

**LANKA**

# **GUARDIAN**

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## **THE SAARC NON-SUMMIT**

— *Mervyn de Silva*

## **THE BHUTAN INTRUSION**

— *Bertram Bastiampillai*

## **"TIGERS", SINHALA PARTIES AND INDIAN POLICY**

— *S. D. Muni*

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## **MAHATTAYA**

on

**India's Geo-Politics and the Eelam Struggle**

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## Briefly . . .

### ANURA ON WHY SAARC FAILED

Acting Opposition Leader Anura Bandaranaike called a press conference and told the media: SAARC had to be called off at the last minute because Sri Lanka lacked a coherent foreign policy. The UNP's foreign policy had deteriorated steadily and lacked coherence and that was why Sri Lanka had to suffer the humiliation of having to cancel the Summit, he said.

Among the foreign policy blunders, according to Mr Bandaranaike: refusing to attend the 1989 meeting of the Council of Ministers in Islamabad and refusing to host the fifth SAARC Summit in protest against the presence of the IPKF in Sri Lanka, thereby contravening the rule that bilateral issues should not stand in the way of SAARC.

The acting Opposition Leader recalled that 96 nations had attended the Non-Aligned Summit in 1976 and that if the lost prestige was to be regained it was necessary for Sri Lanka to revive good relations with India. The expulsion of the Indian journalist Mr Kuruppaswamy too would have contributed to the series of diplomatic blunders committed, he said.

A journalist asked what steps were recommended for the restoration of relations with India. The answer was given by Mr Vasudeva Nanayakkara, the NLSSP leader who was also present: "Change the Government!"

### FUTA CALLS FOR DEMOCRACY

The Federation of University Teachers Associations (FUTA) has expressed grave concern about the future of democracy in Sri Lanka. The present system has no capacity to meet people's aspira-

tions says the federation in a lengthy resolution adopted unanimously.

Excerpt: "The community of university teachers in Sri Lanka views with alarm the continued deterioration of the democratic process that has hitherto prevailed in this country. The present situation is one of a conflict between the executive presidency and a sizeable section of the parliament. This does not bode well for the future of the politics nor for democracy in Sri Lanka.

"We as university academics are gravely concerned about this situation and we wish to state and reiterate that the democratic system that had existed in the country should continue to prevail".

### JAFFNA CITIZENS FLEE LTTE DEMANDS

Fleeing LTTE demands for gold, Jaffna civilians are filtering through jungle paths into Vavuniya. About a hund-

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## TRENDS

### Not what Vijaya wanted

"Vijaya said very clearly that we should not have any alliance with the feudal and bourgeois SLFP whoever its leading personalities maybe", says SLMP National Organiser Ossie Abeygunasekera in a statement complaining that he was not informed of discussions held by certain polit bureau members of the SLMP, including its General Secretary, with the SLFP.

### Abolish PAYE tax

A newly formed union called the Organisation for Employees' Tax Relief has

called on the government to abolish the PAYE tax. At its inaugural meeting the convener Mr A.W.H.W. Weerakoon said that the tax was inequitable and also a disincentive to production and development. He cited a case where a death donation of Rs 1500 made to a private sector employee had been taxed to the extent of Rs 687.

### LTTE stirs in Tamilnadu

Sri Lankan Tamil militants have formed a "Tamil National Retrieval Force" (Tamil Desiya Meetpu Padai) in Tamil Nadu to generate support for their movement in the South Indian state, the Hindu reported.

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# Lessons of SAARC non-summit

Mervyn de Silva

India has been indicted for the wrong offence. True, Delhi's erratic diplomacy, perceived here and in much of the neighbourhood, as devious and diabolic, did expose itself to the charge of planning to scuttle the SAARC summit, and punish an obstreperous President Premadasa. Sri Lanka was indeed denied the pomp and prestige of hosting a SAARC summit, and the splendid ceremonies that accompany the formal crowning of a new SAARC chairman. The UNP had to suffer instead the taunts of the acting Opposition Leader, Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, who in turn was reminded by the Lake House press of his no-holds barred exchanges with High Commissioner Mani Dixit, who is about to be installed as Foreign Secretary.

But this is only the domestic flap and the follow-up to the postponement of the summit.

The real lesson of the SAARC meeting, such as it was, relates to the SAARC YEAR OF THE CHILD, and the celebration thereof. The "year" is itself part of a wider program entitled THE DECADE OF THE GIRL CHILD. India has already had its own show in Delhi, an excellently organised event from all first-hand accounts, India raised foreign funds, notably UNICEF, the obvious choice. Delhi hasn't the slightest objection though this is none of its business, really to Sri Lanka going about fund-raising in the same fashion. But it strongly objects however to SAARC or the SAARC secretariat raising funds outside the region for a SAARC DECADE OF THE GIRL CHILD ceremonies. In short, any attempt to mobilise UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP OR E.C.,

ASEAN etc is strongly discouraged. In fact, all such efforts are obstructed, even if the inquiry is directed to a single country like JAPAN or a small group of small countries, e.g. the NORDIC group. Why?

Plainly, Delhi does not wish to encourage the growth of a separate SAARC identity, an overarching collective identity that reduces India's special status as the 'natural leader' or at least *primus inter pares*. Paramountcy and pre-eminence would be greatly eroded if Indian identity suffers such a subsumption.

There is such a thing as the SAARC Fund. But India argues that it should not explore extra-regional sources or invite International agencies (UNDF, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNCEP etc) because there is more than adequate funds available within the region. And that's pure pie-in-the-sky. India, apart from that, donor countries, particularly the affluent, JAPAN, EC, the NORDIC group etc are keen to strengthen regional efforts. In the first instance, there is the strictly economic rationale some projects make sense and ensure success only when conceived regionally. Secondly, regional economic co-operation reduces inter-state tensions and improve the chances of settling regional conflicts, an important item on the global agenda of the "New World Order" however clear in conception or whatever the shape it ultimately assumes. Thirdly, a region that acts as a fairly cohesive collective, can become one of the basic building blocks of the new global power structure. The resolution of inter-state conflicts or conflicts with regional spill-over effects should be, ideally, a regional responsibility. A func-

tioning regional body could be the most effective instrument of conflict-resolution or at least assume a fireman's role in the wider neighbourhood e.g. EC as benign interventionist-cum-mediator in the civil war ethnic conflicts in Yugoslavia, a war that released a flood of refugees to neighbouring western countries.

India has invoked the SAARC Charter to justify its action. There must be strict adherence to the principle of "Heads of state/Heads of government only" at the summit meeting, although the South Asian summiteers have cheerfully winked at gross "violations" before. So Indian punctiliousness was slightly suspect, just as the sight of Mr. Eduardo Faleiro, cheerfully greeting the Maldivian Chairman's ruling that the summit could not be held in the absence of His Majesty Jigme Wangchuk, was widely appreciated. After all, his minister, Mr. Madhavsinh Solanki himself had taken wing westwards, to Iran. So neither at Foreign Secretary nor at Foreign Minister level was India going to be represented anyway. And the Prime Minister will spend only one night. In his case at least there was a strong reason that most observers would have appreciated — the by elections, his own chance to get himself a Lok Sabha seat after, hopefully, a comfortable polls victory. Equally important was the chance that the by elections offered the Congress party. It could change its lowly standing as a minority regime to an administration with a clear parliamentary majority.

The Indian press, widely quoted here these days, present a somewhat different picture, from the official version, of Delhi's

behaviour. Mr. Mani Dixit, former High Commissioner Colombo, High Commissioner, Islamabad and Foreign Secretary-designate was required in Delhi to brief the Prime Minister and the External Affairs Minister on Sri Lanka and Pakistan. "Mr. Dixit was asked by New Delhi to cancel the visit... The inference is inevitable. By that time India had made up its mind that the summit would not take place..." reported K.P. Nayar in the ECONOMIC TIMES OF INDIA. But SEEMA GUHA, who spent three years here as TIMES OF INDIA correspondent, had already reported on Oct. 21 (TOI 22/10): "Ostensibly, the Prime Minister will rush back as he has to face a by-election. But actually New Delhi wants a message to go home to President Premadasa. India is concerned about the Sri Lankan President's refusal to mend fences with this country, and his propensity to keep needling New Delhi." In other words, even Mr. Rao's decision to spend less than a day had very much to do with teaching the Sri Lankan regime and its leader a lesson than any domestic preoccupation or the trouble in Bhutan which prompted His Majesty to cancel his own trip but to send a high level representative himself.

#### SAARC IDENTITY

Over and above this Indo-Sri Lankan friction is another question which concerns the entire South Asian community and its future. One could call it the SAARC Identity. The SAARC charter, which is held sacrosanct, and properly so, emphasises the need to "strengthen cooperation" among members in international forums on matters of common interest. (Article I, G). The next article refers to "cooperation with international and regional organisations with similar aims and purposes" (Article I, H).

This could mean UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO, or other sources like E.C. or Japan or the Nordic group. But India insists that the South Asian Seven should not seek financial assistance *outside* the region. Each

member-state can do so but not as a group. Why? For obvious reasons, India prefers to keep its relations at a strictly bilateral level because collective action, especially in the realm of attracting resources from *outside*, will weaken its leadership role and the accompanying influence. A SAARC identity that expresses itself as a single group dealing with the outside world (US, JAPAN, EC) would automatically alter the 1 plus 6 equals 7 equation, greatly reducing the power of 1, India. An extra-regional Japan or Germany or EC dealing with the 7 together must necessarily weaken Indian influence *within* the South Asian Club because Japan, or Germany or EC is economically much stronger than India.

India insists therefore on being the sole shaping force of the SAARC identity.

Any threat to Bhutan, says its 1949 Treaty with India, is a threat to India which also controls the country's foreign affairs.

Aid from India amounts to well over 50% of Bhutan's budgetary needs. Bhutan is thus totally dependant on Delhi. Harsh living conditions and land hunger have resulted in large-scale migration. And today settlers of Nepali origin constitute more than 35% of the Bhutanese population. They watch Indian Bangladeshi TV programs; They don't speak Dzongkha nor wear the national dress. The Bhutanese regard this as "cultural pollution". Their reply is Bhutanese version of *jathika chintanaya*, an insistence on the national language and the indigenous *drukpa* culture. Whereas Colombo has a problem in north, Thimpu has a revolt brewing in the South. Does it need Indian help?

Nepal is of course more important to India, particularly because the King had played off Delhi by cultivating China, and inviting U.S. aid. In the Nepal-Bhutan dispute, Delhi has to tread warily. Will Bhutan be 'Sikkimized'?

Who warned the King that

his "security problem" in the south was too serious to permit him to leave Bhutan? After all, he had accepted the Sri Lankan invitation. Anyway, Bhutanese situation was a tempting "target of opportunity" for Delhi. Once Delhi would not accept the idea of an accredited representative and Chairman Maldives sent out its circular, Mr. Faleiro was off the hook and off to the airport.

If Bhutan was a target of opportunity for India, India's absence served the same purpose for Pakistan. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif who grabbed the chance. In an interview with Gamini Weerakoon, editor of the SUNDAY ISLAND, the Pakistani PM said "the absence of superpower rivalry in the Indian ocean region should not mean exercise of hegemony by any regional power". In his speech he referred to Kashmir, and that brought an official protest from India House.

Although Colombo was denied a morale-boosting 'summit spectacle', as an SLFP MP put it, the presence of Pakistan and Bangladesh, the two major sub-continental states (both have problems with India) the aggressive speeches of the dynamic Nawaz Sharif, and the dignity and self-assurance of Begum Khaleda Zia prevented the Colombo non-summit from turning into a total fiasco. Chairman Gayoom another Muslim leader, made it four against three, a serious embarrassment to 'superpower' India.

But the last-minute salvage operation, with a chance of playing host to a one-day conference if the Chairman cooperates, should bring home to Colombo, now nursing its bruised ego, that there is always somebody smaller than Sri Lanka in the neighbourhood, who reacts the same way, to haughty Big Brothers.

As for Delhi, which hosted YEAR OF THE CHILD in 1986 with the help of "foreign grants", it should remember that Big Brothers and Regional Hegemony should give up childish ways.



# The Bhutan Factor

**Bertram Bastiampillai**

**W**hether India had a role or not in the non-event of the SAARC summit in Colombo, Bhutan whose absence provided the immediate cause for putting off the Summit has enough troubles of her own which anchored her king in Thimphu. The government is a hereditary monarchy headed by a powerful king who appoints a prime minister and advisory council to assist him. He also appoints a quarter of about the 130 member advisory national assembly while village headmen about three quarter of the members; a far cry from electoral democracy.

The king is besieged by ethnic Nepalese now in revolt. The king sought Indian assistance in September to contain political agitation on the common border. India assured that her territory would not be used by pro democracy Nepalese from Bhutan who fled into India when the king withdrew their rights as citizens. But India which is certainly interested in Bhutan's stability however as simultaneously also to steer away from angering her own ethnic Nepalese whose nationalist fervour has been aroused in support of their kinsmen at the mercy of Bhutan.

