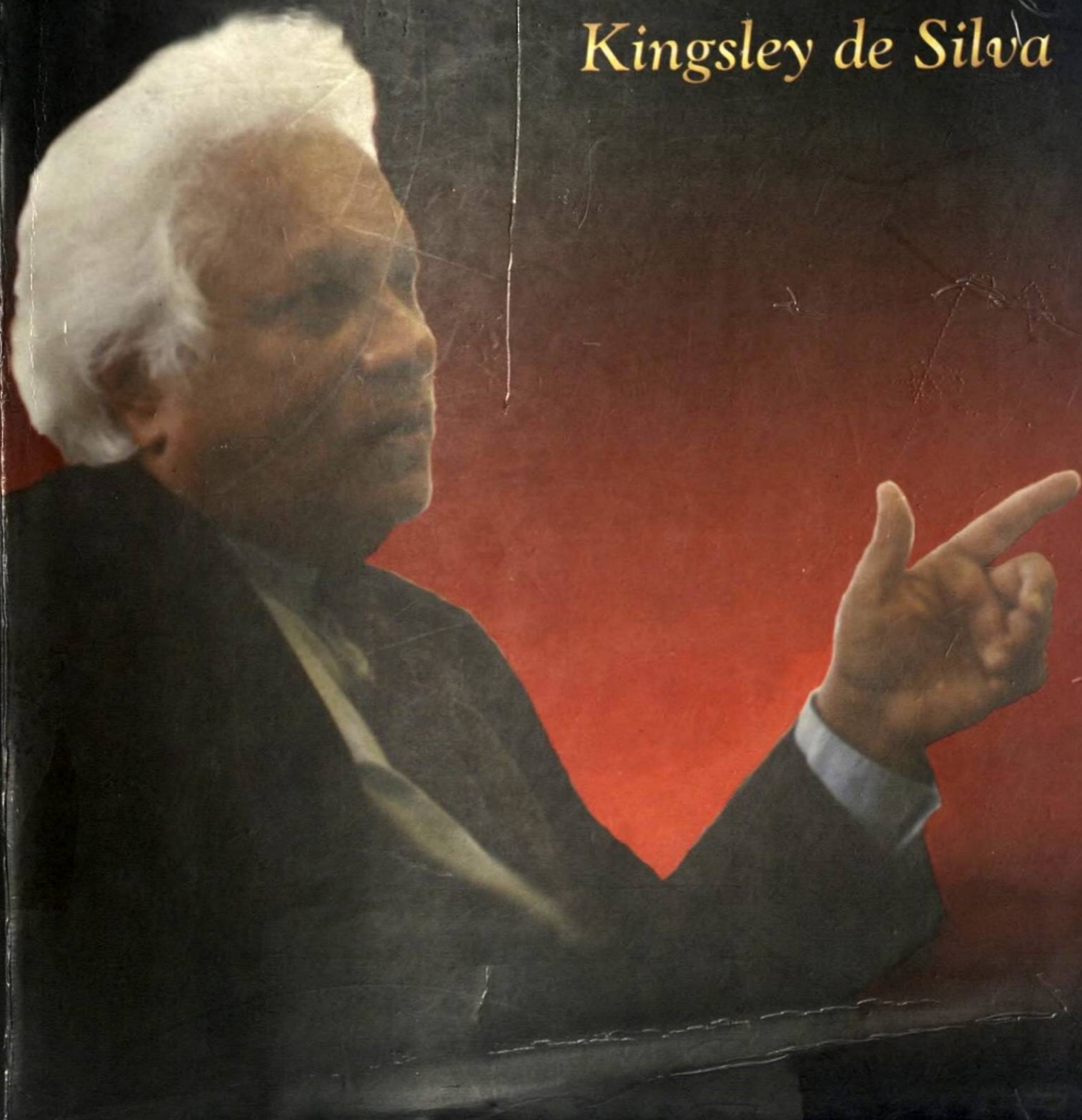# History and Politics:
# Millennial Perspectives

*Essays in Honour of*

*Kingsley de Silva*

# HISTORY AND POLITICS:

# MILLENNIAL PERSPECTIVES

## Essays in Honour of Kingsley de Silva

Edited by

Gerald Peiris
S W R de A Samarasinghe

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Kingsley de Silva BA Hons (Ceylon), PhD (London),
DLitt (London)

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This collection of essays is being published in acknowledgement of the services rendered by Kingsley de Silva as a teacher, researcher and writer, policy maker in higher education, and consultant in affairs of governance. It is, moreover, a token of our immense admiration and gratitude for his scholarly contributions to the enrichment of our understanding of modern Sri Lanka and South Asia, for his persistence with efforts to safeguard and promote the true spirit of higher learning, and for the respect and recognition he has earned for the exquisite quality of his work.

The idea of producing a *festschrift* in Kingsley's honour was conceived by us in 1995 at the time of his resignation from the academic staff of the University of Peradeniya which he had served for almost forty years. For Kingsley, premature retirement from the university must have been a painful decision – not merely the termination of an institutional link, but the severance of a cherished personal bond that had withstood the pressures of intensifying constraints on serious academic work within Sri Lanka alongside highly attractive career prospects outside the country. That those in charge of university affairs themselves made it difficult for Kingsley to continue in its service without jeopardising his research commitments; and, following his enforced resignation, they continued to ignore his enormous contributions to the university and his unparalleled scholarly achievements, are perhaps symptomatic of the erosion of the sense of decency and humanistic norms that has been increasingly evident for some time in the entire system of control over higher education in our country. We refer here to these sad lapses not in a spirit of condemnation but to highlight the compelling need on our part to give expression to our esteem of the person who could be considered Sri Lanka's most outstanding university scholar of our times.

Kingsley de Silva could, in many ways, be seen as epitomising an all too rare fulfilment of the ideals of university education envisioned by those at the vanguard of Sri Lanka's national university movement of the 1930s and the 40s. Inspired as most of them were by liberal traditions of higher learning, they expected the best products of their own university to be men and women of "enlightened and civilised intelligence... with a thirst for knowledge and a passionate commitment to the pursuit of scholarly excellence." These, of course, are the hallmarks of Kingsley's career record.

Kingsley entered the University of Ceylon in 1951 when its Faculty of Arts was still in Colombo. In the following year, he was in the first batch of students to be transferred to

the newly established campus at Peradeniya. Thereafter, climaxing an exceptionally brilliant undergraduate career with First Class Honours, earned seemingly with effortless ease, Kingsley joined the academic staff of the university in 1957. The degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of London obtained in 1961, once again with no great strain, marked the beginning of a trail-blazing career in research. The doctoral thesis itself, published under the sponsorship of the Royal Commonwealth Society, was a task completed – not (as customary) to be dipped into time and again for recycling contents as journal articles to serve as props for elevation to higher academic ranks. The focus of his research at this stage was on various aspects of the colonial regime in Sri Lanka not dealt with in the thesis. These included topics such as constitutional reforms, land policy, immigration of plantation workers, and indigenous resistance to alien rule.

