge held that the new language regulation was illegal as the Official Language Act transgressed the prohibition against discrimination in Sec: 29 of the Constitution. The Supreme Court set the judgment aside on the ground that a public servant could not sue for his salary. The Privy Council, which set aside the Supreme Court's ruling on suing for a public servant's salary, directed that the Supreme Court should now rule on the constitutional issue. The Government thereupon abolished appeals to the Privy Council, and the 1972 Constitution did away with minority safeguards enshrined in Sec: 29.

Be it noted that unequal language requirements give unequal access to the public service and its promotional opportunities to the limited number that seek to enter it. The graver consequence is that it makes nearly 30% of the population unequal before the courts of law and at every public counter. May be on the face of it a language preference, it is essentially racial discrimination. Little did its sponsors realize that, while two languages and Sinhala-Tamil bilingualism in administration would make for One Nation, insistence on one official language would lead to Two Nations! !

Nor did they realize that it is when both linguistic groups use their respective languages not merely as means of communication and in every aspect of the democratic process but as an instrument of the creative life that the greatness of the entire nation is promoted; yea, human civilization itself gains when language becomes the means of developing the collective consciousness of every ethno-cultural group, its distinctiveness and its distinction. The use of an auxiliary international language, like English, by those who can as a creative medium and by those who need it, as a functional tool, adds to the nation's stature.

It would, however, be a sad situation if Sri Lanka opts for the choice, that Toynbee warned against of "languages waging internecine wars with one another in disintegrating civilizations at an advanced stage of their decline"! Alas, it bodes ill, that as we recede from the year of Independence and the stability of the colonial era, we should make a return journey to the medieval period instead of catching up with the world of our time!

*Emergency 1958* by the eminent Sinhalese journalist Vittachchi is a record of the mass killings of that year, for which there was no official inquiry or even the expression of sympathy with the wronged Tamils. (Insurgency, 1971 and the cruelty on both sides makes a dismal story, but it was not a racial conflict).

*The Tragedy of January 10th, 1974* records the findings of the Kretser Commission, a court appointed by Tamil citizens to inquire into an unprovoked police assault on a gathering to bid farewell to some of the world's eminent Oriental Scholars who had participated at the 4th International Conference of Tamil Research Studies. The Government did not respond to the demand for an inquiry made by Tamil M.P's, but the police officer chiefly responsible for the unjustified eight deaths and the humiliation undergone by thousands of people received a promotion. What with imagination could have become a great national festival, not just a Tamil occasion, became a tragic experience and the turning point in our history!

And, three years after, in the 30th year of Sri Lanka's Independence, we have just gone through the 'black fortnight' of August, 1977. Prime Minister Jayawardena has promised to appoint a Commission of Inquiry and it is best to await that investigation as to the extent of the killings, arson, loot and humiliation inflicted and the motives behind. One tentative statement may however be quoted here from the *Tribune* of August 27, 1977:

"All those who have brought reports about the violence against the Tamils are unanimous that the Police in many places were not only silent spectators of looting, arson and assault, but in some instances active participants in the violence. Many observers feel that it was deliberate and pre-planned."



#### 4. 1972: Not our Constitution

The Tamil United Front came into being in the historic City of Trincomalee on May 14, 1972 when the freedom, dignity and rights of the Tamil people were threatened by a retrograde Constitution. Notwithstanding the fact that it was the House of Representatives, elected on a party basis, that constituted itself into a Constituent Assembly and despite the denial of elected representation to a million Tamil plantation workers and the absence (since 1956) of even a single elected Tamil Minister in the Government, the Tamil people had agreed to give themselves and their fellow countrymen the chance of writing a new Constitution to serve as the nation's charter for the years to be. Representative citizens, including Senators and Members of Parliament, had met in two successive conferences in the Town Hall, Jaffna, and approved by consensus a series of Resolutions and a Memorandum on the Draft proposals. The Tamil political parties had also submitted their recommendations. None of these was given any consideration and, following this rejection, the majority of Tamil Members had withdrawn from the assembly. In fact, of the 19 elected Tamil members only 4 voted for the acceptance of the new Constitution on May 22; of these 4 members, three had already been expelled from the parties on whose tickets they entered the house, the fourth being an independent. It would then be correct to say that the Tamil people did not accept the Constitution of 1972 as their Constitution. The third session of the Tamil Conference also intimated to the Prime Minister that the Constitution was unacceptable.