Then India has to contend with Marxist West Bengal support for the democracy demanding Nepalese. West Bengal protests against incursions by Bhutan's militia to assist pro democracy agitators and guerrillas. Yet India had been ignoring the capture of Bhutanese refugee protestors in West Bengal and Assam. India's actions stem not merely from a love for Bhutan's King but also from a fear that the agitation of Nepalese of Bhutan is controlled from Nepal, which

is resented by India. She would like no one to interfere in Bhutanese affairs.

Revival of democracy in Nepal which accounted for the conflict with her own one time autocratic ruler, the Monarch, had also clearly stimulated the activity of the democratic groups in Bhutan. The Nepali Congress and leftist groups in Nepal support the agitators of Nepalese descent within Bhutan. Nepal has no border with Bhutan but her porous frontier with India has made dissident Bhutanese from the Bhutanese People's Party and human rights activists to run into Nepal via India.

The Bhutanese King's assertion of Bhutanese culture initially provoked the violent movement for multi-party democracy and in turn aroused Nepalese active involvement in the agitation within Bhutan. Bhutan and India are apprehensive of this phenomenon. Bhutan wants no change in system and India wants no relaxation of her influence in the kingdom.

The king's action to enforce Bhutanese-Buddhist cultural dominance was due to his alarm that Nepalese Gurkhas comprised the majority in southern districts. He clamped down on Nepalese Hindu culture and ordered that traditional Bhutanese dress be universally adopted. The Bhutanese language was made official and teaching of Nepalese banned. Numerous Nepalese were dubbed illegal immigrants. In 1988 the real demographic scenario showed that out of 1.37 million, Bhutanese Buddhists amounted to 48%, the Nepalese 45% and others 7%.

Faced with this frightful picture where the Bhutanese majori-

ty was precariously slim, the King ordered an enforcement of the 1985 citizenship act by which 1958 became the determining date for claiming Bhutanese citizenship by domicile. Overnight 30,000 ethnic Nepalese without documentary proof of domicile were rendered stateless. Mass protests erupted in August and September last year and consequent violence accounted for over 300 deaths. India persuaded the king to abandon insistence on the dress and cultural code, but this measure came too late, and India remains diffident of driving the king further in conceding the demands of the ethnic Nepalese or the pro-democrats.

The Nepalese who had for long sought their fortune in Bhutan abandoned the land of democide, seeking sanctuary in India and Nepal. They fled from a repression of anti nationals by the Bhutanese militia. Allegations of human rights proliferated which Bhutan denies. The present crisis is only a climax of problems since the eighties when tension rose high between the indigenous Drukpas and other Nepalese with an influx of impoverished Nepalese.

The King sensitive to the intrusion and afraid of Bhutan being swamped by Nepalese awoke late to preserve Bhutan's cultural identity. His repression of protests against the steps to preserve Bhutan's identity worsened the rift between the Bhutanese and ethnic Nepalese. The Nepalese militants took their campaign of anti-government violence. This group swelled when some Bhutanese hankering for democracy supported the Nepalese.

There is wrath against a Monarchy that permits no free elections, is suspicious of outsiders, allows hardly any foreign publications in, and tolerates only supervised tourism. But the King himself faces a dilemma — he would like Bhutan to be open and foster its

*(Continued on page 9)*

*(Professor Bastiampillai teaches history at the Colombo University)*

## INTERVIEW

# LTTE on the Current Situation

*A translation of the interview given by M. K. Mahendrarajah (Maaththiya), deputy leader of the L.T.T.E. and the President of the People's Front of Liberation Tigers (PFLT), to Uthayan, a Jaffna Tamil daily.*

1. **Question** :- It may be argued that the Indo-LTTE war of 1987 resulted in a set back to the freedom struggle of the people of Tamil Eelam. Do you feel that a similar situation has arisen now? In India the Tamil Nadu government and the Central government are both engaged in a blatant attempt to suppress the Eelam struggle. Rajiv Gandhi's killing is being used as a propaganda tool against the Liberation Tigers. The ground situation like the consequences of the Elephant Pass war, the critical situation resulting from economic sanctions etc. have led one to suppose that these factors constituted a setback to the freedom struggle?

**Answer** :- I am of opinion that the term 'crisis' would be more appropriate than the term 'set-back'.

In the course of our national liberation struggle we have come across many such crises. It is not surprising that such situations arise in a freedom struggle. A people who long for national liberation have got to face such situations.

It is a mistake to consider that the Indo-LTTE war resulted in a set-back to our struggle.

The Indian intervention arose as an inevitable historical factor in our struggle. This was a war of aggression foisted on us.

The contradiction which arose between the Indian geo-political ambitions and the national interests of the people of Tamil Eelam erupted into a war. We resisted Indian aggression

with the intention of safeguarding the national interests of our people.

Some may hold the view that we could have avoided this war. If we were to avoid this war certainly we would have had to forgo the interests of our people to the Indian regional ambition. Had we done so it would have amounted to a very great political betrayal of our people.

It is true that in this war loss of lives and destruction were on a big scale. Even so it cannot be said that our struggle suffered a big set-back as a result of this war. We had to face a very serious crisis because of the intervention of the Indian army. We protected the interests of our people. We achieved this objective by shedding blood. Ultimately we succeeded.

Indian historians have commented that this war caused a disastrous set-back to the foreign policy of India. The Indian ruling classes also have to admit this bitter truth. Therefore this war may be considered not so much as a set-back to our freedom struggle but as a set-back to the imperialistic thrust of India. The Indian military intervention has advanced our struggle for self-determination to a new dimension. In this context, we can say that our struggle took a progressive leap.

For a long time, in one form or the other, we have faced several critical situations. We cannot take the struggle forward without facing such situations. It would be wrong to suppose

that because of the external critical situations faced by us today that our struggle has been pushed back. As a struggle develops and gains maturity critical situations are likely to increase.

It is true that we are facing very many pressures today. The Indian government and the Tamil Nadu government are acting together to crush our movement. As you correctly stated Rajiv Gandhi's killing is being used as a propaganda tool against the Tigers. At the same time the Sinhala government also has launched a military offensive as well as stiffened its economic sanctions.

We are not surprised over the Indian stand. Our people are also well aware that the Indian ruling classes have always been acting against the interests of our liberation struggle. The Indian ruling classes wrongly presuppose that our freedom struggle is detrimental to the national and regional interests of India. For this reason the Indian government has been, from time to time, making efforts to stifle our struggle.

The Indian ruling classes have been denying the right of the national formations for self government. They consider that a struggle of the nationalities for self government is a serious threat to Indian unity and national integrity. The Indian government is attempting to enforce this stand in the island of Sri Lanka which is beyond its shores. It is because of this that we are at loggerheads with India. The Indian government fears that the struggle of the people of Tamil Eelam for self-determination is likely to whip up nationalist feeling in Tamil Nadu and pave the way for separation. As a result of this baseless



fear the just struggle of our people has to face several problems.

The Indian intervention in our struggle began in 1983 and has assumed several ghostly proportions. It is not possible to narrate this long and complicated story in detail.

Indian imperialism has, from that moment up till now, made Herculean efforts to suppress the Liberation Tigers for they realise that the Tigers are a formidable fighting force who have taken forward struggle of the people of Tamil Eelam for self-determination with great courage, vision and determination. It is in continuation of these efforts that steps have now been taken against the Tigers in Tamil Nadu.

Rajiv Gandhi's death is used as a propaganda tool against the Tigers. For the Indian ruling elite, which was engaged in a malicious campaign to undermine the image of the L.T.T.E. and to alienate our organisation from the people of Tamil Nadu, the killing of Rajiv Gandhi came as a blessing. The politicians and the media which described the several incidents of violence, which took place in Tamil Nadu, as the outcome of the gun culture of the Tigers did not hesitate to level accusations against the Tigers for the death of Rajiv.

For quite a long time the politicians of Tamil Nadu have been using the Tigers as though they were pawns on their political chess-board. The Liberation Tigers were made scapegoats in their power struggles, in the overthrow of governments and in their political squabbles. The Tiger hunt which started during the Karunanithi regime has today become so intense as to lay hands on the refugees from Tamil Eelam. The real men behind all these are the rulers in Delhi. They are the perpetrators of the political farce being staged in Tamil Nadu. Their secret objective is to somehow or other suppress the Tamil Eelam Liberation struggle.

The anti-Tiger campaign which has reared its head in India is not something which has started anew. It is the manifestation of the old foreign policy towards Sri Lanka, the objective of which is to crush the struggle for self-determination of the Tamils.

The tremendous strides made by the Tigers in the armed struggle and the growing internationalisation of our struggle might have alarmed the Indian government. Therefore, it is not surprising that an attempt is being made by India to exert pressure on the Tigers.

The attitude of India or the ground situation cannot be considered as a big set-back to our struggle. It is clear that India is pursuing its former policy. Since they cannot intervene directly in Tamil Eelam once again, they are attempting to raise an iron curtain in Tamil Nadu. But so long as there is support and sympathetic feelings among the people of Tamil Nadu for our cause, this curtain is not going to be an obstacle.

The ground situation in Tamil Eelam is not adverse to us. We have proved in the course of the Elephant Pass war our capacity to engage in a direct confrontation with a large scale military offensive. This reveals a new made development of our military capability. As part of our military strategy the siege has been temporarily relaxed but the war has not come to an end. The enemy has hoisted his flag on his own graveyard. That is all.

It is true that the policy of the Indian Central government, the attitude of the Tamil Nadu government, the internal war situation, the economic sanctions all-in-all constitute a heavy pressure on our movement and on our people. These pressures would not be a set-back to our struggle. Really these may become the motive force which would carry the struggle forward. These pressures bring

home to us the necessity to stand on our own legs, and on our own soil and to fight on our own strength. Whatever be the crises that we have to face so long as we have courage, determination and faith no power on earth can destroy us.

2. Question :- The government is saying that the ethnic issue cannot be resolved by military means. The proper course is a political solution through talks and consensus of views. What is the position of your movement in this matter?

Answer :- This is a political sermon preached by the Sinhala government for a very long time.

By preaching non-violence and practising violence, the Sinhala ruling classes have been cheating the Tamil nation for more than forty years. Even today while talking about peace it is intensifying military operations.

On the question of armed violence, we must distinguish between the military oppression of the Sinhala government and the freedom struggle of the Liberation Tigers. There is a fundamental distinction between the military repression of the oppressor and the liberation struggle of an oppressed people. One cannot, at the same breath, compare the one with the other and dub both as militarism.

## Of a Moral Nature

The army of the oppressor functions as the instrument of injustice. It is used to crush, to oppress and to destroy people. The armed forces of the Sinhala government are carrying out these destructive functions. They are being used to decimate the Tamil nation.

The oppressed people wage a struggle against injustice. They are compelled to bear arms and to fight back. The armed struggle of the oppressed people is based on the ethics of righteousness. In this way the armed struggle of the Liberation Tigers is based on justice,



on the ideal of human liberation. Therefore, the armed struggle of the L.T.T.E. in its essence is progressive.

## **The Army of Aggression and the Army of Liberation**

The Sinhala army is engaged in a war to occupy and to destroy the homeland of the Tamil People. The army of the Tigers is engaged in a fight to liberate the lands of the Tamils and also to protect the Tamil people. The one, functions as an army of aggression and the other, as an army of liberation. Therefore there is a distinction between the two armies as regards the ideals the attitudes and the moral bases. It is wrong to hold that both are resorting to armed violence without appreciating this distinction.

## **No Alternative**

The people of Tamil Eelam have for long carried out non-violent agitations and protests in a peaceful and non-violent manner against the military oppression of the Sinhala state.

All these agitations and protests were put down by armed might. State terrorism was unleashed on our people who stood unarmed and powerless. In the circumstances there was no option open to us, other than to arm ourselves and to defend our lives. Therefore, it is state oppression that gave birth to the armed resistance of the Tamils.

We are carrying on an armed struggle in order to achieve a political objective. Therefore, on must view our armed struggle as a mode of expression of a political struggle.

We are engaged in this fight in order to enable our people to live in peace and to live with security and dignity and to enjoy all human rights and political freedoms.

## **Peace Option**

We are not opponents of peace. We are engaged in this struggle to establish permanent

peace in our land, which has been torn to pieces by war.

Although for a long time we have charted out a path of an armed struggle we have not rejected peaceful ways and means. We have not rejected the approach to find a solution to our problem through peaceful negotiations.

We have declared a ceasefire on several occasions. We have participated in peaceful negotiations. We have made efforts to find a permanent solution to the problem of our people through conciliation. But the Sinhala governing classes are not willing for a peaceful approach. They are not willing to find a solution to the Tamil national question by peaceful means.

The Sinhala government is keen on a military solution. The Sinhala government wants to occupy the Tamil land through military aggression and to keep the Tamils under suppression through superior military might. From the beginning up till now, Sri Lanka has been upholding this senseless militarist policy. The Sinhala government is not ready to give up this militaristic approach based on chauvinism.

## **Challenge to the Ruling Classes**

The armed resistance, movement of the Liberation Tigers has assumed tremendous growth challenging in a big way the militarism of the Sinhala ruling classes. Each and every military action of the Tigers imparts a basic truth to the Sinhala state that the policy of aggression will not work. Yet the Sinhala ruling classes have not realised the falsity of their military philosophy.