In the context of the ongoing expansion of the 'Arts and Humanities' at our universities – a trend that had been accompanied since the early 1950s by a proliferation of research on Sri Lanka's past – and, more specifically, in recognition of the achievements that already featured Kingsley's academic career, in 1967, the university offered him a specially instituted Chair of Sri Lanka History. The expectation behind this move was that it would, among other things, revitalise the then moribund project embarked upon by the university to produce an authoritative History of Sri Lanka. As it turned out, Kingsley in his new post accomplished much more than what was expected. In the daunting task of working towards the completion of the 'university history project,' he was able to mobilise the talents of a dynamic group of scholars – most of them, his former students; employ his own expertise to ensure quality and to achieve the desired comprehensiveness of coverage; and produce, within an amazingly short spell, what critics came to acclaim as the seminal work on Sri Lanka under British Rule. This was only the first demonstration of Kingsley's capacity to inspire and guide collaborative effort, and to perform a catalytic role *vis-à-vis* research in the Faculty of Arts at Peradeniya. Under his editorship, the *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies* acquired greater vigour than ever before, attracting, in particular, the writings by the younger scholars at Peradeniya, for many of which the refinements which Kingsley provided were indispensable. *Sri Lanka: A Survey*, a work on contemporary affairs of the country published in 1977, was yet another collective scholarly effort to which Kingsley provided leadership. It should be recapitulated that these general contributions to the promotion of scholarship at Peradeniya were accompanied by Kingsley's own prolific output of research, with *A History of Sri Lanka*, published in 1981, representing what could be regarded as the crowning achievement among his many writings in History up to that time. We should also recall that most of this work was done at a time of political instability and economic hardship in the country, when research funding was virtually non-existent, when even writing paper was scarce, and when those with scholarly ability and promise were leaving Sri Lanka in droves in search of greener pastures.

The founding of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) in 1982 with Kingsley de Silva as its Executive Director, seen in retrospect as a landmark event in the development of social sciences research in Sri Lanka, was also of significance from the perspective of its impact upon Kingsley's own career. Two distinct changes deserve special

mention here. First, the new opportunities for research developed in the ICES, mainly in the form of enhanced resources, linkages with research institutions outside Sri Lanka, and a dedicated support staff, had the effect of accelerating what was already a breath-taking pace of work. In addition, given the commitment of the ICES to issues of ethnic relations, and its multi-disciplinary matrix of manpower, there was a distinct shift in Kingsley's own research focus towards contemporary affairs of governance, not exclusively those of Sri Lanka, but embracing a much wider field. His writings since the early 1980s are too numerous for individual mention in this brief sketch. Suffice it to say that each of these writings is an important contribution – invariably, a major contribution – in its specific field. This shift towards 'governance' was, of course, not an abandonment of History. For, apart from the historical perspective found in almost all his writings, Kingsley has, while devoting much of his attention to issues of contemporary politics, continued to produce major works in the discipline of History. These include the completion of the 'university history project' in the form of a collaborative volume on the period of Portuguese and Dutch rule over the maritime areas of Sri Lanka, and the two-volume study of documents on British Ceylon in the 'End of the Empire' series of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies of the University of London. A thorough mastery of contemporary Sri Lankan affairs with an exquisite blend of History and Political Science are also seen in his two recent monographs – *Regional Powers and Small State Security*, published by the Woodrow Wilson International Center, and *Reaping the Whirlwind*, published by Penguin Books. Further, some of his shorter writings in History that are of direct salience to the understanding of current affairs have also been published from time to time in the ICES bi-annual, *Ethnic Studies Report*, edited by him – which, incidentally, is the only regularly published research journal of the social sciences in Sri Lanka.

That the ICES ranks among the most prestigious research institutes in South Asia, also bears testimony to the scholarly excellence and the organisational acumen to which Kingsley has been providing leadership. The efforts by Kingsley and his colleagues in the directorate of the ICES have enabled it to forge close links with several research institutes in the West and in the Indian sub-continent; host national and international conferences on a wide range of themes of global salience almost on a regular basis; co-ordinate major research projects that encompass the whole of South Asia; conduct large-scale surveys; and sustain a record of research in the social sciences which none of the universities of Sri Lanka could match.

Over a part of his career Kingsley de Silva was intimately associated with policy formulation in Sri Lanka's higher education. The legislation promulgated in 1978 to disband the existing, centrally controlled, monolithic administrative structure of university education, and to replace it with a multi-university system within which each university is vested with academic freedom and considerable autonomy, was based on a set of comprehensive proposals submitted by him to the political party elected to office in 1977. As a member of the University Grants Commission established under this legislation, he devoted attention to a range of important issues in higher education – in particular, those concerning curricular reforms and the modalities of student admission to the universities –

with an unswerving commitment to the all important objective of raising the quality of learning, teaching and research at our universities. Several of his major writings on aspects of higher education in Sri Lanka could be considered as representing the coalescence of his interests in the history of modern educational development in Sri Lanka and the experiences gained through his involvement with university governance during the 1980s.

It is well known that Kingsley de Silva was a personal friend of late President J R Jayewardene, whose biography – one of the most detailed and incisively critical studies on the politics of modern Sri Lanka – was co-authored by him. What is perhaps less well known is that this friendship was not an "electoral bandwagon" type of link which academics sometimes tend to develop with the politically powerful, invariably for purposes of upward mobility. Kingsley's association with JR began, in fact, in the mid-1960s, and flourished through many vicissitudes of JR's career, and remained as close as it ever was until the time of JR's death several years after his retirement from active politics. The similarities in political outlook and the shared interest in History could well have been ingredients in this friendship. But what cemented it, above all else, was JR's respect for Kingsley's scholarship and intellect, and the fact that he found in Kingsley a person on whom he could place unreserved confidence and trust even when they held sharply divergent views, as they did on the decision to conduct the referendum of 1982. The veteran politician that JR was, he is also likely to have found it unusual that Kingsley expected nothing in return for himself through their association other than the privilege of giving advice when consulted on matters of vital concern to the country, always maintaining low profile. We are aware, in fact, that diplomatic posts and national honours offered by JR and some of his successors were turned down by Kingsley.

The esteem and regard with which Kingsley de Silva is held outside Sri Lanka are amply borne out by the impressive array of honour and other forms of recognition bestowed upon him at various stages of his career. Among them are some of the most prestigious fellowship awards of Britain and the United States, numerous invitations to highly exclusive international conferences and seminars, the post of President of the International Association of Historians of Asia, and, the degree of Doctor of Letters awarded by the University of London.

Kingsley, we expect, will continue in his scholarly pursuits for many more years to come. The reminiscences that follow written by persons who have known him in his multiple roles as scholar, educationist and institution builder, and also as a personal friend bear testimony to his amazing breadth of knowledge, the effortless elegance of his communication skills, his sense of humour, and, above all, the abundance of goodwill he has for his friends.