Non-the-less the TUF asked for a dialogue with the Prime Minister to discuss a six-point demand for the amendment of the Constitution adopted at a meeting at Mahavalawu, Kopay, on June 25, 1972:

- (1) The Tamil language should be given the same status in the Constitution as the Sinhala language.
- (2) There should be constitutional guarantees of full citizenship rights to all Tamil-speaking persons who have made this country their home. There should be no different categories of citizens and no discrimination between them and also no power to the State to deprive a citizen of his citizenship.



- (3) The State shall be secular, while equal protection is afforded to all religions.
- (4) The Constitution should provide for justiciable and therefore valid fundamental rights guaranteeing the equality of all persons and ethno-cultural groups.
- (5) The Constitution shall provide for the abolition of caste and untouchability.
- (6) In a democratic and socialist society, a decentralised structure of government alone will make it possible for a participatory democracy where power will be people's power rather than State power.

When, instead of holding a dialogue with Tamil leaders, Government spokesmen claimed that the Tamil people had accepted the new Constitution, Mr. S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, who had come to incarnate the mood and hopes of the Tamils of Sri Lanka, resigned his parliamentary seat on this issue. Two years and four months, by the very device of the Emergency under which the Constitution was adopted, the ruling group was able to put off the bye-election. When he re-won the Kanke-santurai seat by an over-whelming majority on February 6, 1975, he announced that he considered the result as "a mandate that the Eelam Tamil Nation should exercise the sovereignty already vested in the Tamil people and become free".

Regarding the refusal of the Government to enter into a dialogue with the genuine leaders of the Tamil people for a political settlement, or to consult them on other matters affecting the Tamil people, Bishop Lakshman Wickremasinghe of Kuru-nagala wrote in his Diocesan letter an year ago.

"The situation in Jaffna with regard to the Tamils continues to deteriorate. The continued obtuseness of the present Government and of those from all parties in the Sinhala establishment who openly or tacitly support its policy, is one of the heart-rending tragedies in our midst. The use of open force by police and army, the psychology of 'defensive reaction' and the attempt to use nondescript persons with marginal influence as puppets leaves me ashamed as a Sinhalese."

The failure of the provisions of the Constitution to uphold the national ideal and the democratic principle is aptly shown

by the facility with which the majority ethnic group has been able to deny opportunities to Tamils in education, employment, land alienation, economic and industrial activity.

To cite one example, the selection by so-called open competition for the CAS in the very year 1972: Total 106, Sinhalese 100, Tamils 4, Muslims 2 — For another, University admissions: A formula called media-wise "standardisation", unknown elsewhere, requires in effect different minima in different subjects from the two ethnic groups, with a view to severely curtailing the intake of Tamil candidates, especially in the Science-based studies. The disproportionately high brain-drain of professionally and technically qualified Tamils and their families is to be explained mainly by their search of educational opportunity for their children — leading to the draining away of further potential ability. Alas! Education the very means of fighting inequality should itself become an instrument of discrimination!

#### 5. TULF—Resolution on Tamil Eelam

On the fourth anniversary of the formation of the T.U.F., on the 14th of May, 1976, the First National Convention of what was renamed The Tamil United Liberation Front, met under the Chairmanship of Mr. S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, Q.C., M.P., in the village of Pannakam in the Vaddukoddai Constituency and resolved "that the restoration and reconstitution of the Free, Sovereign, Secular State of TAMIL EELAM, based on the right of self-determination inherent to every nation, has become inevitable in order to safeguard the very existence of the Tamil Nation in this country". (The writer, who was one of the delegates to the Convention, was the sole abstainer). The full Resolution (running into several pages) was printed and distributed by Mr. Chelvanayakam and other members of the Action Committee on May 22, Republic Day. Mr. Amirthalingam Secretary-General of the Front, and three M. P.'s were arrested, taken to Colombo for detention and later charged at a Trial-at-bar. 67 lawyers, including several eminent Q. C.'s, appeared on behalf of the accused at what turned out to be a historic constitutional case. Subsequently, the Attorney General indicated that the case was not being proceeded with.