What shall we do in these circumstances? How shall we face an enemy who believes in oppression and militarism? How shall we deal with an enemy who callously disregard human justice, equity and fair-play? How shall we handle a communal demon, who wishes

to find a final solution in genocidal destruction?

There is no other alternative than to continue to fight, for our cause with courage, determination and faith. In order to wage a war with a powerful force we also must be powerful. It is power that has become the determining factor in our struggle.

## **People's Power**

We will be able to meet the challenge of our enemy and achieve our goal of liberation only if we augment our man power and strengthen our armed power and transform ourselves into a formidable fighting force.

It is people's power that adds strength and vitality to a liberation movement. We will assume the character of a powerful force when people's power takes the shape of national power then converts itself into a combating force and joint hands with the liberation movement.

We will continue to fight but we have not closed the doors for peace. It is our strength alone which would form the base for both war and peace.

3. Question: - Even if the government agrees to hold talks it is certain that under no circumstances will it agree to the creation of Tamil Eelam. In that event will you agree to accept something which will fall short of Tamil Eelam? Or will you act on the basis that the only course open to you is to fight for the achievement of your objective till the bitter end?

Answer: - We firmly believe that the only lasting solution for the Tamils is the creation of an independent state of Tamil Eelam. This indeed is our political goal. We are engaged in this struggle in order to achieve this political objective. At the same time the international community advises us to consider a solution other than an independent state of Tamil Eelam - a substantial

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# Obstacles to Resolving Conflict

S. D. Muni

A notable aspect of the political crisis touched off by the move to impeach President Premadasa was the increased interaction between Tamil and the mainstream Sinhala parties. The EPRLF group in parliament threw its weight behind the anti-Premadasa combine, largely to settle scores, however belatedly, with the president for the dismissal of the EPRLF-dominated N-E provincial council in early 1990s. The EPRLF was also aggrieved over Mr. Premadasa's opening to the LTTE in April 1989 and his subsequent decision to supply arms to them. President Premadasa on his part cultivated the support of the smaller Tamil groups in parliament like the TULF, the TELO and EPDP. He was even willing to seek the support of EROS, a close ally of the LTTE. The EROS MPs had left parliament in June 1989 after the outbreak of armed hostilities between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan armed forces.

## Wrong Impression

The reliance of the Sinhala parties on the Tamil across the impeachment divide created the impression that the Tamil parties had joined the national mainstream, and that this could eventually pave the way for a negotiated solution to the ethnic issue. Such impressions and hopes are, however, ill-founded. The Tamil parties had been active in mainstream politics before the ethnic strife erupted in the early eighties. Rival Sinhala parties wanted Tamil support against each other without, in any way, changing their uncompromising stance on Tamil demands. This was also true during the recent bitterly-fought power struggle. In fact, ethnic prejudices were openly articulated by many Sinhala MPs on both sides.

Despite the Sinhala parties' need for Tamil support, their position on the ethnic question seems to have hardened over

the past few months. This is evident in the stance of powerful Sinhala establishments like the military, the administration and the sangha (Buddhist clergy). They are exerting considerable pressures on the government to seek a military solution to the challenge posed by the LTTE, and bother little about non-LTTE groups.

As it happens, the ethnic war is confined to the Tamil regions of north and east Sri Lanka, and scarcely impinges, therefore, on Sinhala. It is indeed amazing that all those Sri Lankan human rights groups, which were so vocal over deaths and destruction in the Tamil areas during the IPKF operations, are completely silent these days. This is so notwithstanding the fact that more than 2,000 Sri Lankan soldiers and about the same number of LTTE militants have died and many more of them have been injured and disabled permanently in a period much shorter than that of the IPKF operations. This suggests that the concern for human rights is not free of political and ethnic prejudices.

There are two emerging perceptions behind the firming up of the Sinhala position in favour of an outright military approach in dealing with the LTTE. One is that there is no other alternative to this approach since the LTTE will not settle for any political resolution within the framework of Sri Lanka's sovereignty and integrity. The growing evidence of a possible LTTE hand in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi has gone a long way in strengthening this Sri Lankan perception. It is unfortunate that Sri Lankans are ignoring India's chastening experiences of 1987-88 in this regard.

The second perception is that a military victory over the LTTE is both desirable and possible. The army's success in the Elephant Pass and other

Mullaitivu operations has enhanced the confidence of the military and political leadership. They have also been encouraged by the results of the crackdown on LTTE establishments in Tamil Nadu following the killing of Rajiv Gandhi. Besides, optimism about the military option has been strengthened by the flow of arms supplies, including light tanks, from China and some east European countries. Well-informed Sri Lankan sources say that if the present constraints on the LTTE and support for the Sri Lankan military from friendly countries continue, the LTTE may be tamed in a year's time. Yet only a couple of months ago, the army chief, General Hamilton Wansinghe, had acknowledged the LTTE's military prowess both as a guerilla and fullfledged conventional force.

The hardened Sinhala stance on the ethnic question assumes that once the military challenge of the LTTE is eliminated, the Tamil problem can be resolved on the Sinhala terms. Since Mr. Premadasa's coming to power, there has been no attempt even to undertake a sincere debate on the question of devolution of power to the Tamils under the 13th amendment. Devolution processes have been negated by quiet administrative actions. And above all, resettlement of Sinhalese has continued in Welis Oya and other sectors of the north-east region to accentuate demographic discontinuities in the territories recognised as the traditional Tamil homeland.

At the political level, the lack of seriousness on the Sinhala mainstream parties has reduced the All Party Conference, set up to find a political resolution of the ethnic issue, to a farce. The government support for an individual member's motion to constitute a parliamentary select com-

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mittee for working out an ethnic solution has been widely welcomed. The select committee will be broad-based, ensuring both the government's and the opposition's participation in evolving a consensus. But this will happen only if there is a sincere political will to find an honourable place for the Tamils in Sri Lankan society and polity. There are, also, no indications that such a will exists. This being so, the select committee looks like a non-starter.

### Tactical Gesture

In view of the hardened Sinhala position on the Tamil

question, Mr. Premadasa's occasionally conciliatory pronouncements appear to be a carefully planned tactical gesture. It helped him to secure the votes of the smaller Tamil groups in parliament in his fight against UNP dissidents. It also helps him to maintain a suitable distance from the military's hardline position and leaves the overall political initiative on the Tamil question in his hands. In the international context, it enables him to project a dovish, peace-seeking image which is necessary to ensure continued in-

flow of economic assistance from the Western donors.

India has painfully learned to live with the consequences of Colombo's hardened position on the ethnic issue. But as Sri Lankan military operations in the Tamil areas get intensified, there may be more refugees seeking shelter in India, and the LTTE may be making new, and even deadly, moves to regain its base in Tamil Nadu. It is time that the Indian policy-makers started planning responses to the unfolding consequences of Sri Lanka's persisting ethnic strife.

### LTTE...

*(Continued from Page 7)*

alternative scheme of self-government.

The international community is also suggesting that we should spare no efforts to find a political solution through peace dialogue. We do not reject this idea. That is why we are prepared for peace talks.

We are fully aware that the Sinhala government will never agree for the creation of an independent state of Tamil Eelam. This is not a matter for a bargain. We know only too well that this is an objective that has to be won through struggle. We are equally aware that the Sinhala Government will not consent even to a substantial alternative scheme.

We announced that we were ready to participate in talks in order to impress on the international community that the Sinhala chauvinistic forces are not ready to met out justice in any form to the people of Tamil Eelam.

### Federal set-up

We have already declared that we are quite prepared to consider favourably a proposal for full self-government within a federal set-up. But it does not appear that the Sinhala government has even given thought to it. However we are not surprised over it. Our people would have become

aware of a political truism through long and better historical experiences.

### The Fundamentals of the National Question

Leave alone the issues of Tamil Eelam and federalism. The government is even refusing to acknowledge the fundamentals of the Tamil National question.

The Sinhala government continues to deny that the people of Tamil Eelam constitute a national entity, that they have a homeland with a history of its own and that the people of Tamil Eelam, as a people constituting a national formation are entitled to the right to self-determination.

Even today we are prepared to consider a viable alternative based on a recognition of these fundamental aspects of our national question.

But the Sinhala government is not going to agree to all these. Yet we do not reject the idea of holding talks.

We are ready to participate in talks in order to drive home to the international community, the fact that the basic demands which underlie the Tamil national question are just and reasonable, and the fact that the Sinhala government is not prepared to bestow justice in a civilised manner.

We are confident that the world will sooner or later realise the intransigent and unjust attitude of Sinhala

chauvinism. It is on the basis of such a realisation that the support and sympathy of the international community will turn in favour of our struggle.

### The Bhutan...

*(Continued from page 4)*

subsistence economy. He is afraid of adverse publicity that would hurt his Kingdom. But at the same time too many Nepalese would mean the smothering of Bhutan's ethnic identity.

Hardliners in the palace urge the king to be strong against immigrant Nepalese. But he is aware that too much hardness can make even the worm turn; already it has, he knows. His own position is in jeopardy which is worsened because of rifts within the royal family itself; he is insecure in his position.

In such a tenuous state he would not have come to the SAARC although he favoured regional cooperation and desires multilateral relation. His own position could have been lost for ever and Nepal which is close by and had turned democratic recently too had to be wary just it gets drawn into the problem in Bhutan which would have been inevitable if there is an upheaval. Already some suspect that Nepal herself would like her citizens to get a better deal, and Bhutan to democratise. Naturally like Bhutan, Nepal also had reason to remain grounded and give the SAARC a pass this time.

# Miss Daisy: reflections on racism

## — Observations on Ethnic Groups and Hierarchy

Izeth Hussain

An American play, staged recently in Colombo by courtesy of the American Cultural Centre, prompts some questionings about misconceptions regarding the nature of ethnic problems. These misconceptions seem to be widespread among our majority ethnic group which is disposed to believe that ethnic problems arise because of a failure to socialize across the ethnic divide. According to this notion, our ethnic problems will be solved once we all come together in affirmation of our common humanity. It will be argued in this article that ethnic problems can be properly understood only if they are set within a paradigm of hierarchy. It is not a question of our coming together, but of the relative positions of our ethnic groups in Sri Lanka's hierarchical social system.

The play, which is set in the notoriously racist deep South of America, has no more than just three characters, a crotchety old white lady, her son, and a black chauffeur. According to the programme note, the lady and the chauffeur begin their association in suspicion and mistrust, but in the course of twentyfive years they develop a profound and almost completely unacknowledged love for each other. We have, therefore, in terms of this summary two human beings who have discovered their common humanity across the ethnic divide.

No more than just three characters, a few pieces of furniture by way of stage props, nothing particularly dramatic about the plot, and performed without an interval, the play nevertheless held the audience riveted. This can be partly explained by the professiona-

lism shown by the three American actors. Probably the more important part of the explanation is that the theme of people coming together across an ethnic divide can be expected to resonate powerfully in the Sri Lankan psyche these days.

More particularly in the psyche of the Westernized Sinhalese, who would have constituted the major part of the audience. They are given to the belief that they, unlike the Sinhala educated, are virtually devoid of communalism because they can easily engage in cross-ethnic socialization by virtue of sharing a common language, English with the Westernized of the other ethnic groups. In terms of this notion, our ethnic problems are really the consequence of the "Sinhala only" policy imposed in 1956, and can be expected to fade away once we all become tri-lingual. But the Westernized Sinhalese are perfectly well aware that the US and South Africa have been bedeviled by ethnic problems even though all the ethnic groups in those countries share English. And they are aware also that during several decades before 1956 our Westernized Sinhalese and Tamils conducted their ethnic quarrels in their common language, English. There seems to be some sort of evasiveness, evidently operating below the level of consciousness, about really confronting our ethnic problems. Otherwise the curious notion of trilingualism as the solution to our ethnic problems will not be entertained.

The Westernized Sinhalese would have left the theatre feeling reassured because the spectacle of white lady and black chauffeur getting toge-

ther, with no language barrier between them, seems to get to the core of our ethnic problems. Actually the play is not very relevant to our ethnic problems, except in one of its aspects.

This is the aspect of Jew and black coming together, for the white lady and her son are Jews. The play reflects the fact that at one time the American Jews made a notable contribution to the upliftment of American blacks, something quite understandable because the American Jews themselves were for long the victims of vicious racist prejudice in the US. It should be natural for the victims of prejudice and discrimination to come together. Therefore the message to be drawn in transposing the play to the Sri Lankan context is that the Tamils and the Muslims, both of whom complain of discrimination, should establish common ground like American Jew and American black, and come together. This conclusion, a rigorously logical one from what is actually there in the play, would not have been reassuring to the Sinhalese members of the audience, if it had been understood.

However, while this deconstructionist reading is not a perverse one, the intention behind the play is obviously to make the relationship between white lady and black chauffeur a paradigm of the coming together of people across any ethnic divide. The message is a universal one, but paradoxically it is at the same time specifically American. For America represents the coming together of people from all corners of the globe, black, brown, white, yellow, for the most part the wretched of the



earth, who shed their ethnic particularities in the great American "melting pot" and made good. The image of the "melting pot" is outmoded because the US too has its "ethnic revival". But America could nevertheless be regarded as representing the cosmic man of the future.