# The Historian

## Lorna Dewaraja

In the world of historical scholarship, whether in Sri Lanka or abroad, Professor Kingsley de Silva needs no introduction. Historical studies in Sri Lanka is a neglected field partly due to the virtual extinction of history as a subject at school level depriving the rising generation of any knowledge of their past, let alone the magnificence of their heritage. Further, in the context of the present ethnic conflict, what passes as history is often partisan conclusions derived from fictitious data. In this rather disappointing scenario, the multitude of writings that has flowed from Kingsley's prolific pen, is like a beacon in the dark, untarnished by ethnic and sectarian strife. In the modern age historical scholarship whether in Sri Lanka or elsewhere has assumed the form of narrow specialisation within which, no doubt, has produced outstanding works, but these are no substitute for the vision of history as a whole. Kingsley stands out in his copious contributions, major publications and monographs produced over a period of 40 years and encompassing an unbelievable range of subjects ranging from history to politics, ethnic disputes, higher education, religion and culture. Kingsley views history as a process involving many ramifications and personalities, however eminent, as products of this process.

Kingsley's latest contribution and hopefully not his last are the two volumes which he edited of documents on Sri Lanka relating to the transition period from colony to independence covering the two phases 1939-1945 and 1945-1948, opening the window to a new world of scholarship on the path to Sri Lanka's independence. It is a part of a series named the British Documents on the End of Empire Project (BDEEP) undertaken under the auspices of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London to publish documents from British official Archives on the demise of the Empire, and the events leading up to it. In 1945 apart from the countries of present day India, Pakistan and Burma, Britain had over 50 formal dependencies; 40 years later only a few shreds were left. This eventful process had to be documented in the context of Britain's domestic situation and her position in the international order. The BDEEP is structured in two main series A & B. In Series A, documents relating to the empire as a whole were published in a thematic arrangement; and B provides country studies of how from a British government perspective former colonies achieved independence. The country volumes in Series B follow a chronological arrangement. Kingsley's work is Vol. II of Series B entitled *Sri Lanka* and is divided into two parts: Part I is the Second World War and the Soulbury Constitution 1939-1945; Part II is Towards Independence, 1939-1945. The fact that he was selected to undertake this massive work is in itself an index to Kingsley's international image as Sri Lanka's historian *par excellence*. His scholarly introduction running into about sixty pages to the series of documents that are published is a panoramic overview of the period 1939-1948, highlighting all the important issues that cropped up, such as the demand for constitutional reform, the impact of the Second World War, Indo-Ceylon negotiations, the

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Soulbury Constitution and the path to freedom including the various obstacles on the way. While examining remote and less researched issues relating to Ceylon he examines the transfer of power against the wider background of the entire process of decolonisation and the withdrawal of Europe from Asia, showing the depth of his insight and the breadth of his vision. He takes the reader through the image of negotiations, the trials, disappointments and frustrations of the Sinhalese leadership before the prize was achieved. Yet due to the clarity of his vision and elegant simplicity of his style the reader is never confused. The documents themselves that have been selected mainly from the CO Series and supplemented by the War Cabinet/Cabinet Papers are an index to Kingsley's prodigious capacity for hard work and his meticulous accuracy. The publication of these volumes completes a trilogy of documentary histories based on the official British records for the end of empire in South Asia.

A J Wilson's comments on this work is amply justified:-

> "K M de Silva has produced an admirable work of scholarship. He has taken the reader into the dark recesses of the Whitehall documents. In so doing we are given delectable pen portraits of the main players especially Senanayake, Bandaranaike and G G Ponnambalam. K M de Silva is fair in the selection of the relevant papers. He has avoided the temptation of tilting towards one side or the other. All that one can exhort the reader is to read on and read on. This is a rich harvest, and the documents keep the attention riveted. All praises therefore to de Silva."

*The Biography of J R Jayewardene of Sri Lanka: A Political Biography* Volume I, 1906-1956, co-authored by de Silva and Howard Wriggins, US Ambassador in Sri Lanka during the first four years of JR's spell in power, covers the period up to 1956 and is primarily the work of Kingsley. So is Volume II which covers the years 1956 to JR's retirement from active politics in 1989. This biography is really an encapsulation and analysis of the modern political scenario of Sri Lanka as borne out in the life and work of one who spanned it from the freedom movement to independence and the post-independence fortunes of the country which in no small way were shaped by him. Those who have read Kingsley's other works can identify the superb craftsmanship and refined style that have rocketed him to fame as Sri Lanka's most eminent historian. Kingsley's hand in the work is unmistakable – the ability to present the most complicated events with clarity, the logical organisation of large amounts of diffused and diverse source materials, and the lucid and superior grasp of movements and processes.

Biographies of Sri Lankan political figures are few, and those few have been authored by personal admirers or friends of the subject of the biography or by those who were loyal supporters of his political party. Kingsley's long standing friendship, admiration and proximity to his subject notwithstanding it is far from being an uncritical hagiography.

The very few biographies of Sri Lankan politicians that we have are slim volumes restricted in scope and documentation. This is partly because Sri Lankan politicians, even

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the most educated of them, are rarely in the habit of keeping journals and diaries of events in which they were involved or of collecting and presenting their papers or publishing their memoirs. However, in the case of JR and SWRD there is a wealth of documentary evidence published and unpublished including diaries and a mass of letters which have now been gifted to the Sri Lanka National Archives and forms the nucleus of the Presidential Archives at the President's Office.

Kingsley had unrestricted access to this collection. He not only had long hours of interviews with JR but also had discussions with his friends, associates and employees as well as politicians and contemporary public figures, and this information formed the basis of the biography. Though this is primarily a political biography his family background as well as those of connected families depicting the social life of the upper class westernised elite in Colombo, is dealt with in some detail. With each chapter revolving round the life of JR, the biographer skilfully unfurls the political, social and economic issues, while highlighting the activities of other political personalities as friends and rivals of JR. Little known details emerge from this study, JR's support for the Education Reforms of 1943, the scandalous intrigues of the Kelaniya Temple which had ramification of family ties with JR, his initiative and perseverance that eventually led to the establishment of the Colombo Plan, his verbal brilliance at the San Francisco Conference, enunciating the Buddha Word, "Hatred never ceases by hatred, but by love," and thus winning for Sri Lanka the everlasting gratitude and friendship of Japan, and finally 1956, JR defiant in defeat. Only Kingsley with his sound knowledge of the currents of modern Sri Lanka history and his elegant style of writing could keep the reader gripped in this tangled mass of complex events.

Kingsley believes that the UNP would have disintegrated or disappeared after its crushing defeat of 1956 had it not been for JR's organisational skill. From his resounding victory in 1977 to his retirement in 1989, JR was at the zenith of his power and he dominated the political scene to such an extent that his biography is in a very real sense a commentary on the political history of the island. A well known reviewer writes, "The period it deals with is a stirring moment in history – a nation emerging from colony to independence and the parturition pains of new nationhood. De Silva and Wriggins capture the spirit of those exciting times and their text is both readable and comprehensive."

Through its pages march all the great movements, issues and personalities that moulded contemporary Sri Lanka. They are linked and balanced in a well proportioned way. For the comprehensiveness of its human portraiture, meticulous attention to detail, plenitude of its observation and consummate skill in handling difficult and diverse sources, this biography is the best written of any Sri Lankan so far.