At the General Election '77, where voting took place on July 21, the TULF fielded candidates for all the predominantly



Tamil and some of the predominantly Muslim electorates. The Front had asked the Tamil people to regard the vote as a plebiscite on the issue of Tamil Belam. Their candidates won in 18 Tamil electorates and lost only in the 19th electorate, Kalkudah, which was won by a U. N. P. Tamil candidate (who was earlier associated with the Front). The C. W. C. ally of the Front won in the plantation Nuwara Eliya electorate. The very large majorities which the TULF scored and the enthusiastic election rallies, attended by entire families left no doubt about the response of the Tamil people. But the Front failed to win any of the predominantly Muslim seats, which were won by the U. N. P. The United National Party, which gained a big landslide victory outside the Tamil areas, also benefitted by the Tamil marginal votes in their areas. The sole Tamil candidate elected on a UNP ticket became Minister of Justice the first elected Tamil Minister in 21 years! The TULF is the main Opposition Party and its leading spokesman Mr A. Amirthalingam is the Official Opposition Leader.

## 6 Will Sri Lanka Split?

"Two different nations, from a very ancient period, have divided between them the possession of the Island: First, the Sinhalese inhabiting the interior of the country, in its southern and western parts, from the river Wallouve to that of Chilaw, and secondly the Malabars (i. e. Tamils) who possess the northern districts." —Cleghorn minute, 1st June 1799. The Vaddukoddai Resolution and Tamil leaders lay much store by the historical argument that it is the British rulers who for administrative convenience "shackled together" the hitherto separate Sinhalese and Tamil territories. But, cannot we argue that the British period was also part of our history, and that when the British super-imposed an Island wide political and administrative system, it was but a fulfilment of the fundamental cultural and spiritual unity which was the cumulative message of Sri-Lanka's history?

But, has not that noble message been betrayed these thirty years so much so that we have cut the earth on which to erect the very foundation of a new nation? Let alone the failure to think out a social philosophy and the appropriate structures for this nation, are we one nation—if the Tamils of Sri Lanka are denied human dignity and equality, discriminated against in every

sphere, the statues of their great men dishonoured, subjected to Uganda-type savagery from time to time and made to listen to insulting racial refrains from a police and army of 'occupation,'? And for some years of the Emergency, as the Amnesty International has pointed out, "deprived of an important means of expressing its opinion democratically"? Meanwhile a stream of propaganda, calculated to un-build our nationhood, is poured out in mass media so freely available only to some. Two examples, one so to speak heralding the 'black-fortnight' of August and the other pronouncing the epilogue!! First, Professor F. R. Jayasuriya in a central page article so full of untruths and distortions, in the pro-Government SUN of August 11-12: "Sri Lanka is unquestionably and undeniably the land of the Sinhalese" ..... "it is the duty of every Tamil in this country" (to go over and settle in Tamil Nadu in South India). Second, according to an Information Department press release in the SUNDAY TIMES of August 28, a memorandum to the Prime Minister by the Ven: Madige Pannaseeha, a Maha Nayake Thero, in which the venerable Thero advocates the planned colonisation of the North and the stationing of an army of 1,000 soldiers in Jaffna. The Thero also wants legislation to prevent any talk of a separate state either orally or in writing! Did not Kelvin Knight write in the ECONOMIST (25 June 1977) that "the multi-party system of the West is not a good system of government for nations of the third world: it often places power in the hands of a majority ethnic group or the members of a particular religious creed?" And where masses of our countrymen have remained untouched by the time spirit and still live with loyalties which do not extend to the whole nation, it is an ominous sign if even men of learning and religion should fail to discern the authentic voice of Sri Lanka. The call of Lanka is still for some leader of thought or action who embodies in his person the Sri Lanka Man and the greatness of the nation to be!