It is a specifically American vision that is projected in the play. We have to ask whether that vision is accurate and realistic, or whether it is merely sentimental, and we have also to ask whether it is really relevant to Sri Lanka's ethnic problems. To explore these questions, we must first situate the play within a distinctive American tradition.

A peculiarity of the play is that all three of its characters are thoroughly decent people. From the moment that Miss Daisy makes her appearance we know that she is obstinate and cantankerous, a regular harrikan, but we sense at the same time that deep down she is a thoroughly decent old stick. And likewise, we know that both her son and her chauffeur are decent to the bone. What relevance has this to ethnic problems? We know that decent people all over the world gravitate to each other, and can easily socialize across ethnic divides. But ethnic problems become really problematic after such decent folk are neutralized and the upper hand is gained by low fellows who are indecent to the bone.

Behind the decency of Miss Daisy and the others is a venerable American tradition, going back indeed to the very inception of the US. Its Constitution had behind it the ideology of the Enlightenment of eighteenth century Europe, which was formulated by Rousseau and other thinkers. According to that ideology man is born free, though everywhere he is in chains, and man is naturally good though his goodness is distorted by conventions and the constraints of society.

There is, it appears, a pristine purity underlying the rascality we see all around us. This ideology found its archetypal American exponent in the figure of Emerson, who quickly inspired two great American writers, Thoreau and Whitman, and since then the natural man has continued to appear under many avatars in American cultural expression. He is there behind the curious notion of the dichotomy between American innocence and European experience, the latter finding its expression in a sophistication that is equated with evil. The power of the Enlightenment ideology in America is shown by the fact that the notion of natural man and of American innocence infected even so finely sophisticated an intelligence as that of Henry James. It is there behind even as great a novel as his *Portrait of a Lady*. A further avatar of the natural man is Miss Daisy, behind whose crotchettiness is sheer goodness.

There is, of course, another tradition in America, accommodating a vision of evil which is lacking in the Emersonian tradition. This is to be expected because the Puritan and other emigrants who went to America built a civilization, and no civilization can be built without an ability to understand and cope with evil. The vision of evil finds powerful expression in the fiction of Melville and Hawthorne. In Robert Frost, the most popular American poet of this century, we seem to have both traditions. For the most part he was in the tradition of Emerson, who was significantly his favourite American poet, but in some of his poetry there is a powerful sense of the dark side of the human.

One of his best poems, *Mending Wall*, provides a corrective to the misleadingly simple message projected by Miss Daisy. The poem begins "Something there is that doesn't love a wall", meaning not a human agency which breaks

down fences but some kind of unexplained ineluctable natural force. The poet-farmer of the poem sees no reason to get together with his neighbour to re-erect the stone fence because it will come down in any case, and besides he grows apple-trees while his neighbour grows pines and neither will encroach into the other's territory. The stone-fence is no more than a token, not really a demarcation boundary, but his neighbour insists that "Good fences make good neighbours". We have on the one hand, therefore, the something that doesn't love a wall, symbolic of a force that brings human beings together across the ethnic or any other divide, while at the same time we have the territorial imperative, man's need to draw frontiers and establish the territory of himself and his group, symbolic of the will to keep apart from others. And this apartness goes together with potential hostility towards the other. The poet suddenly sees his neighbour approaching with a stone clasped in each hand, "like an old stone-savage armed.", and there is about him a darkness which is not just of woods and the shade of trees.

In Miss Daisy we have only the something that doesn't love a wall, an astigmatic vision which fails to recognize the fence. The truth is that American white and American black may assert their common humanity across the ethnic divide, something that was certainly happening even during the days of slavery in the old South, but the problem is that they still remain members of their own distinct ethnic groups. Had there been an interval during the play, the Westernized Sinhalese would have socialized most affably with Izeth and Mahen and Wilhelm, replicating the cross-ethnic socialization that has been going on in Colombo and other places in the south, except when a rare ethnic outburst occurs as recently in

Beruwela. Even those Westernized Sinhalese who are among the world's worst racists since the time of Adolf Hitler, as shown by their advocacy of genocide as the only solution to the Tamil problem, are always prepared to socialize with the Tamils. And while all this cross-ethnic socialization, and even cross-ethnic copulation, has been going on the ethnic conflict rages in the North and East with a ferocity unparalleled in the past. Our ability, and that of Miss Daisy and the black chauffeur to cross ethnic frontiers in grand affirmation of our common humanity, is not very relevant to Sri Lanka's ethnic problems.

Our ethnic problems, and perhaps all ethnic problems everywhere, can be fully understood only when they are placed within the paradigm of hierarchy. Only an adumbration of the theoretical framework behind this hypothesis will be given in this article. All societies which have a division of labour are certainly hierarchically structured, and even the simplest societies which were invertebrate, without division of labour and without government as we understand the term today, seem to have had the principle of hierarchy operating in them. It might be postulated that man, at least man as known up to now, is a hierarchical animal.

Ethnic problems should be seen as specifically modern phenomena. Certainly there have been conflicts with an ethnic character in the past, but in Sri Lanka we tend to ethnicize the past and misread it in terms of our contemporary ethno-politics. Ethnic problems are modern phenomena because they relate to the mass expectation of upward mobility in hierarchically structured social systems. According to Furnivall's conceptualization of the "plural society", different ethnic groups lived side by side in traditional societies, more or less apart from each other, except that they interacted in

the market place. Each group knew its place in the hierarchy and kept it, as ordained by king and nobility. Certainly there was some measure of upward mobility for individuals and groups, even in the caste societies of India and Sri Lanka, but the important point is that upward mobility was not an expectation, something regarded as a birthright.

Upward mobility is today, unlike in the past, the expectation of practically everyone and has become normative, the consequence of mass education, the prospect of economic well-being for all, and of the ideology of equality. De Tocqueville, writing out of his American experience, noted that the ideology of equality had been growing in power since the 13th century, and he predicted that it would sweep the world. It has certainly spread, but it is in conflict with the hierarchical drive in man. The ethnic problems and the ethnopolitics of the contemporary world are among the consequences.

Situating Miss Daisy within the paradigm of hierarchy will show that its message is not particularly enlightening about ethnic problems. White lady and black chauffeur come together but, as we have noted, they preserve their ethnic identities. What is far more important is that the life-chances of the black chauffeur's grandchildren are much less than of the white lady's grandchildren, and that is the core of the ethnic problem: hierarchy and not the difficulties that there may be in socializing across the ethnic divide.

The power of the hierarchical principle can be demonstrated very clearly through the history of ethnic relations in the US. Slavery was practised in total contradiction to the Enlightenment ideology enshrined in the American Constitution itself, and it required a civil war to emancipate the blacks. At that point something very curious

happened. Louis Dumont in his superlative book on the Indian caste system, *Homo Hierarchicus*, noted that it was precisely at that moment of time, just when the emancipation took place, that racist theories began to flourish in the US for the first time. Earlier the blacks though slaves were just as human as anyone else, the children of God who were capable of salvation just like the American whites. But the hierarchical principle required that the black thrust for upward mobility after emancipation had to be somehow suppressed. Since our ideologies and knowledge-systems serve power, a new ideology had to be found to justify the keeping down of blacks in low places in the hierarchy. It was found in the ideology of racism, the theory of the supposed genetic inferiority of the blacks which made them unfit to rise in the hierarchy. However, there has been a steady improvement in the situation of the blacks in the course of this century, particularly since the 'sixties and at present the focus is on affirmative action, providing special opportunities for the blacks in compensation for past discrimination, to the extent that the whites have taken to complaining about discrimination against them.

It would appear, therefore, that de Tocqueville's prediction about the ideology of equality sweeping the world is coming true at last, in the US at least. But this might be too facile a conclusion. It is known that the latest ethnic group to immigrate into the US is usually at the bottom of the hierarchical scale. This suggests that the elevation of the blacks means no more than a re-ordering of the hierarchical structure of American society, not that the hierarchical principle is no longer operative. The power of that principle is shown by the fact that the blacks have felt some sort of compulsion to be snooty towards the Puerto Ricans.



It is not being postulated here that man is by nature incorrigibly hierarchical. The hierarchical drive in some societies, such as Australia or Sweden, is far less powerful than in others such as India, while in some primitive societies the hierarchical principle was hardly operative, and in any case did not operate in any oppressive form. It remains that in some societies the hierarchical drive is powerful and vicious, and in such societies under-privileged ethnic groups have to struggle against being pushed into lowly status. A black American radical will declare Miss Daisy to be not very relevant to Sri Lanka's ethnic problems, and probably argue that affirmative action and the elevation of the blacks

became possible only because they resorted to violence in the 'sixties. They burnt property in protest against homo hierarchicus, the insurance rates on property escalated, the rationality of homo economicus came into operation, and the life-chances of the blacks improved and have kept on improving. The message is not a comforting one for our Sinhalese majority, nor for our minorities.

In Sri Lanka, the typical ethnic discourse of the Sinhalese intelligentsia focuses on promoting understanding between our ethnic groups. Many of them assume that once we become trilingual and everyone socializes across ethnic divides, as Miss Daisy and the black

chauffeur do, and we Westernized Sri Lankans do at the foyer of the Lionel Wendt Theatre, the underlying causes of our ethnic problems will disappear. There is an obsession about promoting national identity, and one segment of the Sinhalese believes that Jatika Chintanaya will solve our ethnic problems. These approaches evade the hard realities of our ethnicity, which relate to issues of discrimination and the relative positions accorded to different groups and sub-groups in Sri Lanka's hierarchical social system. Unless we confront those hard realities our ethnic problems are not likely to be solved. In the alternative, we have to expect further eruptions of Frost's "old stone-savage armed."

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# It is a numbers game — a reply

Shelton Kodikara

**P.** Sahadevan has reactivated the debate about the Sirima-Shastri Citizenship Agreement of October 1964, an agreement which has been greatly transgressed both in letter and in spirit since its original signing. Sahadevan takes off from a letter I had written to the Editor, *Lanka Guardian* on 15 July 1990, in which I had attempted to place some of the more recent amendments to Sri Lanka's citizenship law in their context. Sahadevan begins by quoting Hugh Tinker's *The Banyan Tree: Overseas Emigrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh*, (Oxford, 1977,) wherein the author likens the exclusion of Indian Tamils from the electoral registers in 1950 to an imposition "upon the Indian Tamil population (of) a form of 'apartheid' which was just as severe". This happened fourteen years before the Sirima-Shastri Agreement was signed and, in any event, the exclusion applied only to the small number of Indian Tamils who were then on the electoral register, the principle of it being that the franchise should be restricted to citizens only and that the citizenship of Sri Lanka was then a matter under consideration for the bulk of the Indian community in Sri Lanka. Whether or not the principle of the exclusion of this community from the franchise was justified or not is not the question at issue here. But what is interesting is that an academic of such high standing as Hugh Tinker should liken it to a form of apartheid! The esteemed British historian of South Asia appears to have overlooked the glaring reality that it was in fact the British plantation *raj* which created the unhealthy, inhospitable and crowded ghetto-like living quarters for the Indian plantation workers on the up-country estates which were really comparable to a form of

apartheid! And Sahadevan has sadly missed the relevance of this fact to the whole question of citizenship for and repatriation of these plantation workers. The estate-lines, or habitations, where never intended to accommodate a surplus of labour on the estates. It was not only an age-old tradition, fostered by the plantation *raj*, to siphon off the surplus labour to South India, where it came from, but the non-working aged or dependent parts of the estate population often preferred to retire to India or to take a holiday there. I am here referring to the practice which obtained before Sri Lanka's immigration law, enacted in 1949, imposed restrictions on the free travel which had been the tradition between India and Sri Lanka for centuries. In the early fifties, it was still possible for estate workers of Indian origin to travel to and from Sri Lanka to India on special permits. By the sixties, this had stopped completely, and the estates were confronted with a class of persons who wanted to go back to India but could not because of the existing laws.

The question which Sahadevan is asking is: Were the views of the "leaders of the people concerned", i.e. the Indian estate workers, really ascertained before the 1964 agreement was signed? Sahadevan does not think so, or he is somewhat confused about it, but the answer to his question is a very definite 'yes'. He says that there is no confirmation in the Lok Sabha debates of my statement, based on a report in *The Hindu* (26 November 1964), that Swaran Singh, then Indian External Affairs Minister, who had made an exploratory visit to Sri Lanka in September, prior to the signing of the agreement in October, had indicated to the Indian High Commission in

Colombo that 300,000 estate Tamils wished to come straight-away" to India, a statement which Sahadevan has distorted later in his article to "come back straight" (!) to India (the exclamation mark is Sahadevan's). The account of the relevant portion of the Lok Sabha debate quoted by Sahadevan does not mention a specific figure of 300,000, and both Sahadevan and I are unaware how that figure could have crept into the *Hindu* report, unless Mr Swaran Singh divulged to *The Hindu* reporter a specific figure which he was not prepared to reveal in the Lok Sabha for the obvious reason that while India had signed an agreement providing for the repatriation of 525,000 Indian Tamils from Sri Lanka, his information in Sri Lanka might have been that only 300,000 approximately were known to be in favour of going back to India at the time, i.e., in 1964. We now know that more than 500,000 Indian Tamils did in fact voluntarily apply for Indian citizenship under the agreement.