The publication of *The University of Ceylon, History of Ceylon* Volume III in 1973 and Volume II in 1995 was undoubtedly the result of Kingsley's unflagging effort and determination in the midst of many obstacles. He was the Editor-in-Chief of both and in the case of Volume III more than a third of the book has been authored by him. These two were the successors of *The University of Ceylon, History of Ceylon* Volume I (Parts 1 & 2)

released in 1959 and 1960 under the editorship of Dr S Paranavitana, then Professor of Archaeology at Peradeniya. This covered the history of the island from its beginnings down to 1500. It was expected that Volume II which was originally intended to bring the story from 1500-1947 would be released soon after. However, it took another 13 years for the next volume to appear and that was Volume III, covering the period from the beginning of the 19th century to 1948. Volume II which was now intended to fill the gap between I and II was planned for publication within a year of Volume III. However, it took another 22 years and finally saw the light of the day in 1995!

In his Preface, Kingsley refers to the inordinate delays and the many problems he had to face, not merely the failure of the contributors to meet deadlines or inability to complete their assignments, but also acute controversies and administrative inertia. The publication of these two volumes in the midst of almost insurmountable problems is a landmark in the historiography of the island. They serve a twofold purpose, as a basic university text-book and a work of reference, and as a general background reading for all those interested in Sri Lanka's history. The trilogy is at last complete and we now have in our hands a history of Lanka from its beginnings to 1948, when the long colonial period ended and the island regained its independence, a work of dignified, non-partisan objective scholarship. The vision of those who conceived the project has been vindicated. The task of co-ordinating the work of far flung scholars, critically examining and incorporating the ever growing copies of original unpublished research work is in itself an intimidating task. The credit goes to Kingsley who presided over both volumes from the time they were a daunting mass of disorganised papers, to the time they emerged from the press.

There are some very significant features in these two volumes. All the contributors are Sri Lankans who are specialists in their respective fields. History is treated as the totality of human experience and equal weightage is given to economic, social, cultural and religious developments as to political history. Although both books deal with the colonial period, Kingsley has not taken the usual Eurocentric perspective and highlighted only the activities of the colonial powers. A particularly noteworthy feature of Volume II is the emphasis given to the Kandyan Kingdom, which emerged as a response to the colonial onslaught. Although Kandy deserves a separate volume to itself, considering the role it played not only in extending Sri Lankan independence for another two centuries but also in the cultural evolution of the island, previous histories have overlooked its importance. When one considers that Kandy, and Kandy alone, bore the brunt of the struggle against European aggression, the marginalisation of Kandy in Sri Lanka historiography is all the more ironical and inexplicable. The emphasis was on European activities in Asia, while even the very existence of vibrant, stable, indigenous polities like Kandy tended to be overlooked. Kingsley has, to some extent, rectified this imbalance. For this alone, Kingsley who master minded the whole volume deserves credit.

Another of Kingsley's major works is *A History of Sri Lanka* (1981), which according to him is a summary of the present state of knowledge on many of the complex issues in the history of the island. The book is rather top heavy in that he devotes only 60 out of

the 581 pages to Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, which were the foundations of the island's civilisation. The reason for this he explains is that he is more at home in modern and contemporary history where his research interest lies. However, it is a massive undertaking, and is an index to the author's indefatigable energy and capacity for hard work. In his preface, the author himself indicates the timeliness of the work, "It is remarkable but only too true that nobody has done in this century what Sir James Emerson Tennent had achieved in 1859-60 in the second volume of his classic work on Ceylon, to write a history of the island from its legendary beginnings to the author's own day, a span of over 2000 years."

*Sri Lanka, A Survey* (1977), a collection of scholarly articles edited by Kingsley, is a publication of the Institute of Asian Affairs, Hamburg, on contemporary Sri Lanka. The diaspora of Sri Lankan intelligentsia at the time proved a major obstacle to the work and as a result certain gaps could be discerned. Yet this is the first comprehensive review of Sri Lanka since independence. Kingsley has given a different emphasis to the book, and he has strayed off the beaten track and diversified into other less researched areas, geography, demography, education, religion, literature, arts and economy, which had not been subject to indepth study since the 1960s.

Kingsley's versatility is evident in his bold attempt together with G H Peiris to produce the work *The University System of Sri Lanka: Vision and Reality*, 1995, published by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Kandy, Sri Lanka. Of the 295 pages in this book over one fourth has been authored by Kingsley, giving a critical overview of the 'Evolution of University Education' in Sri Lanka. Recording the chequered history of the University from the early beginnings in 1921, tracing its variegated fortunes, moving from crisis to crisis, is no mean task. Kingsley, with his long association with Peradeniya, his involvement with the University Grants Commission as member and Vice Chairman, and his sound knowledge of the background of contemporary politics, has achieved this with finesse. The erudite contribution of various scholars on controversial issues such as those concerning university governance, the contribution of the universities to Sri Lanka and to literature, theatre and the arts adds a rich diversity to this volume. Above all, as Kingsley surmises, this work facilitates the matching of the vision of the pioneers of University Education in Sri Lanka to the reality of the present.

Kingsley's earliest work, *Social Policy and Missionary Organisation in Ceylon 1840-55* published in 1965, is the result of his research for the doctoral degree. Here too he is a trail-blazer and looking at missionary records not previously consulted he has produced this most readable book highlighting little known facets of British colonial rule – the role of missionary organisations as a part of the Imperial package.

In addition to the many books and monographs mentioned above, Kingsley de Silva has to his credit well over eighty journal articles and chapters of books published in Sri Lanka and abroad. All of them carry the hallmark of exemplary scholarship. Starting with a review article on "The Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms" in the *Ceylon Journal of Historical*

*and Social Studies* in July 1959, over the last forty years a prodigious number of learned papers has flowed from Kingsley's pen. During the first two decades of his academic career, he was concerned mainly with elucidating, analysing and critiquing British colonial policy and its impact on Sri Lanka's political, social and economic life. Sequentially, he also examined the historical events surrounding the resistance to colonial rule and the eventual transfer of power to Sri Lankan political leaders. In all his historical writings, what is patently clear is his intimate familiarity with primary sources, making him one of the most authoritative historians of British rule in Sri Lanka.

In the light of the major works discussed above and the numerous articles and monographs that he has written on many other related themes one could justly call Professor Kingsley de Silva the greatest historian of modern Sri Lanka. His prolific output, versatile record, and his all embracing vision of history, rising above narrow specialisation and completely free of sectarian bias marks him out to be a veritable doyen of historical scholarship in Sri Lanka.

# Kingsley de Silva and the ICES

## Robert B Goldmann

In October 1976, when I was a programme officer for the Ford Foundation, the President of the Foundation, the late McGeorge Bundy, asked the staff for new programme ideas for discussion by the foundation's board. I sent in a memorandum that focused on ethnic conflict, particularly in third world countries, where the foundation was providing substantial technical assistance and educational support. Among the countries I listed were Burundi, Nigeria, Malaysia and – because the problem was worldwide – Northern Ireland and Yugoslavia.

My argument was that the technical assistance we were providing may go to waste as ethnic conflicts tear apart the very fabric of the countries and institutions we were seeking to help. There was no echo either from board or top staff of Ford. But I was determined to press on. And had I known that at the end of the road, I would meet and work with Kingsley de Silva, Neelan Tiruchelvam, Sam Samarasinghe and Radhika Coomaraswamy I would have pressed even harder!