Given lofty statesmanship on both sides, it may still be possible at this eleventh hour to work out a settlement assuring the Tamils the essence of their demand within the framework of Sri Lanka. The self-determination principle can still find adequate scope in one or other of the new political systems emerging in other multi-racial societies of the modern world. Such, for example, is the autonomous nationhood proposed for the Catalans of Spain, or



Home Rule for Scotland (with direct representation in the European Parliament), or the formulas being considered for the coming together once again of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. Or, may be, we can evolve our own new model of government, very different from the Western style of party-based parliamentary democracy, that would both obviate the domination of one ethnic group by another and at the same time ensure the much sought after participatory democracy. We can consider whether in the manner urged by Jayaprakash Narayan we cannot re-structure government on the Village Council base, forming Electorate and District Councils by the upward integration of councils at lower levels, making the District the unit for socio-economic and educational planning. Nor should we overlook the role of the voluntary Cooperative Movement, similarly built from below to above, as a major instrument for creating a democratic socialist society.

Whether in our political settlement we opt for two autonomous regions within the bosom of a single state, or for two separate nations in the bosom of Sri Lanka, the two great communities cannot but afford to live in unity and with mutual benefit. Towards this consummation the schools and universities can make an immeasurable contribution. Not least, like what the Nordic States did some years ago, we need to re-write the History of Sri Lanka to reflect its composite heritage and to convey its enduring message of the supremacy of the spiritual over the material.

31 August 1977

One of the fundamental elements which may determine the relationship between the dominant and minority groups is territoriality. In some cases, a certain minority group has its territorial domain and territorial identity which reflects the identity of the minority. In this situation the right to the land or territory is a paramount question...

The crux of ethnic identity is closely intertwined with the politics of language. The dominant ruling groups often impose their own language as national or official language and suppress the languages of minority groups. The question of identity and self-determination of minority ethnic groups requires critical evaluation of policies of "one nation one language". For example, the issue of Sinhalese-Tamil-English usage in Sri Lanka represents a sensitive case of politics of language that constitutes a central dimension of ethnic relations in that country..

On the social and cultural level discrimination and uprootedness become paramount problems for the powerless ethnic or racial groups; here the issue of self-identity and self-determination or autonomy become crucial for their liberation. Also this issue is inseparably connected with unjust structures of power relations.

**Identity and Justice, OCA-URM, Tokyo, 1977.**



# THE WAY OUT

## 1. The essence of the crisis

The tragic happenings of August'77 have deepened the crisis in Sri Lanka. It is a grave story that is now unfolding itself in the evidence placed before the Sansoni Commission - of widespread assaults and killings of Tamils, the looting and burning of their homes and shops, the humiliation of their women and the desecration of their temples. The essence of the crisis is that 30 years after reaching the gates of Independence there has been a return journey to the no-nation state of medieval times.

Indian Minister Asoka Mehta once said: "When a religious community, a language group makes sovereign claims and reduces all other associations to the status of satellites democracy is destroyed". It may help us to see things clearly if we compare ourselves with India, with whom we share much of our ancient heritage. India's road to independence witnessed a mass struggle against the foreign foe, while ours consisted of resolutions adopted in and out of the legislature. Even more significantly, simultaneous with the external struggle, Mahatma Gandhi put forward a Constructive Programme calculated to strengthen India from within. True to form, our exercise in Constitution making was no more than disposing of the will of the people without their participation, claiming a party - mandate for the Constitution of 1972 and for the amendment of 1977. On both occasions, the party in power represented one ethnic group, more or less. India, on the other hand, was true to her (and our) spiritual genius. Her Constituent Assembly was an "India in microcosm", in which even the small minorities were well represented, and she applied with great effectiveness the characteris-

ancient concepts of consensus and accommodation. And true to her commitment to deeply spiritual and not narrowly religious values, India is a Secular State. A Federal Constitution assures all linguistic groups of self-identity and self-determination,

Perhaps a clue to the sort of thing that may have over the years poisoned the minds of large sections of the population is provided by the following statement by a university don in the SUN of August 12, 1977: "Sri Lanka is unquestionably and undeniably the land of the Sinhalese..... It is the duty of every Tamil in this country (to go over and settle in Tamil Nadu in South India)". Social scientists tell us that children are born without race prejudice. Such prejudice is taught them in various ways.