But to revert to the supposed divergence in the *Hindu* report and the Lok Sabha debate, what does Swaran Singh say during the course of that debate? He says, "I did have consultations with the leaders of persons of Indian origin there". Mr J.B. Kripalani intervenes at this stage and says: "It is a fact that, whatever may be the reason, there is a good percentage amongst our people who are settled there, who want to return to India. It is a hard fact, may not be convenient or pleasant, but it is a fact". This is confirmed by Swaran Singh. Pressed as to what is meant by a "good percentage", Swaran Singh says, "their number runs into lakhs". I do not see here any arguable discrepancy between the *Hindu* report and the Lok Sabha debate.



Sahadevan canvasses the question of how Swaran Singh knew about any numbers at all, and he mentions three possibilities: (1) Three lakhs of Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka may not really have indicated to the Indian High Commission that they wished to be repatriated (2) The Indian High Commission in Sri Lanka gave the Government of India false information. (3) Swaran Singh "cooked up this story in the face of scathing criticism made against the Indian Government by the opposition members in the Lok Sabha". Says Sahadevan: "Swaran Singh alone knows the truth". Wrong again, Mr Sahadevan! Mr S. Thondaman also knows the truth. Why is the name of the leader of the Ceylon Workers Congress, not mentioned even once in Sahadevan's article? Whom else would Swaran Singh have consulted about the intentions of the up-country Tamil estate workers? Who else would have been in a position to know about their interests and intentions?

Did the CWC or its sister-organisation, the Democratic Workers Congress (DWC) reject the 1964 agreement as a horse-deal? On the contrary, what both organisations demanded was that in implementing the agreement, the twin processes of repatriation and grant of Ceylon citizenship should be expedited so that they may be completed even before the fifteen year period stipulated in the agreement. They objected vehemently to compulsory repatriation and asked that in determining the repatriable quota, only those who opt or can be induced to go shall be repatriated and that "immediately on the exercise of the option a person to be repatriated shall be conferred Indian citizenship" (See statement issued by the CWC, *Ceylon Daily News*, 9 November 1964) and that similarly, "Ceylon citizenship shall be conferred on a person immediately on his name being entered in the Register of those who the Government of Ceylon

considers as Ceylon nationals, and that they be put on the general electoral register and considered as full-fledged Ceylon citizens. The determination of who among the Indian Tamil population in Sri Lanka should be Indian citizens and who should be Sri Lanka citizens had always been a numbers game, *viv.*, the Dudley Senanayake-Nehru talks of 1953, the Nehru-Kotelawala agreement of 1954. It was a numbers game in the Sirima-Shastri agreement, and Mr Thondaman found that the numbers game did not detract from his own political interests. What happened to the repatriates after they went back to India—the manner of their rehabilitation, their victimisation by unscrupulous elements in Tamilnadu, and the impact all this had on the attitudes of future potential repatriates from Sri Lanka, is quite another story. But it is this story which seems to interest Sahadevan most, and which seems to have impelled him to reactivate the discussion of the Sirima-Shastri agreement.

Sahadevan writes:

The present case of about 80,000 Indian passport holders who do not wish to opt for physical repatriation to India should be viewed in the above perspective. . . .

that is, in the context of the ineffectiveness of the rehabilitation measures in Tamilnadu and that "a great many of the Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka have lost their roots in the country of their ancestors". Sahadevan makes reference to Yvonne Fries and Thomas Bibin's book, *The Undesirables* (Calcutta, 1984), which is indeed a valuable pioneering study of what happens to repatriates when they do get to India. Although they are modest enough to say that the book does not say "the whole truth about the fate of the expatriates", but only attempts to "create a plausible picture of what it is all about", the authors did hold the view that "the Indian Tamils of Sri

Lanka had the right to remain in Sri Lanka" and that "those Indian Tamils who have been and will be expatriated to India have the right to become something else than second class citizens in their new fatherland". Taking his cue from the book, Sahadevan expresses the opinion that:

"Most of the repatriates seemed to have preferred to seek Indian citizenship owing to the compulsion imposed upon them by the rejection of their applications for the Sri Lankan citizenship prior to the conclusion of the 1964 pact". This view is very questionable.

I have myself mentioned elsewhere how Indian Tamil estate workers initially boycotted application for Ceylon citizenship under the Indian & Pakistani Residents Citizenship Act of 1949, and that of the 237,034 applications which were eventually filed, as many as 160,000 were received by the Department of Immigration after the end of May, 1951, during the course of the last ten weeks available before the two-year deadline expired. The question is, who organised the boycott, and who eventually decided to lift it? Who exerted compulsion on whom? Again, according to a one-time very high official of the Immigration Department, as many as 38% of the applicants did not reply to correspondence relating to their applications after their original filing.

Sahadevan writes under the assumption that the 1964 agreement has been rejected, and that "a possible solution in place of the 1964 pact" needs to be suggested. As far as I am aware, neither Sri Lanka nor India have rejected the 1964 agreement. The 1986 Citizenship Act enacted by Sri Lanka to give Sri Lankan citizenship to an additional 94,000 stateless persons of Indian origin in the island was related to the shortfall of 94,000 persons in the Indian list of 600,000 who had to be granted

(Continued on page 19)

## Nationalism and Soviet Dis-union

Reggie Siriwardena

**T**hey have emphasised the role of printing and other forms of communication as well as mass education in standardising languages and in creating a sense of shared identity among the 'imagined communities' who are nations.

In several of the Soviet republics where in 1917 people were still living as tribals or nomads, the processes which are broadly described as 'modernisation' came only after the revolution. In fact, in some of the Asian languages of the Soviet Union the adoption of written scripts was a post-revolutionary development, as was mass literacy.

The rise of new intelligentsia and administrative stratum in the peripheral republics produced the class that could be the creators and transmitters of nationalism. Thus not Benedict Anderson's 'print capitalism' but a print socialism was a formative element in the growth of national identities in some of the republics.

In the last part of this lecture I shall sum up the record of the Gorbachev era in respect of the nationalities policy and attempt some assessment of the possibilities of the future.

If one takes Mr. Gorbachev's three watchwords, glasnost, demokratizatsiya and perestroika, one has to recognise that the first two have made great advances during his regime.

In keeping with glasnost the Soviet media have attained extraordinary openness and freedom in the last five years.

The fact that one of the first actions of the Emergency Committee on August 19 was to impose press censorship and to suspend the publication of

certain papers is evidence that they knew journalists in general could not be trusted to collaborate with the coup. Today, of course, there is hope that even Pravda (which has reappeared as an independent paper) will at last live up to its title.

Demokratizatsiya or democratisation has also made progress under Mr. Gorbachev: open public meetings, free demonstration and agitations have been a feature of the recent Soviet scene that had no precedent for five decades. Free elections have been held in several republics, including the Russian Federation, though at the centre the elections to the Congress of people's Deputies took place on a constitution which still reserved one-third of the seats for the Communist Party and its affiliated organisations.

But considering the fact that the Soviet Union had not had any democratic elections since those in 1918 for the Constituent Assembly (which was dissolved by the Bolsheviks when they failed to gain a majority) the advance in democratisation has been substantial.

However, if one considers the third of Mr. Gorbachev's watchwords, perestroika in its most precise sense—restructuring—then, I think, one has to recognise that this was exactly what was lacking.

In the fields of both economic and nationalities policy Mr. Gorbachev could shake the existing structures but could not put anything concrete in their place. I don't propose to discuss the economic failures here, except to say that the decline of the economy contributed towards exacerbating the tensions and conflicts on nation-

alities questions. When the centre had little to offer by way of material benefits, it was inevitable that centrifugal tendencies would be accentuated.

It is true that Mr. Gorbachev cannot singly be blamed for the failures in either economic or nationalities policies; the hard core of the party apparatus was resistant to change in both of these fields. Where Mr. Gorbachev can legitimately be criticised is that in his anxiety to remain in power so that he could push through the reform process, he relied on a perpetual balancing act between conservatives and reformers which severely restricted his freedom of movement.

For at least four years liberal-minded intellectuals had been advising him that the Union could be saved neither in its previous form nor even as a reformed federal structure but only as a loose confederation. Yet Mr. Gorbachev could not opt for such a structure because he feared a backlash from the conservatives.

Again, on the Baltic states he was by 1989 constrained to publish the secret protocols to the Stalin-Hitler agreement by which these states had been brutally and cynically annexed; yet he kept insisting on the validity of their accession to the USSR and sustaining it by shows of force. Today, in the aftermath of the coup, he has had not only to advocate a loose confederate structure as the last hope for the Union but also to recognise the absolute right of the Baltic states to secede.

The Union Treaty was Mr. Gorbachev's final attempt before the coup to attempt a new relationship between centre and republics. It recognised the



status of all republics as sovereign states, and embodied a new name for the Union, which was to become the Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics.

The dropping of the word 'socialist' from the Union's title was significant particularly in the light of the clauses which gave the republics full control of land and natural resources in their territories and free choice of forms of property ownership and methods of economic management, thus opening the way to private property.

The other powers of the republics were to include determining their national state and administrative complexion and their system of 'bodies of power'. Each republic was to have the right of direct diplomatic representation in dealing with foreign states. Each signatory to the treaty was to be pledged to democracy based on popular representation, the popular vote and the rule of law and to the establishment of a civil society.

On the other hand, the Union's defence and state security, co-ordination of foreign policy moves and foreign economic activities of the republics, money emission, the Union budget, enactment of Union laws and law enforcement bodies of the Union were to remain in the hands of the centre.

There was a third sphere in which there was to be joint responsibility between the centre and the republics, and this included determining the military policy, state security policy and foreign policy of the Union and policies regarding fuel and energy resources, transport, communications and environmental protection, and supervising observance of the constitution and law enforcement. Disputes between the centre and the republics were to be resolved by negotiation, and where this failed, through arbitration by a constitutional court.

The language of the Union Treaty was that of a generous

federalism which compared well with that of some other federal constitutions; yet one can understand why six republics decided not to sign the treaty. Apart from the fact that some of them — the three Baltic states in particular — had set their sights firmly on independence, they may well have been suspicious of this gift-horse, given the long tradition of dictatorship by the centre.

As is well known, federal structures are good only as they are implemented in a genuine spirit of devolution of power; constitutional terms like 'co-ordination' can mean whatever they are interpreted to mean, and if taken illiberally, can provide an excuse for continued maintenance of authority by the centre.

The six republics which opted to stay out may well have thought that a central government still in the hands of a Communist Party with its Leninist traditions could not be trusted to act in a liberal spirit in dealing with the republics. Further, the provision for adjudication by a constitutional court on disputes between republics and centre may have seemed unreliable in a country with no tradition of judicial independence where outright politicisation of the judiciary has been the norm.

The Union Treaty that was to have been signed on August 20th has been buried by the aborted coup. Last week's debate at the Congress of People's Deputies centred round the possibility of a much looser confederation than that envisaged by the Union Treaty as a basis for future relations between the republics. On September 5th the Congress in its final session agreed on the proposal for a new Union under which each republic would be able to define the degree of its association.

This means the end of the former Soviet Union. But has the salvage measure to preserve

something of the Union from the wreckage come too late?

The situation today is that twelve of the fifteen republics have made declarations of independence, while the largest and most powerful republic — the Russian Federation — has gone a long way towards assuming the power and authority of the paralysed centre.

Of the twelve declarations of independence three — those of the Baltic states — have already been given effect. It is likely that the Moldavian Republic, whose territory was annexed by the Soviet Union at the end of the Second World War, will also persist in its claim for independence. 64 per cent of the population of Moldavia are ethnic Rumanians, and it is possible that these people will seek independence only as a transitional step towards re-joining Rumania.

What of the other eight? The reality that must be recognised is that if any of them are in fact determined to secede, there is no longer any power in the Soviet Union that can restrain them. The Communist Party is out of action and discredited, the army and security apparatus are compromised and probably deeply divided among themselves, and President Gorbachev's prestige and authority have been badly shaken.

So the republics have the opportunity to make their own decisions. Is there any consideration that can induce them to stay in some form of association?

The answer is that there is one material consideration which will have weight at least for the present, and that is economic. The economies of the republics have been developed in close interdependence in respect of raw material supplies and trade, although these economic relations have been distorted and bureaucratised by being routed entirely through the central administration.

The system can, of course, no longer be perpetuated; but the

republics do have a self-interest in maintaining bilateral ties with each other for the maintenance of economic activity. This consideration will apply even to the Baltic states, who have been so heavily dependent on the Soviet economy for supplies of raw materials and power and for markets for their own manufactures that they cannot immediately cut themselves loose economically even when they do so politically.

In time may be, the Baltic states could move into the German and Swedish economic orbits; and these possibilities may be followed also by Byelorussia and the Ukraine if they become independent. But the immediate prospect is that the sheer necessities of survival in an economic situation which is nothing short of catastrophic will compel the republics to enter into some form of economic association. This may involve no political centre beyond one which is set up by the republics themselves rather than one standing above them; the new regime in Moscow is thinking of such associations as the EC as a model of future relations between the republics.

However, the problems of the Soviet Union or of any agglomeration of states that succeeds it will not be resolved simply by opting for a voluntary economic relationship between the republics. Among the republics one will be immensely larger than the rest, richer in natural resources, more advanced in economic development and more plentiful in skills — and that is Russia.