Five years of persuasion later, Professor Donald Horowitz, now of Duke University and a leading American authority on the subject, joined me on a journey to Africa and Asia. We were seeking reactions of people in critical places, and looking for possible sites for an institution that would focus on the issue in a non-political, knowledge-seeking way.

It was our stop in Sri Lanka that yielded concrete results. Kingsley and Neelan, working together from their different perspectives, provided the opportunity. It was they who invited us to come in. It was they with whom we eventually established ICES.

A critical, indispensable ingredient of the successes of the ICES is Kingsley's decisiveness, his vast knowledge, his insatiable quest for more, his ability to build and develop an institution, and – this may be the most important – his personality. What a sterling character! What loyalty to the task to which he is committed, and what a sense of humour!

Kingsley and I come from about as different a set of backgrounds as one can imagine. A cosmopolitan Sinhalese academic with a Portuguese surname, and a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany who had thrived in America's pluralism and whose knowledge of Asia was pretty much limited to geography. It still is not broad or deep, but there's more of it than before 1981 when I first landed in Colombo. And most of the little there is I owe to this Professor!

There's only one thing for which I'll never forgive Kingsley. On one of my trips to Sri Lanka the key staff of ICES accepted a dinner invitation at the German embassy in Colombo. The ambassador had been sympathetic to our efforts. At the dinner, he made a toast. It called for a response. I sat opposite Kingsley, who was the logical speaker on our side. He refused to budge and signalled that I was to do it. I hesitated. He re-signalled. The pause became embarrassing. He sat as though cemented in his chair. I had no choice. And so I got up, glass in hand. What was I, a refugee from the country that was hosting this dinner, a Jew in Sri Lanka, to say?

There was no time for drafting, or even thought. And so what came out was that it couldn't be more appropriate than having someone with my experience as victim of unrelenting persecution, work on ethnic conflict in a country trying to cope with it. The episode became the last paragraph in my autobiography.

So, as angry as I was at Kingsley in those moments of raised glasses, it turned out that this, too, was a wonderfully positive experience for me. I owe it to Kingsley, who probably knew exactly what he was doing!

I've kept in touch with activities of the ICES as well as I could during the past seventeen years, and 'am deeply gratified that those early efforts yielded such wonderful fruit. And it's Kingsley de Silva, along with his colleagues, who have done the work and who continue to do it. I am convinced that when the history of Sri Lanka's current struggles is written and, yes, I believe, of their resolution, Kingsley and the people of the ICES will have an honoured place on those pages.

There's no need today to argue for attention to ethnic conflict. It's the stuff of headlines and front pages. No individual and no institution knows the answers. But the

ICES knows more than most. And Kingsley's hunger for knowledge, his commitment and his brilliance must and will keep shedding new light on one of the world's most elusive and dangerous problems.

# A Friend and a South Asianist

## Vishwanath Pai Panandiker

Kingsley and I became instant friends when we first met in 1981. When I ask myself why I look upon Kingsley as a close friend, only some of the reasons I could think of seem tangible. In interpersonal relations there is often an elusive and indefinable chemistry that causes mutual appeal. I have wondered whether the fact that both of us come from 'maritime' South Asia – he from the fabled Island of Sri Lanka and I from what may be called the 'island' of Goa – could be an ingredient of this affinity, for, I am convinced that those who live along the coast of any country tend to be more open, more flexible, more experimental, and, perhaps, more friendly.

Kingsley is, of course, an extremely warm and friendly person. Is it because he is a quintessential Sri Lankan? It is probably more attributable to the fact that he has harmonised within himself many traits which give him an inner spiritual peace. I have never asked Kingsley about his spiritual convictions and outlook. But a man who has such inner calm and peace, as Kingsley does, must surely be a deeply spiritual person.

South Asia has never lacked great scholars. But until about two decades ago, there was almost no South Asian community of social scientists and political thinkers. There were reasons for this. Each country in the region, notably India with its vast size and complexity, was preoccupied with its own problems and issues. In addition, there was very little incentive and support for thinking in terms of South Asia and a South Asian identity, despite our long historical ties and interactions.

The promotion of a South Asian identity within a frame of friendly international relations in the region has not been an easy task. The partition of the *raj* in 1947 left behind a trauma from which not only the countries which it brought into being but those of the entire region have not yet recovered. Apart from this, each of these countries has its share of ethnic strife which invariably spills over into its neighbourhood, perpetuating prejudices and mutual suspicions. Moreover, the conventional alignments of external links of South Asian countries have typically been in the direction of the West – towards countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States. This has also tended to persist, mainly because of the special benefits that accrue from the "look west" policy, such as those in education, employment, technology transfers, investment, and even income from tourism.

Interestingly, over the past two decades or so, South Asians have made a conscious effort to come together. On the whole, despite apprehensions, most of which are related in one way or another to acute poverty and deprivation which persist throughout the region, these efforts have achieved a measure of success. Ranking important among these efforts are those made by Kingsley and other like-minded South Asian scholars in establishing close and cordial links between the countries of the region while circumventing the various forces that inhibit the emergence of such links.

We in India have greatly benefited from Kingsley's vision, outlook, and his efforts to communicate with us at both intellectual as well as personal levels. I have always believed that many conflictual relations can be mitigated – even resolved – by strengthening personal and intellectual relationships within the thinking community of South Asia. Personally I have been greatly enriched by my close interactions with Kingsley. Apart from that, I am sure that our association has helped both of us in understanding our domestic and regional problems, and in our efforts to persuade the policy makers in our countries to seek peace, co-operation and stability in South Asia. Our success hitherto could well be considered inadequate. But we have built both personal and institutional bridges.

I have always regarded Kingsley as an eminent South Asian scholar. His highly impressive record of writings comprising many books, reports, and monographs, include several works on themes that embrace the whole of South Asia. These bear ample testimony to his great mind, diligence and dedication to scholarship. The International Centre for Ethnic Studies of which Kingsley is the Executive Director has collaborated with the Centre for Policy Research here in New Delhi in several important research projects and in programmes that were designed to promote interaction and exchange of ideas among thinkers and opinion leaders of the region.

South Asia for thousands of years has been the cradle of a great civilisation, culture and thought. Kingsley represents that unbroken tradition. He has drawn on the rich heritage of Sri Lanka and South Asia and has, in turn, contributed to the enrichment of the South Asian intellectual tradition. Kingsley has, in particular, contributed immensely to the promotion of South Asian identity, community and co-operation.

I pay my humble tribute to this great South Asian from Sri Lanka.

# A Lifelong Commitment to Scholarly Excellence

## John M Richardson Jr.

The professional career of Kingsley de Silva has been characterised by prolific scholarship, meticulously high standards, prescience and originality. He has rendered distinguished service to higher education in Sri Lanka with courage and steadfastness under circumstances that were not only trying but, literally, life threatening. As early as 1980, he had the vision to see that ethnic studies would be the topic of emerging importance, not only in South Asian scholarship, but internationally. He had the organisational ability to manifest that vision by founding and providing disciplined, inspiring leadership to what has become one of South Asia's most respected research centres, the International Centre for Ethnic Studies. It is the breadth of his contributions, as well as the high quality in each arena where he has made his mark, that makes Kingsley de Silva truly exceptional.