You've got to be taught, before it's too late  
Before you are six or seven or eight,  
To hate all the people your relatives hate;  
You've got to be carefully taught.

Who are the persons in this country who teach the young and old this pernicious untruth of race? Politicians who have political stakes in race prejudice; discriminatory groups who have economic stakes in it; men with "perverse emotions and twisted reason" who write in newspapers and history text-books and those who teach out of those text-books and, alas, men who wear religious robes, but who hearken to the myth of race rather than to man's humanity. Both those who insist on 'Sinhala Only', meaning 'Sinhalese only', and those who seek "the foremost place for Buddhism", deny the existence of the nation.

## 2. Western political models provide no answer

For 30 years we have tried multi-party parliamentary democracy, with a Prime-Minister-led-Executive, as in Britain. Since last Independence



Day, we have adopted a Presidential Executive system as in the U. S. and France. Both are sub-systems of the same parliamentary system deriving from the historical experience of those Western countries. But, as Jayaprakash Narayan has pointed out, Western societies have an infra-structure and a variety of institutional set-ups that give substance, not merely form, to democratic government.

First, the delicately balanced party system, where the 'swing' at a general election is by a small margin, not a landslide. Besides, there is a basic national unity in Britain. In the words of Sir Walter Moberly: "Our party-differences have not been carried to an extreme. After a General Election, the new party does not undo the bulk of the work of its predecessors. The outlook which Mr. Churchill and Mr. Attlee have in common is more important than the things in which they differ". It is much otherwise in this part of the world. The election campaign itself tends to partake of the nature of a civil strife, and after the elections, political tension continues with probes and policy reversals. We readily disintegrate into our primitive groups.

Second, there is the corrective of a powerful public opinion that exerts a continuous influence on the representatives. A connected element is a free and fearless Press, which acts as an extra lobby to the House. The malaise that affects this young nation is that despite the adoption of the forms of democracy, the people have hardly imbibed the spirit of liberty. Who has protested against the two major newspaper groups being state-owned and heavily subsidised by government advertisements? Or, who has considered it unwholesome for the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation to be an instrument of Government propaganda?

In the next place, the free academic community should serve as the conscience of the nation; its positive function is to promote the freedom of ideas

in a world where the state has at its disposal the means of enslaving the minds of men. But, how can the university, which has lost its own freedom, serve as society's safeguard against the State? And, are all university men alive to this betrayal?

Not least significant is the wide dispersal of power by a federal structure in the United States and a net work of local councils in France and Britain. In the U. S. there are 50 semi-sovereign states and all together 90,000 units of local government. France has nearly 38,000 units of local government. Britain, though a unitary state, has a highly decentralised structure, most governmental activities, including Education, being in the care of local self-governing councils. The President in the U. S. and France, and the Prime Minister in Britain, do rule, but they have to carry both parliament and the nation with them.

Gandhiji objected to "20 men sitting at the Centre and ruling the country"; it was State power and not people's power. How much more open to objection one Executive President ruling from the Centre and not responsible to the legislature either. In addition to 20 or more Ministers at the Centre, 20 or more 'District Ministers', appointed by the Centre and responsible to it, but adds to this concentration of power; it takes away from the people's participation in the decision-making process.

If, as Harold Laski has urged, it is the citizens who have to play a creative role by being an active and integral part of the law-making process, the State and legislature's function that of "registering" the will of the citizens, the present proposals seek to reverse that process. It is hardly consoling to be told that the people can change their rulers once in a few years. There is little liberty except where the ideas which are embodied in policy and law seep upwards from below. We have therefore to



see the enrichment of national life in the expansion of society rather than of the state.

Besides, centralisation is not consistent with the spatial dispersal of power. Laski argues that it makes for uniformity; it "lacks the genius of time and place". If decision making has to commence in the small local community and flow from there to broader levels, the system of Proportional Representation, extended to local self-government, certainly goes counter to the concept that men "belong to a community and to a place".

Our democracy is like a pyramid not standing on its base, but made to stand on its head!