The circumstances of the post-coup situation have, as I have already stated, led to the government of the Russian Federation taking over many of the functions of the centre. Boris Yeltsin with his undoubtedly courageous stand against the plotters has emerged with his stature greatly enhanced; and in the wake of the failed coup President Gorbachev appointed Ivan Silayev, the Rus-

sian Federation's Prime Minister, as the new Prime Minister of the Union.

The Russian tricolour now flies over the Russian Parliament, and one must expect in the months and years to come a strong assertion of a reviving Russian nationalism — politically, culturally and spiritually. The removal of Lenin's name and the restoration of the pre-revolutionary name of St. Petersburg to the old capital (as asked for by majority of its citizens) is a symbolic expression of this revival. I wouldn't be inclined to regard such a development in entirely negative terms, for I would maintain that the Communist era had a destructive effect on the rich heritage of Russian culture and even on the Russian language. The Russian Christian tradition, whether Orthodox or dissident, has today a better chance of reviving than Communism.

But at the same time the potential imbalance between Russian power and those of the smaller republics carries with it the dangers of continuing Russian hegemony over the outlying republics which may manifest itself in new forms after the dissolution of the centralised Communist state. The second danger one can foresee in the future is that the removal of central authority may lead to the intensification of ethnic conflict either between neighbouring republics, as in the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, or between majorities and minorities within republics.

At the time of writing, Georgia has protested that its declaration of independence has not been treated in the same way as that as the Baltic states. (They have a point because if the Baltic states were forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1940, so was Georgia in 1921.) The President of Georgia, where a nationalist party holds power won in free elections, has announced that they are breaking off

all official relations with Moscow.

Meanwhile in Azerbaijan, President Ayaz Mutalibov has also set a definite course for independence. The Azerbaijani situation is fraught with uncomfortable possibilities because it was one of the only two republics (the other being Kirghizia) which supported the coup regime during its brief existence. Further, Azerbaijan has been conducting a bitter struggle with neighbouring Armenia over the status of the autonomous region of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is an Armenian enclave inside Azerbaijani territory.

Mutalibov has now announced that he is no longer a member of the Communist Party (there is really no longer any Communist Party to belong to anyway) and has held a hasty Presidential election to confirm himself in power. The election has been boycotted by opposition parties. Mutalibov will undoubtedly seek to strengthen his position by fanning Azerbaijani nationalism, and this bodes ill for relations with Armenia and for the Armenian minority inside Azerbaijan who can no longer rely on the federal army to protect them. The Armenian case is a reminder that while the two forces that have broken up the Soviet Union are democratisation and nationalism, the two elements may not always go together; and we must expect in the future the emergence of right-wing nationalist regimes in some former republics of Soviet Union.

I wish to conclude with some brief observations on Marxism and nationalism.

1848, which was the year of mass upsurge of nationalism in Europe, was also the year of the Communist Manifesto. In that document Marx and Engels proclaimed that the nation-state had already been outdated by the creation of the world market under capitalism,



and that the working class had no country; they ended the Manifesto with the ringing cry, 'Workers of the world, unite!' When seventy years later, a party and a leader dedicated to Marxist internationalism took power in the former empire of the Tsars, it seemed that Marx's prophecy was being borne out. But soon Great Russian nationalism refracted itself through the Soviet state, and the Communist International which was to have been the organ of international revolution became only an agency for the furtherance of Russian national interests.

In Russia the dominance of nationalism was a sequel to the revolution; in subsequent revolutions—the Chinese, the Cuban, the Vietnamese and others—nationalism was a strong force from their very inception and a condition of their victory. Thus in the century and a half since the Communist Manifesto nationalism turns out to have had a greater survival value than Marx and

Engels imagined, and with the fall of Communism in Eastern and Central Europe and now in the Soviet Union, it will clearly outlive the political movement that Marx and Engels fathered.

There is no reason to regard the prospect of re-emerging nationalisms in the territory of the former Soviet Union through roseate spectacles. The subject peoples who are experiencing national liberation for the first time will rejoice, but there is much hardship, conflict and perhaps violence that they will go through in the years to come. Probably also some of the sub-minorities in the newly liberated states will experience the heavy hand of the dominant national majorities in their territories.

For those who have lived a long time with the illusion of the Soviet Union as moving towards a terrestrial paradise, this will be a gloomy prospect. But we must today recognise that belief as a secular messi-

anism which never had a basis in reality. To accept that human societies will probably always be imperfect, as human beings are imperfect, that utopia never comes, is not to abandon the struggle against injustice, oppression and exploitation which is much older than Marxism.

The faith that it is possible to create a perfect society in which human beings will at last be freed from all their problems is in fact highly dangerous because it encourages the ruthlessness of a Stalin, a Pol Pot or a Wijeweera: what does it matter—they must have thought—if any number of People are sacrificed if future humanity are going to live happily ever after? We should rather engage in the effort to correct human ills in the sober recognition that the struggle is a never-ending one which needs to be renewed and sustained in every age. The intoxication is over; this is the morning after.

## It is a numbers game...

(Continued from page 15)

Indian citizenship and repatriated to India, under the terms of the 1964 agreement, which was supplemented by the 1974 Sirima-Indira citizenship agreement of 1974. Sri Lanka extended its obligations still further in this regard with its Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons (Special provisions) Act of 1988, which provided that any person of Indian origin lawfully resident in Sri Lanka, who was neither a citizen of Sri Lanka or of India, and who had not previously applied for the citizenship of neither country, "shall have the status of citizen of Sri Lanka with effect from the date of the commencement of this Act, and shall be entitled to all the rights and privileges to which other citizens are entitled by law".

I have referred elsewhere to the domestic political compul-

sions which led the then President of Sri Lanka to initiate these two pieces of legislation. They were obligations unilaterally undertaken by Sri Lanka on top of the bilateral obligations which were stipulated in the Indo-Sri Lanka citizenship agreements. Whatever the number of persons involved in the residual category under the 1988 Act—it is estimated to more than 200,000—the problem of statelessness, the eradication of which was the primary purpose of the 1964 agreement, can now be regarded as solved.

Sahadevan's real concern is with an entirely different problem, that relating to those persons who have been registered as Indian nationals, who have still not been repatriated to India, and who, presumably, do not want to go to India. This category of persons, estimated

by Sahadevan to number about 80,000, must then remain indefinitely in Sri Lanka on visas, or become a *de facto* stateless group again because they are ineligible to become Sri Lanka citizens under the 1988 Act, being already Indian citizens.

There is another aspect to this matter which Sahadevan appears to have overlooked. Article 2.16 (d) of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of 29 July 1987 stipulates as follows: "The Government of India will expedite repatriation from Sri Lanka of India citizens to India who are resident there, concurrently with the repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees from Tamilnadu". This is a time when India is asking for the early return of Sri Lankan refugees from Tamilnadu. Sri Lanka itself has welcomed the return of these refugees. Let, then, the reciprocity contained in Art. 2.16 (d) take effect.

# Environment and policy makers

S. Sathananthan

## 7.2. Industry

The investors in the industrial sector have resisted the incorporation of environmental protection measures in the production process; and the national industrial policy statement (Ministry of Industries, 1989) was silent on the question of environmental management. The Strategy virtually pleaded that the 'Chambers of Commerce and Industry must accept the urgent need to conserve and protect the environment'. It then recommended a list of actions. They are: improve the capability for environmental impact assessment, utilize cleaner technologies, incorporate pollution control measures, grant incentives for pollution control, promote recycling, provide industrial counselling service and to include environmental science in university curriculum (CEA, 1988:24). The Action Plan did not go beyond naming 6 issues of concern (CEA, 1990:2-13) in relation to the list of actions suggested by the Strategy.

In short, the Strategy and the Action Plan failed to put forward a plan for environmental management with respect to agriculture and industry. This conclusion applies equally to the measures and actions proposed for the other 16 economic sectors.

## 8. An Approach to Environmental Management

It is necessary to return to fundamentals. Interaction between nature and society occurs broadly at three levels:

(a) **the individual**: at the level of the individual, a producer appropriates resources directly from the environment; and the volume of resource appropriation by each individual is conditioned primarily by need.

(b) **the social group**: at the level of the group, individuals interact with nature indirectly through organized groups. Today the commercial firm epitomizes such group organizations. The volume of resources consumed by private capital is determined almost exclusively by the level of economic activity in society and by the criterion of profitability. Indeed, during periods of economic recession output is reduced and resource consumption falls despite the continuing and rising need for goods and services among the population. Cooperative forms of organizations is a second type of group organization in which the criterion of satisfying the 'common goods' takes precedence over ensuring an income in excess of expenditure.

(c) **the State**: exploitation of resources by the State is not directly influenced by individual need and is less responsive to market demand. Instead, it is determined more by macro-economic requirements (construction of basic industries, increase in national output, etc.) and of strategic considerations (national security, etc.). State capital is primarily influenced by these two criteria, though it faces the necessity to earn a profit.

The distinction made above between the three principal factors is by no means exhaustive. But it serves to draw attention to the structurally heterogeneous character of society-nature interactions and to emphasize the differing politico-economic imperatives which define the parameters of the different society-nature interactions and the intensity with which each of the interactions takes place. Except among hunter-gatherers, in the more deve-

loped social groups the individuals are organized into systems or societies; and in each society, the way in which the individual, group or the State interacts with nature is determined by the socially established criteria of ownership, control, demand and usage of natural resources. Therefore, environmental management presupposes an understanding of the sociological perspective of resources and of the 'social link' (Komar, 1975:236) between society and nature.

The potentials and limitations of the 'social link' have to be identified in respect of each factor and incorporated into any programme of environmental management. This means that the structural prerequisites of sound environmental management must be identified at the macro level in respect of each economic sector: in agriculture, for example, changes in agrarian structure to eliminate subsistence agriculture is a case in point. To satisfy these prerequisites, micro level initiatives within each sector should be implemented: the consolidation of fragmented land holdings and introduction of a minimum or floor size for holdings to ensure that each holding is capable of carrying on commercial agriculture is one such initiative.

The Strategy and the Action Plan lack a sociological perspective of natural resources; predictably, they fail to perform tasks of environmental management.

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## Do the Estate People Really Belong?

Paul Caspersz

Over 825,000 "Indian Tamils" remain in the country, together with the natural increase since 1981, forming part of its population. With what legitimacy and with what status do they so remain? Maybe the best would be to proceed from areas of easy agreement to those of possible disagreement. Among the former would be the question of nomenclature. Should we and the censuses persist in calling this group of persons "Indian" Tamils? If the reason for so doing is that they are recent immigrants from India, it needs to be recalled that they are only the last in the series of Indian immigrant groups to arrive in the island and make it their home? Usually placed first in the series were the Vijayans, but even they were probably preceded by several centuries by groups of Veddahs. In colonial times there is sufficient evidence that caste groups like the *karavas*, the *salagamas* and the *duravas* were originally South Indian immigrants who over a period of centuries assimilated so successfully with the local population as to make everyone, even themselves, oblivious of their origins. Hence, if we and our censuses still speak of "Indian" Tamils, the logical outcome would be to list the others as Indian Sinhalese, Indian Ceylon Tamils, Indian Ceylon Moors and — why not — half-Indian Burghers, and so on. The situation would then be as untenable as it would also be ludicrous.

A further more specific and sinister reason is adduced by some. The 19th century immigrants, they say, do not yet consider Sri Lanka their home; the sense of belonging of the estate people regards India, not Sri Lanka. For evidence, they point to the photos of

Gandhi and Nehru on the walls of the line-rooms and to the old planters' records of remittances periodically sent to India by estate people. In rebuttal, it has to be said that the photos — weak arguments in any event — were popular at the time of the visits of Gandhi and Nehru to the island but have now disappeared nearly completely. As for the periodic remittances to the poor relatives in India, they as little prove lack of allegiance to Sri Lanka as periodic remittances of Sri-Lankans in Australia to less fortunate relatives left behind prove that those who have gone do not want to be citizens of Australia. They are testimony to allegiance to the extended family network, not the lack of allegiance to the host country.

The Tamil estate people have in this country given more than sufficient evidence of their desire to be considered citizens of this country. The Donoughmore Commission in 1928 estimated that about 40-50 per cent of the plantation workers were permanently settled in this country. Ten years later in 1938 the Jackson Report on immigration raised the figure to 60 per cent. Finally in 1946 the Soulbury Commission reported that 80 per cent of the estate population was permanently settled in Sri Lanka. In 1949 the Indian Tamils were asked to seek citizenship rights under the Indian and Pakistani Residents' (Citizenship) Act of 1949. After an initial period of unwillingness to apply (on the advice of their trade union leaders that application would imply the legal acceptances of non-citizenship), no less than 825,000 persons did submit their applications. To all but the willfully obtuse these figures

provided evidence weighty enough to say generally that the Tamil population living in the plantations is a population that is, and desires to be permanently settled as citizens in our country.

If the group hitherto called Indian Tamil is to be called simply Tamil, however, it would not serve to give them their marks of distinction from the older Tamil arrivals. The marks of distinction would be advantageous to the Estate Tamils if employment were to be by strict ethnic quota.