In addition to his scholarship, Professor de Silva's qualities as a human being set him apart. The qualities to which I refer are integrity, intellectual honesty, personal courage and unflinching devotion to duty, as scholar, teacher and Sri Lankan citizen. While gaining international recognition, he remained a dedicated teacher who inspired and cared for his students with a combination of Churchillian eloquence in the lecture-hall and personal attention. While other Sri Lankan scholars, many less talented, left their homeland to accept prestigious, lucrative positions in the United States, other Commonwealth nations and elsewhere, he remained at Peradeniya. While others detached themselves from the political process, he agreed to serve his country as Vice Chair and member of the University Grants Commission. During his tour with the Commission, he sought to elevate intellectual standards, raise the levels of funding for the universities, while standing firm against political meddling in university affairs. Through turbulent times that nearly destroyed the university he loved, Kingsley de Silva's courage, scholarly productivity and commitment to Sri Lanka never wavered, and do not waver, to this day.

Kingsley's contributions are amply documented in his *Curriculum vitae*. He has authored or co-authored eleven books and edited or co-edited twelve others. His articles, published in American, British and Sri Lankan scholarly journals, number more than eighty. He believes that scholars should make their views known to the public at large. Accordingly, he has contributed regularly to the popular press and to fact-opinion journals such as *Lanka Guardian*. I do wish to highlight the significance of some details concerning these writings.

Kingsley de Silva is the world's most respected authority on the history of Sri Lanka. Among his numerous contributions to the subject are his *Volume II* and *III* of the University of Ceylon Series *History of Ceylon*, his landmark *History of Sri Lanka* (1981), *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi Ethnic Societies: Sri Lanka* (1986), *Sri Lanka: Problems of*

*Governance* (co-authored with G H Peiris and R Coomaraswamy, 1993) and his monumental two volume *J R Jayewardene of Sri Lanka: A Political Biography* (co-authored with Howard Wriggins, 1988 and 1994). His most recent volume, *Reaping the Whirlwind: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka* was published by Penguin Books in 1998. There are also innumerable shorter pieces and scholarly articles. His writings on Sri Lankan history are meticulously researched, literate and insightful. They exhibit attention to sources, respect for facts and the courage to draw lessons of general relevance.

Through his historical research and numerous writings, well known to all South Asian Scholars, Kingsley has also established himself as an authority on the history of the British *Raj* and the transition of South Asian nations from colonial rule to independence. Recently, he contributed a chapter to Volume IV of the *Oxford History of the British Empire and Commonwealth*. He edited the two Volumes on Sri Lanka in *The British Documents on the End of Empire* series (1997). Few, if any, historian could match his knowledge of British Colonial Office records dealing with the pre-independence and transition to independence periods in India and Sri Lanka. Few match his personal access to living political leaders of the post-independence period or his contacts with leading South Asian scholars.

*Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi Ethnic Societies* represented a transitional work in de Silva's scholarship, broadening the focus of his work to include the interrelated issues of ethnic conflict, nationalism and governance. His writings on these subjects, which anchor the research agenda of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies have widened his international recognition and stature. This was acknowledged by the prestigious Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars when they awarded him a coveted Wilson Center Fellowship to pursue his writings on ethnic conflict. In 1992, he was named as a member of the Center's International Advisory Committee on Ethnic Studies. Also, he served as a final referee for Solicited Grants Programme of the US Institute of Peace on Ethnic Conflict, a highly unusual designation for a non US citizen. In 1993, he was chosen to teach a course on Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict at the Salzburg Seminar, one of Europe's most prestigious intellectual fora. Among de Silva's recent edited volumes on ethnic conflict, nationalism and governance are *Sri Lanka: Problems of Governance (1993); Peace Accords and Ethnic Conflict* (with S W R de A Samarasinghe, 1993); *The Internationalisation of Ethnic Conflict* (with R J May, 1991) *Ethnic Conflict in Buddhist Societies* (with several co-editors, 1988).

Much of de Silva's work on ethnic conflict has been linked with the research programme of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), which he founded in 1982. The accomplishments of the Centre would be worthy of note even if it had been established in Japan or in the United States. The growth and achievements of this world class research institute in Sri Lanka are a living testimony to Kingsley's vision, leadership, organisational skills and tenacity.

When the ICES was established in 1982, the global significance of ethnic conflict was not widely recognised. The creation and nurturing of the Centre required both

prescience and perseverance. From its early years, the ICES began to bring Asian and a few international scholars together to discuss major dimensions of ethnic conflict. Research projects were initiated, internships were established and external funding was secured. A small, but very high quality research library, periodical collection and clipping service were established and made available to researchers from all over the world. A capable and dedicated staff was formed that could provide high quality research services and organise successful world class conferences with the most minimal resources.

The ICES research programme viewed the political, sociological, cultural, religious, economic and international dimensions of ethnic conflict in Asia from a comparative perspective. At the same time, the Centre staff members attempt to provide reasoned analysis to the political leaders and competing factions engaged in Sri Lanka's tragic ethnic conflicts as well as conflicts in other parts of the world. Even in 1987-90, when Sri Lanka's society and government were under a virtual state of siege from civil wars in both the North and the South, the Centre's leadership courageously continued with their research program and held scheduled international conferences on ethnic conflict. During the desperate months of late 1988, and again in subsequent years, I often visited the Centre and viewed staff members working cheerfully in the face of disrupted transit, water and electricity as well as personal threats.

The ICES has maintained commitments to truth seeking, impartiality and intellectual independence in an environment where such commitments can be – literally – life threatening. It is well known that Sri Lanka has had its own quota of strife and instability during the years of the Centre's life. Throughout this period, as noted above the Centre has managed to function effectively. The ICES senior management, comprising both the Sinhalese and Tamils, has demonstrated how a multi-ethnic institute can thrive even in a violently divided society.

Professor de Silva's distinguished record of service to higher education in Sri Lanka was featured by the leadership he provided to processes of policy formulation which, on occasions, evoked fierce opposition and personal hostility. This was particularly true during the JVP (People's Liberation Front) insurrection which created turmoil in Sri Lanka's universities and even threatened to topple the island nation's government. From 1979 through 1988 he served as a member of Sri Lanka's University Grants Commission and from 1985 through 1989, he was the Vice Chair of the Commission. In this capacity, and as one of Peradeniya University's most distinguished senior faculty members, he fought tirelessly (though not always successfully) to maintain high academic standards and insulate universities from political pressures, whether the source of those pressures was politicians or youthful guerrillas. During a period when several Vice Chancellors and many top public officials were felled by assassins' bullets, Kingsley followed his regular routine and disdained protective measures, ignoring pleas from family and friends. Later, he and his colleague G H Peiris chronicled the turbulent history of Sri Lanka's higher education system in *The University System of Sri Lanka: Vision and Reality* (1995).