### 3. An Asian Model

It was Hugh Gaitskell who said that neither the British model nor the authoritarian communist one may be the answer to the demand for an Asian model for social democracy. He thought that J. P., the founding father of Indian democratic socialism and associate of Gandhi and Vinoba, may be the one to develop a self-produced Asian model. Perhaps, the most original contribution which we who belong to the Indic civilisation, drawing on our own ancient political genius, can make to the art of government would be to experiment with re-structuring democracy on the village base, on the partyless village assembly where decisions are reached by consensus. The voice of the Five, the voice of God! Why, even in the West, political thinkers are in search of new forms of participatory democracy to replace the present system of voting democracy, called by Madariaga as "statistical representation".

A sound base on which to rest the democratic pyramid is the organic village community. Where villages have decayed into small hamlets

or grown out of size, some re-designing may be necessary. The same with the wards of our new towns and cities. The important thing is to develop neighbourhood groups, may be 500 households here and a 1000 households there, large enough to be viable and small enough to make a community. If it is the shared living and the civic spirit that is the essence of community, the neighbourhood group should become the polling district for all elections, the area of a multi-purpose co-operative or its branch society, the catchment area (may be with adjoining areas) for a primary school and adult leisure provision and continued education. Not least, there should be a gamsabha consisting of all adult men and women.

We meet the demand for a participatory democracy and by the same token go a long way to resolve the racial conflict by decentralizing government on the gram-sabha base, forming Electorate and Regional Councils by the upward integration of councils at lower levels. For socio-economic and educational planning the Region may be the viable unit. Parallel to this structure and reinforcing it, would be the structure for a Cooperative Democracy, building upwards from the face to face village cooperative assembly to the elective Electorate, Regional and apex delegates' assemblies. The corresponding decentralization of economic power would call for the development of small unit technology, which will make it possible to produce in the small scale / cottage sector what can be so produced, with all that this means in terms of employment opportunities and human values.

It is possible that all those who want in Sri Lanka a society based on justice, liberty, equality and fraternity will generally support the suggested new model of democracy. Equally, they may subscribe to the amendments to the draft 1972 Constitution proposed jointly by Messrs.



J. R. Jayawardena, Dudley Senanayake and S. J. V. Chelvanayakam : (a) that there should be a 'bicameral' legislature; and that (b) The President should be elected for a period of six years by an electoral college consisting of members of both Houses of Parliament and the members of the duly constituted local bodies in the country.

#### 4. Problems of the Tamil-speaking People: Conditions for an interim settlement.

The United National Party, in their Manifesto for the General Election, 1977 offered to summon a Round Table Conference on the problems of the Tamil-speaking people. Meanwhile, the Select Committee on the Third Amendment is drafting its suggestions. The fact is that the manner of historical change cannot be predicted with precision before the moment arrives. One believes that though the movement for a separate Tamil State has gathered much momentum, it is still possible to meet in a conference to work out an interim compromise, which may indeed pave the way for a lasting settlement.

Against the background of decentralization outlined above, 3 conditions may be laid down as minima :

1. The first fundamental element for a settlement is the recognition of a territorial domain and territorial identity to reflect Tamil identity.
2. Language identity (note how in the U. S. S. R, Moscow had to give up its proposal in the new constitution to replace Georgian as the sole official language of the Georgian Republic)
3. Self-determination (or regional autonomy) flows from the demand for self-identity. This should include local recruitment and set-up of police units.

Given good will, a number of conventions may be agreed to which will make the settlement an enduring one. Such as, for example, that there should be the office of Vice-President and a firm convention that if the President of the Republic is from one language group, the Vice-President should be from the other. Another convention, that members of the Central Cabinet, the Supreme Court Bench, State Corporations and other directive and consultative bodies should represent all regions in the country and both language groups.

## 5. The Spirit of the Settlement

When all is said, understanding between communities should be at the people's level, more than at the state level. Even nationhood is everywhere an unfinished business. Those who can communicate to the people that they belong one to another, to 'all' and not to 'some', are thinkers and poets, historians and writers, teachers and those public servants who can be described as true patriots.