### Comparison with the Burghers

That the Estate Tamils do possess marks of singularity and specificity as a distinct national group becomes clear if we briefly compare them with another ethnic group, namely, the Burghers. While the "Indian Tamils" — whom from now on we shall, I hope, agree to call "Upcountry Tamils" or "Estate" Tamils" or Plantation Tamils" — were 819,000 according to the 1981 Census, the "Burghers and "Eurasians" were 39,000 (having steadily increased since the 1881 Census, and steadily decreased not only as a percentage of the total population but also in absolute numbers since the year 1953).

The main difference lies in the matter of self-perception. It is here of interest to recall that there is a strong case in political science for saying that a people are a nation when they simply think they are one; all other requisites have their place only to help other peoples to understand these thoughts and recognize the nationhood. The Estate Tamils perceive of themselves as a distinct group in the plural society of Sri

Lanka with the rights and privileges of such distinction (even though the rights and privileges have been so consistently denied). The Burghers do not, certainly not to the same extent, nor with the same intensity. This could, of course, be asserted of the Burghers with less confidence in the pre-1948 period than today. Then it may be that the Burghers hoped and and thought that they had a distinct position, unassailable for all time, in the plural society of the country. Today no longer. Especially after, and because of, the introduction of Sinhala and Tamil as the only media of instruction in schools, the progressive "drying up" of the English medium stream (which continued to be the lifeline of the Burghers even after 1948) since the late 1960s, the Burghers have increasingly felt their distinctness threatened. Those who could — and they were the leaders of the community — emigrated to other countries, chiefly Australia and Canada. Those who remained increasingly accepted assimilation into the major Sinhala group in the West and South of the island and into the major Tamil group in the Batticaloa District.

There are of course objective factors underlying the differences

in self-perception: different numerical strength in the total population, different patterns and intensities of geographical concentration, rights to their own language, different patterns and intensities of religio-cultural belonging, employment specificity among the Estate Tamils introducing in them the sense of being a distinct social class to an extent never present in in the Burghers community.

The comparison with the Burghers helps one to understand that the Estate Tamils are subjectively and objectively a distinct national group. It is, however, not as easy to see why this national group never coalesced with the older Tamil national group in the country but retained its own identity. Both groups had awareness of the same provenance of origin, spoke the same language and the majority in each adhered to the same religion. But they lived separately and had different social customs. Above all else, the Tamils of the North — who were through long processes of cultural development the leaders and pace-setters for Tamils of the East and Tamils scattered elsewhere in the island — considered the Estate Tamils as unqualified for equal consideration because of their lowly social and economic status.

The Estate Tamils had a caste structure which was not different from that of the older Tamil inhabitants. But whereas in the North the lower caste Tamils were a minority completely dominated — at least until very recent times — by the higher castes, in the plantations the lower castes were in a majority. The lower caste Northern Tamils did not have the opportunities to forge linkages with the Estate Tamils, while the latter because of educational and economic disadvantages were not even aware of the possibility or the potential importance of such links.

For all these reasons — which, of course, need further investigation — the Estate Tamils over the past 150 and more years have developed as a national group, distinct not only from the majority Sinhala national group, and from the other non-Tamil national minorities — the Moors, the Malays, the Burghers — but also from the Tamils of the North and East. It is the role of this national minority in Sri Lankan society that is today crucial. It is the role of the bridge-builder, if only the Estate Tamils were allowed the opportunity of playing it.

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# Expatriates, Immigrants and Literature:

## 3 South Asian Women Writers

Roshni Rustomji-Kerns

SANTHA RAMA RAU, Kamala Markandaya and Bharathi Mukherjee are intensely aware — even self-conscious — regarding their position as Asian women recreating, in their writings, the lives of immigrants and expatriates. Their works consistently revolve around people who are caught in the awkward act of juggling with multiple cultures. Interestingly, Prabhakar Machwe in an article, "Prominent Women Writers in Indian Literature After Independence" [JSAL, Spring-Summer 1977] resists the temptation to include Rama Rau and Markandaya in the discussion because they are "...not probably fully Indian. They have non-Indian nationalities... [even though] their understanding of India is so realistic and feeling-full" (p. 148). The official nationalities of the three writers are not of overwhelming importance for a discussion of their works. All three write in English and all three have made their homes and practiced their craft in South Asia and the West.

Santha Rama Rau's works are difficult to find and many of them are out of print. This is a disservice towards an interesting South Asian woman writer. She writes well, but not brilliantly, and much of her work may feel dated. But at a time when most of Asia was still overtly under Western domination, she tried to understand and write about the complex ties and tensions between South Asians and Westerners as well as those between India and the rest of Asia.

Santha Rama Rau was born in Madras and educated in England, the United States — and as she constantly reminds

us — by her mother and grandmother. On the dust jacket of her *Gifts of Passage: An Informal Autobiography*, she is described as "one of the most perceptive observers of our curious and very complex world. As an Indian educated in the West, she brings a wonderful balance as well as sympathy to her vision." It is the usual dust-jacket hyperbole. Books have to sell. Yet the three books by Rama Rau to be discussed do show her as a perceptive and compassionate narrator of expatriate experience.

*Home to India* (1944) is an autobiographical account of Rama Rau's return to her Brahmin family at the age of sixteen, after ten years of education in the West. It is the story of a woman returning to her motherland when that land is living through the last years of the struggle for independence from Britain.

*East of Home* (1950), another autobiographical work begins with the author's experiences in post-war Japan where her father is free India's first Ambassador. From Japan she travels through the cities and villages — some well known and some not traditional maps — of China, Indo-China, Siam, and Indonesia. Anyone interested in studying the Chinese revolution and the Vietnam war will find this book both fascinating and worthwhile. *East of Home* is an unusual chronicle of an Indian woman's adventures and education in post-World War II Asia. Rama Rau's gradual realization of herself and her country as integral parts of greater Asia gives this book much of its poignancy.

*Remember the House* (1956) presents a fictionalized character. Baba, a young woman dis-

satisfied by her high-society life within the confines of a traditional Hindu family. She is seduced by the glamor of Western-style romance as she sees it in her short-lived friendship with an American couple. In her search for excitement, and the kind of fulfilled life she feels is lived by Westerners, she spurns the possibility of an arranged marriage and falls in love with love. The object of her infatuation is a schoolteacher who visits her grandmother's house in South India. Baba dreams about love and marriage while the young man, already suitably betrothed, continues his visits because of the excellent food offered by Baba's grandmother. Underneath the humor and the descriptions of the glittering cosmopolitan life of Bombay contrasted with the quiet, nearly ascetic life of South India, is the story of a young woman learning to see the different faces and facets of love. As Baba begins to understand her place in the newly independent India, and as she acknowledges the many traditional relationships of which she is a part, one wonders if Santha Rama Rau is consciously weaving a twentieth-century story around the ancient Hindu concepts of *kama*, *sneha* and *prema*.

The second writer, Bharati Mukherjee, can take her place among the best South Asian and American writers of today. Her work ranges from very good to dazzling. Her handling of her subject, of what she calls "the pain and absurdity of art and exile... exile among the former colonizers; the tolerant incomprehension of hosts, the absolute impossibility of ever having home, *desh*..." (Epilogue to *Days and Nights in Calcutta*) is uncompromisingly honest and often deeply pain-

ful. Although at one time she saw V. S. Naipaul as her model, one feels that in some ways she is much more descendant of Santha Rama Rau. Both women come from an economically privileged class and are very much aware of it, both speak of their Indian education at home, within their families, but both rely immensely on their Western education. And although both of them often speak about Hinduism, and the complexities and age of Indian culture, their discussions of these subjects tend to have the aura of intellectual exercises.

*Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1977), co-authored by Bharati Mukherjee and her husband, Clark Blaise, consists of two distinct parts. These are two narratives, in some ways two philosophical essays, based on selected experiences and episodes which took place during an extended visit to India (most of it in Calcutta) in the early 70s. It is in this work that Mukherjee describes the difficulties of being a South Asian writer in Canada and discusses the constant search by many immigrants and expatriates for a secure and familiar place. She continues and develops this discussion in the introduction to her brilliantly written, chilling collection of short stories, *Darkness* (1985).

Her first novel, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), portrays Tara Benerjee Cartwright, a Western-educated, well-to-do Bengali woman, married to an American. Tara's petulance and constant nervousness regarding her role as the Bengali wife of an American, visiting her family in Calcutta, overshadows her well-intentioned efforts to understand her world of diverse cultures. The Calcutta Tara visits is very different from the Bombay (and other parts of India) to which Santha Rama Rau returned in 1939. Tara's Calcutta is a city which continuously on the verge of, or right in the midst of political violence. And as she tries to pick up the threads of her old

life, as she gets strangely mesmerized by a politician, as she attempts to keep in touch with her husband through letters she can barely write, she is forced to look at her own inner world of cultures and ideologies which are often impossible to reconcile. The book concludes with Tara caught in the heart of a violent demonstration. We do not know if she escapes. And like a frightening echo of Rama Rau's less complex Baba's search for love in the midst of a changing society, Tara's last thought is about "whether she would ever get out of Calcutta, and if she didn't, whether [her husband] David would ever know that she loved him fiercely." The whole book revolves around a young immigrant woman surrounded by different ideas, ideals, cultures — all experienced with ferocity.

Mukherjee's second novel, *Wife* (1975), begins in Bengal with an opening sentence which would do credit to Jane Austen.

Dimple Dasgupta had set her heart on marrying a neurosurgeon, but her father was looking for engineers in the matrimonial ads.

Dimple is sure that marriage "would bring her freedom, cocktail parties on carpeted lawns, fund-raising dinners for charities... [and] love." She waits for real life to begin. And begin it does in strange ways, when a supposedly good match is found in Amit Kumar Basu, an engineer who lists among his advantages, "has already applied for immigration to Canada and US; also has job application pending in Kenya."

After their marriage, the Basus immigrate to America. In New York, they live in a series of apartments temporarily vacated by acquaintances. They attend Indian parties where Dimple listens to gossip regarding the relative merits of India and America and about the horrors and violence of New York. Faced with an incomprehensible culture and intense loneliness, Dimple loses even the small degree of confidence and sense of self she

had in Calcutta. She makes lists of different ways to commit suicide. She loses sight of reality as she sinks into the world of television; and after seeing a show in which a birdcage — comfortable but still a cage — figures prominently, she kills her husband as he complacently eats a bowl of cereal.

Tara, in *The Tiger's Daughter*, is caught in the physical violence of Calcutta as she tries to untangle the confusion of different cultures. Dimple loses her sanity when faced with a culture she doesn't comprehend and which refuses to make room for her. Both are lonely, isolated women and their sense of loss is translated and recreated in the lives of the more gutsy, but almost bizarre characters who appear in *Darkness*. Some of us may feel quite uncomfortable around Mukherjee's characters. We look around us and see fellow South Asian immigrants at social gatherings, special grocery and sari stores and even professional conferences. And we say, "No, come on... who here would kill her husband as he eats his cereal? and who would be so silly as to be caught in the midst of a political confrontation? who would brutally attack his unmarried daughter, not because she is pregnant, but because she is pregnant through artificial insemination? This is only well-written South Asian American gothic. After all, aren't all South Asian Americans successful citizens of America with periodic attacks of anxiety regarding their children's cultural identity?" Yet we know that in her own inimitable fashion, Mukherjee has taken her own fears and struggles, as well as the fears and struggles of many among us who have remained without a voice to speak of the immigrant experience, and presented some of the more violent and grotesque aspects of cultural collisions.

The South Asian woman writer who seems to be the most widely known in the west is Kamala Markandaya. Her novels, *Possession* (1963), *The Nowhere*



*Man* (1972) and *Shalimar* (1982) deserve a place in a discussion dealing with meetings — friendly or otherwise — between cultures.

*Possession* can be read as an allegory on colonialism. An Englishwoman, Lady Caroline, fabulously rich, fabulously beautiful and fabulously high-born, finds a young goatherd with artistic abilities during her visit to an Indian village in search of *arak*. She compensates the boy's parents for his goatherding services and takes him away to England, Europe and even America. The boy Valmiki (not a bandit turned poet-saint but a supposed village idiot carefully molded into a high-society artist) grows into manhood and success under Lady Caroline's guardianship. He masquerades in theatrical pseudo-Indian costumes complete with a monkey on his shoulder. He is the possession of Lady Caroline while she too in her own way becomes possessed by him and his success. Valmiki leaves Lady Caroline and the world she has built around him when he realizes the destruction of human life he has brought about through his dishonest posturing and callousness. The story is narrated by Anasuya, a South Indian friend of Lady Caroline's. Anasuya is also implicated in the different forms of possession and neo-colonialism which appear in the book.