Professor de Silva's lifelong commitment to the Sri Lankan nation and to the students of Sri Lanka is a final quality that merits special recognition. Sri Lanka has produced many world-class scholars, some of whom match de Silva's productivity and distinction. But few of these scholars have chosen to remain in Sri Lanka. The political turbulence and economic hardships that Sri Lanka has endured, with their devastating impact on higher education, have led world class Sri Lankan scholars, one by one, to find greener pastures elsewhere. First-class universities in the United States, Canada, Australia and Europe all number distinguished Sri Lankans – most of them, former teachers of Sri Lanka universities – on their faculties. Such positions would be available to de Silva for the asking, but he has chosen to remain in Kandy. In an era when patriotism may be going out of style, he is, in the best sense of the term, a Sri Lankan patriot.

Professor Kingsley de Silva has produced exceptional scholarship, won global recognition, built a vibrant internationally respected research institute, served higher education in his nation and inspired hundreds of students with his teaching. He is a man of intellect, substance, courage, civility and integrity. He is a man whose sense of duty – to students, scholarly ideals and his nation – has received priority over economic affluence and personal safety. He is a *guru deva,* in the most exemplary meaning of the term.

# At the Vanguard of Liberal Scholarly Traditions

## Stanley Kalpage

Professor Kingsley de Silva and I have been friends for more than four decades. We came together in the first instance from different faculties of the then University of Ceylon at Peradeniya (now the University of Peradeniya). Kingsley was an Assistant Lecturer in the Faculty of Arts while I had just returned after gaining a Ph.D. from the University of London to work as a junior Lecturer in the Faculty of Agriculture. And yet we were drawn to each other from the moment we met.

We were both liberal in our thinking, opposed to repressive ideologies such as communism which were in vogue at that time, and held similar views on politics and on civil governance. We were both committed to liberal democratic concepts and this was what brought us together and kept us, as firm friends, through the passage of years.

Those were the days when Marxism held sway on university campuses and its local adherents – the communists and samasamajists – considered themselves as 'progressives,' derisively calling those with a liberal outlook, 'reactionaries.' Our views were unpopular among our academic colleagues at Peradeniya, and yet we remained defiant. Both Kingsley and I were convinced even in those days, nearly five decades ago, that democratic traditions

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and liberal thinking constituted the wave of the future and that the majority of Sri Lankans would never embrace totalitarian ideologies. And so it has proved to be.

Kingsley and I were among those privileged to have experienced the scholarly atmosphere that prevailed in the autonomous University of Ceylon during the inspiring era of Vice-Chancellor Sir Ivor Jennings first at Colombo and later at Peradeniya. We both shared an admiration for the manner in which Sir Ivor, internationally reputed constitutional lawyer, political scientist, and principal constitutional adviser to Prime Minister D S Senanayake, had guided the infant university during its formative years and tried, with his remarkable persuasive skills, to inculcate independent thinking and fearless expression both among students and staff of the fledgling university.

Kingsley de Silva had a clear vision of what university autonomy meant. He once wrote: "The real core of autonomous status consists of first, freedom for university academics to teach and conduct research without the interference of the state or other external influences, and secondly, the protection of the appointment and promotions of academic and other staff from political interference."

With Sir Ivor's departure from Ceylon (as Sri Lanka was then known) in the mid-1950s, the university was seen to drift away from carefully nurtured traditions that Sir Ivor had painstakingly developed and tended towards becoming another government bureaucracy. The government of the day was interfering increasingly in academic matters and university authorities were inclined to act in collusion with the politicians. Both Kingsley and I, together with a number of like-minded colleagues, resented this and decided to oppose the tendency to bring the university increasingly under political control. Hardly remembered now are the furious battles waged in the university senate and court as well as in the council against the authoritarian rule of an "iron Vice-Chancellor" and his sycophantic followers.

After the parliamentary elections of 1965, we managed to prevail upon the new government to remedy the situation to some extent. But when that was achieved with the passage of the Universities Act No. 66 of 1966 under a UNP government, what followed was hardly better. Once again Kingsley was prominent among those who threw themselves into a head-on clash with the then irrepressible Minister of Education and his minions in the ministry who made an excuse of persistent university unrest to impose ministerial hegemony. Fortunately, Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake was liberal-minded and sympathetic to our views and helped to minimise the harsh effects of the legislation which the Minister of Education had proposed.

In the 1970s, the university administration became virtually an appendage of the Ministry of Education. The 'United Front' government which had been voted into power in May 1970 with an overwhelming parliamentary majority had promised the electorate to give 'full academic freedom' to the universities and to 'restore university autonomy.' The government had even prepared the legislation for the institution of a University Grants

Commission (UGC) to provide autonomy to the four universities then existing at Colombo, Peradeniya, Vidyalankara and Vidyodaya.

But with the sudden and unexpected outbreak of insurgency in April 1971, the government's attitude changed abruptly and ministerial control was tightened to a greater degree than ever before. The University of Ceylon Act No.1 of 1972 converted the independent universities into units called 'campuses,' virtually ruled by a central 'Senate House' at Ward Place in Colombo which in turn was merely an appendage of the Ministry of Education in Malay Street.

During an extremely unfortunate 'transitional period,' as provided for by Section 85 of Act No.1 of 1972, virtually unlimited powers were aggrogated by a coterie of officials, all appointed by the Minister of Education, to govern the university. The Minister was given the power to extend the period of transition at his own discretion through a notification published in the government Gazette. The period of transition was extended one year at a time from 15 February 1974, when the first two-year period expired, to October 1978. What was most amazing was that this university legislation was formulated by a Committee consisting entirely of academics, oriented as they were towards the political left.

During this period Kingsley de Silva was in constant communication with the then Leader of the Opposition, J R Jayewardene, as to how the universities should be managed with the next change of government. I was abroad at the time but learned of developments through frequent correspondence with Kingsley.

After a convincing electoral win brought J R Jayewardene to political power in July 1977, both Kingsley and I accepted a difficult assignment – the revitalisation and reorganisation of an inefficient, corrupt and bureaucracy-ridden university system. We laboured together to study and understand the thinking of university academics and administrative staff as well as students and educationists. Kingsley's knowledge of the history of education in Sri Lanka stood us in good stead as we travelled together to the then existing campuses of the University of Sri Lanka for intensive and rewarding discussions and ideas. New university legislation – Act No. 16 of 1978 – was promulgated by parliament, representing a new era in the history of our universities.

Kingsley de Silva and I worked together in directing university education from 1978 to 1988 as Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively of the University Grants Commission (UGC). We were closely involved in planning the expansion of the university system from one centralised body with six campuses to eight independent universities and an open university. Post-graduate education was broad-based with the establishment of separate institutions for Agriculture, Medicine, Pali and Buddhist Studies, Archaeology, and Management.

Kingsley was always deeply concerned about the maintenance of the highest academic standards. He was especially conscious of the need for revising the scheme for admitting students to universities, and considered that admission policies should ensure that equity and justice prevailed. Realising that funding for university education was limited in the face of the government's budgetary difficulties, the setting up of centres of excellence was an idea that Kingsley advocated assiduously.