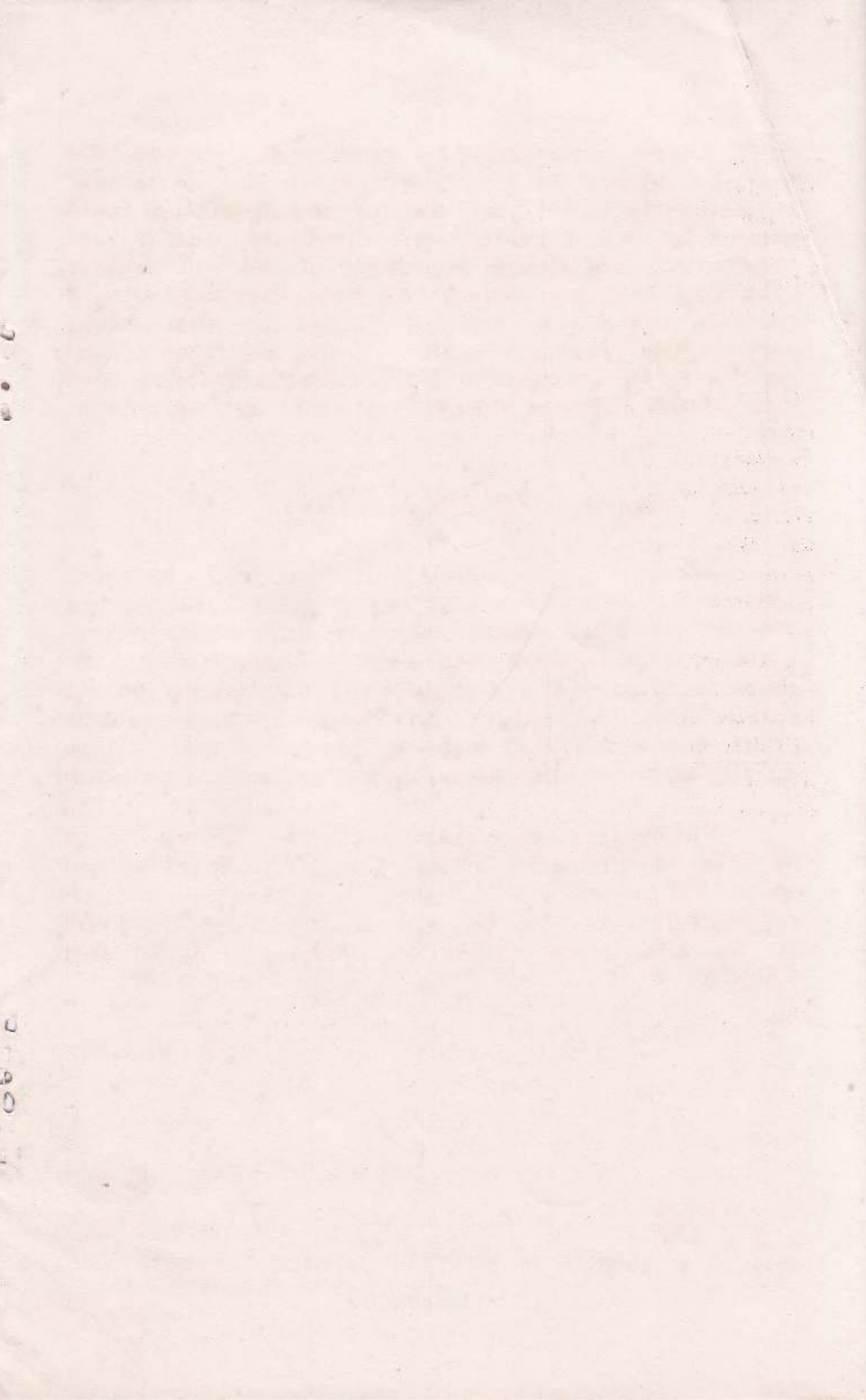
Paradoxical as it may sound, the end we should be after is something more than a political settlement. All pieces will fall into their places, if we can successfully set the people of Sri Lanka in quest of an alternative civilisation based on Truth and Ahimsa.

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The Committee on the Study of Religion & Society  
Constitution