In *Shalimar* (published nearly twenty years after *Possession*), neo-colonialism comes to a South Indian fishing village in the form of a Western company (run by an old British colonial and a younger well-meaning son of a British colonial family) which has been invited by the Indian government to build a tourist paradise, a xanadu, a shalimar, at the edge of the village. Again a young village boy quickly growing into manhood, Rikki, is the central character of the story. Already educated into the exotic and intricate world of the English language by a missionary couple, Rikki, ends

up becoming a waiter, a swimming pool lifeguard and a swimming instructor at the Shalimar complex. His friendship with Tully (the somewhat Hollowoodish jetsetting descendant of the British colonial family whose now-in ruins palatial residence, Avalon, happens to be on the edge of both the new tourist complex and the old fishing village) is overburdened with symbolic echoes of the past. In some ways *Shalimar* is a tribute to Forster's *A Passage to India*. Tully's friendship with Heblekar, a liaison officer between the Indian government and the multinational company, succeeds better than the attempts at friendship in Forster's novel. But his friendship with Rikki seems hollow. Tully, as he asks Rikki to get a boat built and as he invites Rikki to work on the mosaic inside the old family home, remains the man in charge. Tully is still among the men who rule, even if obliquely, Rikki's village and Rikki's life. Rikki's encounter with the West, first through his missionary teachers and then through Tully and Shalimar, which leads to his gradual estrangement from his life in the fishing village; has a haunting vague quality to it. It reminds one of the conclusion of *Possession*. Questions regarding cultures brought into conflict through new forms of colonization, making people into expatriates even within their own cultures, are left unresolved in both novels.

Srinivas, a South Indian man who has to flee to England in order to escape the brutalities of the British Raj, is the "nowhere" man of Markandaya's novel with the same title. Pre- and post-independent India and Britain are portrayed but most of the action is set in a South London suburb. In the process of setting up a home in London for himself and his wife, of raising their sons in the new country, of living through World War II with his English neighbors, of losing one son to the war and the other to an

English daughter-in-law, Srinivas comes to think of England as his country. After the death of his wife he is befriended by an English woman. The two live together, protect each other and learn to respect each other's cultural idiosyncrasies. When ugly racial prejudice becomes an overt part of London in the 60s, Srinivas becomes the target of his bigoted neighbors' violent hatred and loses both his life and his home.

Carefully constructed places of residence: houses, palatial abodes, hotels, hotels and ashrams; places which are alive with busy families, places which have fallen in ruin or places which are in the process of being built, figure prominently in the works of Santha Rama Rau, Kamala Markandaya and Bharati Mukherjee. These are not merely backdrops or settings for the narratives. They are integral parts of the South Asian protagonists' lives as they seek refuge from the assaults by different cultures, struggle to understand their cultural dilemmas and even face some of their most horrifying tragedies.

The obvious place to start discussion of this recurrent motif is, of course, with the titles of Santha Rama Rau's works — *Home to India*, *East of Home* and *Remember the House*. Be they fiction or autobiography, these works speak of returning to the security of well-known houses after long absences, of visiting important political figures and close family friends in their homes, of trying to find a new home in the ancestral country, and of remembering a beloved but long lost home.

At the beginning of *Home to India* Santha Rama Rau is welcomed by her paternal grandmother at the entrance of the family home.

My grandmother's house [was] in Colaba, the extreme end of the island of Bombay... On both sides of the drive up to the house there were great banks of wet, dark, tro-

pical plants and bushes. The hollows were steamy and lined with hibiscus in flower. We drove past the tennis court, which was covered with green slime, for it had been flooded for the last few months of the monsoon... The house itself was large and white... Inside it was cool and dark. The bamboo matting had been dawn across the verandas. There was the monotonous sound of the fans in every room... We were not guests or visitors; we might have been away for a very long time but now we had returned, restoring normalcy to the family and taking up our neglected positions in it.

Later in the day when Santha Rama Rau and her sister, Premila, are in their own room, they open the French doors. The sun and heat which stream in are, of course, followed by the pigeons. The two young women are stunned as the pigeons fly around, perch on the rafters and fill the room with their sounds. When their grandmother comes in she finds her two Westernized granddaughters still staring at the pigeons.

"There seem to be pigeons in the room," Premila said patiently.

"Their nest is up in the rafters." [Said grandmother].

"You always keep pigeons in your rooms?"

"Only here. They will not build on the ground floor."

"Isn't it sometimes a little inconvenient?"

"Not at all." She added pointedly, "They deserve the shelter as much as we do."

"Besides," my grandmother said with a distinct twinkle, "you might have been a pigeon in your last birth." That apparently settled it.

The book concludes with the author's decision to leave India again, this time to learn about democracy in America. She returns to her grandparents' home to bid them farewell.

The day before I left Bombay I drove out to Colaba to say

good-bye to my grandmother and grandfather... The house seemed emptier and dark. The pre-monsoon heat had sent the lizards into the rooms; they clustered motionless on the walls near the ceiling. My grandmother had decorated a small image for my protection... She looked at me for a long time and told me not to expect an easier task when I returned from America... My grandfather came out of an inner room leaning on a stick... He shook hands with me slowly and graciously and warned me solemnly about the gangsters in America. "I have read about them and seen them, too in the motion pictures."

Different types of residences, belonging to different people, set in different countries, reveal the continuity or disruption of family and cultural traditions in Bharati Mukherjee's works. The Catelli-Continental Hotel on Chowringhee Avenue in Calcutta, which Mukherjee describes as "... the navel of the universe. Gray and imposing ... [with the] first floor balcony where Europeans drank tea in earlier decades ... [now] guarded by a turbaned young man ... while small riots break out in the city," introduces us to the Calcutta of the tiger's daughter, Tara Banerjee Cartwright. It is at this hotel that Tara spends most of her time in Calcutta with her friends and new acquaintances. Soon after this introduction, we are transported to the terrace of the house of Tara's ancestor, Hari Lal Banerjee, in the year 1879. We return to the 1960s and the Catelli-Continental Hotel terrace where much of the important action of the book takes place and from where Tara watches the action taking place in the streets of Calcutta.

The fire which destroyed their home in Canada is given as one of the main reasons by both Bharati Mukherjee and Clark Blaise for their decision to visit India. It was this

visit which eventually resulted in their book, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*. Both of them describe the homes they visit and stay in while in Bombay and Calcutta. But their main home during this visit is Ramakrishna Mission in Calcutta.

Dimple Basu (Wife), transported to New York, does not even have the security of a home of her own. The Basus move from one apartment to another in which Dimple spends her lonely, confused days surrounded by other peoples' belongings.

In Markandaya's *Possession*, the huts of Valmiki's village, the swami's cave covered with the brilliant paintings by the untutored village artist and the poverty of Valmiki's family home are all contrasted with the luxurious hotels and the sumptuous house which are Lady Caroline's, and later Valmiki's, places of domicile.

In *Shalimar*, Rikki studies at the small house of the missionary couple, a house which is in a constant state of disrepair; lives in his foster family's hut which can be rethatched and even moved when necessary, a hut which sees the advent of electricity; works at Shalimar, learning how to mix drinks and teaching tourists to swim in the swimming pool which he, bred to the ocean, finds highly amusing; and carries on his friendship with Tully at Avalon which Tully is trying to restore.

But it is in *The Nowhere Man* that this comparison of houses, the incessant appearances of homes, the leaving of old homes and the settling down into new homes, is presented most vividly by Markandaya. Srinivas had helped to build the family home in South India when he was still a young boy. This house is ransacked and torn apart by soldiers, under the orders of a British officer who is searching for underground freedom fighters. Srinivas' young bride-to-be is physically insulted by the officer at this time. Srinivas



repairs the damage done to his house. But later in attempting to protect his father, he gets involved in a confrontation with the governor-general and has to escape to England.

In London, his South Indian wife insists on their buying a gaunt, two-storey house with an eye to the future when, according to tradition, their two sons and their families would make their homes with them, a dream which is not fulfilled in this new land with different traditions. It is this house which shelters Srinivas and his English companion and which a neighbor sets on fire as his personal contribution to racial hatred.

Srinivas' life in South India is presented to us in a flashback which opens with the simple statement, "There was the house, then in which they all lived" (p. 99). And while describing house and searching for festivals to celebrate in the London house with his companion, Mrs. Pickering, Srinivas tells her,

"One does not realize . . . when one leaves one's country how much is chopped off and left behind too. 'The inconsiderables [the physical features of houses, the festivals], which one does not even think of at the time, which are in fact important.'"

To return to Santha Rama Rau, most of her works unfortunately read like an irritating travelogue, as though they were attempts to present an "exotic" culture to a Western audience. But when she begins to explore the inner landscapes of the relationships within these houses — and even between houses — she ceases to be the correct, rather stilted tour guide. The return to family homes is presented as an attempt to go back to and settle down into traditional appointed places in the larger context of the family in India. The author is unable to do this in *Home to India*. In *East of Home* her travels through different Asian countries and her experiences in the

homes, hotels and inns of the people of these countries gives her a sense of herself as an Asian, even if it be a westernized Asian. Baba in *Remember the House* is able to recognize her role in her own society after her experience of visiting Westerners in the houses they have set up in India and her stay with her grandmother at the ancestral home in South India.

The houses and homes of Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Days and Nights in Calcutta* are set at a different time of Indian history. Gone is the exuberance of Rama Rau's return to India in 1939 and the optimism of the advent of India's independence. In Mukherjee's works the return to India and family homes is painfully bewildering. And the attempt to build new South Asian American lives and homes in *Wife and Darkness* often lead to insanity and violence. Her characters remind one of circus performers a combination of tight-rope walkers and trapeze artists, as they search for secure, even familiar, places they can claim as their home. As they look for compromises between their cultures, they try to hold on to their love for their family and friends who seem to have become strangers. They try to transcend the isolation of being a foreigner not only in another country but also in their own cultures. Most of these attempts fail and we see these South Asian Americans become untidily unravelled, caught and wounded on the sharp edges of cultural complexities and conflicts.

In Matkandaya's *Possession*, the expatriate Valmiki moves from his British patron's wealthy home to a poorer life in England and then back to his hut and his swami's cave in South India. In *The Nowhere Man* Markandaya portrays a man, Srinivas, who realizes the significance of houses, and homes, but who loses his home in India and both his home and his life in England. In

*Shalimar*, the building of a tourist paradise and the restoring of an old British home seem futile. At the same time they are a threat to the fishing villagers. Only the ocean and the land which can not be taken over by either the old or the new colonizers remain uncluttered and strong.

These homes and houses, hotels and ashrams, presented either as objects of nostalgia, memories to be held on to in times of perplexing changes, or as sinister cages in unknown territories, could be seen as symbols of the three writers' attempts to explore the world of immigrants and expatriates, the world of the writers themselves.

One way of coming to terms with the confusion, the heartbreak, the courage and the humor of the South Asian immigrant experience, especially in America, may best be expressed by Bharati Mukherjee in her Introduction to *Darkness*:

If you have to wonder, if you keep looking for signs, if you wait — surrendering little bits of reluctant self every year, clutching the souvenirs of an ever-retreating past — you'll never belong, anywhere . . . I have joined imaginative forces with an anonymous, driven, underclass of semiassimilated Indians with sentimental attachments to a distant homeland but no real desire for permanent return. I see my "immigrant" story replicated in a dozen American cities, and instead of seeing my Indianness as a fragile identity to be preserved against obliteration (or worse, a "visible" disfigurement to be hidden), I see it now as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated.

Or as Srinivas, an alien in the eyes of others, a focus of cultural tensions and the target of racial violence, the "nowhere man," best describes himself and most of the characters we have been looking at, "[they are] homeless, not rootless."

## LETTER

### Uduppidy

I was amused at the observations made by Sachi Sri Kantha on the investigative article "Who was Sivarajan?" written by D. B. S. Jeyaraj. I have observed many a time that Sachi has a tendency to challenge and contradict the views of other writers, without having grasped what they were saying.

First, Jeyaraj, in his article meant **Uduppidy village** only

and **not Uduppidy electorate** as mentioned by Sachi. While agreeing with Sachi that "the political star of Uduppidy" was Sivasithamparam at that time, R. R. Dharmaratnam of the LSSP was drawing sizeable support in his native Uduppidy village.

Sachi says that 12 years of age is too small to be a supporter of a political party. That is irrelevant today at a time when many a 12 year old is fighting in LTTE ranks.

R. R. Dharmaratnam of the LSSP did contest in the 1977

general election in Uduppidy where he confronted another United Front candidate Pon. Kumarasamy, of the C.P. Of course the LSSP and the Communist Party ignored the issue simply because they never believed in winning a seat in the North!

May our learned friend Sachi stop and think twice before rushing in to find fault with others, and show his "great knowledge"!

**P. Kirupananthan**

Karanavai North,  
Valvettiturai

### Briefly...

(Continued from Page 1)

red families are reported to be leaving Jaffna daily. The LTTE has demanded a tax of three gold sovereigns for a permit to reside in Jaffna.

### EPF THREATENED SAYS CFL

The Ceylon Federation of Labour has petitioned the Supreme Court that a Social

Security Benefits bill takes away the Provident Fund benefits of employees. The CFL has sought a declaration that the bill is inconsistent with the Constitution.

### COCONUT OIL ADULTERATED?

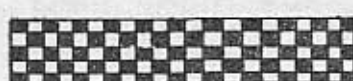
Coconut planters millers and exporters have alleged that 50 per cent of coconut

oil in the market is adulterated. Large quantities of refined, bleached and deodorised palm olein are imported and mixed with coconut oil, a spokesman told the Island. This is a result of the government drastically reducing the import duty on palm olein and other vegetable oils; a further reduction is contemplated, they say.

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