One of the problems that demanded the immediate attention of those of us at the newly instituted UGC was the arbitrary procedure adopted in the selection of students for admission into the universities, which was based, evidently on a system of "standardisation" of marks scored by students of different media of instruction at the GCE Advanced Level examination. This had resulted in a great deal of resentment among the Tamils and had contributed to the worsening of ethnic relations in the country during the 1970s. Kingsley, as a member of the UGC, worked strenuously for abolishing this iniquitous system and replacing it with a new system which, while emphasising the principle of merit in university admissions, also accommodated elements of affirmative action for the benefit of students from the educationally backward districts.

The new system, though decidedly superior to the earlier procedure of "media based standardisation," was also associated in its operation with the problem of de-emphasising merit in the selection of new entrants to the universities, and thus, an effect of lowering academic standards at the university. This, of course, was a problem about which Kingsley was greatly concerned. Thus he was the obvious choice for the chairmanship of the committee appointed by the Ministry of Higher Education in 1987 entrusted with the task of carrying out a comprehensive review of the system of university admissions.

In keeping with Kingsley's concerns, the Review Committee recommended that "academic excellence should be a primary factor in securing admission to a university. The three-tier system of admission which gave priority to equity and equality of opportunity should (they argued) be replaced by a system which restores pride of place to merit and academic excellence." Mindful, however, of the need for a gradual transition into a new system, the Review Committee recommended that the merit element in the admissions formula should be given greater emphasis and a corresponding and progressive reduction be made in the district quotas as well as in the quotas for 'educationally underprivileged districts' (the provision for the affirmative action referred to above) till they were eliminated over a six-to-seven-year period, beginning with the A/L examination of 1988. If this recommendation had been progressively implemented, admissions to universities would have been 100 percent on a national merit list by 1994/95.

Other significant recommendations of the Review Committee included the restoration of practical tests for science subjects, continuous assessment of practical work done by the schools themselves, and the introduction of an aptitude test as part of the admissions procedure. The 30 recommendations summarised in the report of Professor

Kingsley de Silva's Admissions Review Committee will bear study and implementation even today.

Kingsley de Silva's study of and erudite writings on the history of Sri Lanka have been referred to in other sections of this 'tribute.' Needless to say they have contributed immensely to an understanding of the flow of Sri Lanka's history in bygone and recent times. They are meant not only for scholars immersed in the rigorous discipline of history but to laymen who wish to gain some knowledge and insight into the events of the past.

From the vantagepoint of his close rapport with president J R Jayewardene, Kingsley de Silva was better suited and equipped than anyone else to write a biography of Sri Lanka's first executive President. The two comprehensive volumes co-authored by K M de Silva and Howard Wriggins (of the University of Columbia, New York), are further evidence, if indeed any such were needed, to emphasise the meticulous attention to detail and the gift of lucid exposition that have always characterised Kingsley de Silva's research and writings.

In the second volume of this political biography the authors have related in painstaking detail the negotiations that led to one of the most controversial agreements between two neighbouring countries in contemporary times – the Indo-Lanka Agreement of 1987. Perhaps it was with the intention of understanding more clearly the historical origins of the claims made by the Tamil politicians that Kingsley de Silva has devoted so much of his time in the recent past to study and write on what is referred to as Sri Lanka's "ethnic problem."

The International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), founded by Professor Kingsley de Silva, has gained prominence as an institution for study and research into ethnic problems in Sri Lanka and elsewhere. The Centre has conducted a number of seminar discussions on ethnic conflicts both in Sri Lanka and in neighbouring Asian countries. The proceedings of these discussions have been published and constitute valuable contributions to the public discourse on Sri Lanka's protracted "ethnic," later turned "terrorist," problem.

Other subjects on which the searchlight of academic and public discussion has been directed by the ICES include "Corruption and Governance." Much is spoken of corruption and of its corroding effect on governance and society and yet, practical measures to combat it are seldom meaningfully pursued. The ICES is not averse to getting together prominent persons with diverse views to discuss such problems and to seek consensus on practical solutions to them.

The breadth of Kingsley de Silva's interest in history, governance and civil society is growing with his years. So also is the depth with which he continues to study specific problems in these disciplines, together with a committed group of scholars whom he has trained, guided and motivated. All of us are fortunate to have Kingsley de Silva in our midst as Sri Lanka moves with uncertainty into a new century of challenge and promise.

# Resume of Kingsley de Silva

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| 1991 | DLitt (University of London) |
| 1959-1961 | PhD, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1959 October - 1961 July. |
| 1951-1955 | Bachelor of Arts, University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. First Class Honours in History 1955; and two prizes, the Mabel Jayasuriya Prize and Corbett Prize for the Best Student in History; The Arts Scholarship of the University of Ceylon, for the best performance at the BA degree examination of 1955. |

## Positions Held

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| 1969-1995 | Foundation Professor of History of Sri Lanka, University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, later University of Peradeniya. |
| 1967-1969 | Senior Lecturer in History, University of Ceylon, Peradeniya. |
| 1961-1967 | Lecturer in History, University of Ceylon, Peradeniya. |
| 1957-1961 | Assistant Lecturer in History, University of Ceylon, Peradeniya. |
| 1970 -1995 | Editor-in-Chief, University of Ceylon, *History of Ceylon,* Volumes II and III. |
| 1982 to-date | Executive Director, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Kandy/Colombo. |
| 1985-1989 | Vice-Chairman, University Grants Commission, Sri Lanka. |
| 1979-1989 | Member, University Grants Commission, Sri Lanka. |
| 1986-1988 | President, International Association of Historians of Asia. |
| 1980-1986, 1988-1994 | Vice President for South Asia of the International Association of Historians of Asia. |
| 1977-1989 | Director, Bank of Ceylon. |
| 1979-1980 | Member, Presidential Commission on Development Councils. |
| 1992-1996 | Member of the Editorial Board, *International Journal of Group Rights*, (Holland). |
| 1990-to-date | Board of Editorial Advisors, *The Round Table*, (London). |
| 1984-to-date | Editor, *Ethnic Studies Report,* bi-annual journal of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies. |

| 1962-1980 | Editor and Managing Editor, *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies* (*CJHSS*). |
| 1962-1986 | Ceylon–Sri Lanka correspondent to the *Parliamentarian*, the Journal of the Parliaments of the Commonwealth published by the Commonwealth Association, London. |

## Academic Distinctions

| 1995 September | Visiting Scholar, Bellagio Study and Conference Centre, Bellagio, Italy. |
| 1993-1997 | Editor of the volume on Sri Lanka in *The Transfer of Power in Sri Lanka, 1939-1948* in the *British Documents on the End of Empire* series sponsored by the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, and the British Academy. Publishers, The Stationery Office, London, (formerly Her Majesty's Stationery Office). |
| 1993 June | Member of the Faculty of the Salzburg Seminar, Austria. Session 305 on Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict Worldwide. |
| 1992-1993 | Member, International Advisory Committee on Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington D.C. |
| 1991-1992 | Fellow, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington D.C. |
| 1985-1986 | Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence and Professor of South Asian History, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine, USA. |
| 1976-1977 | Commonwealth Visiting Professor, Department of Government, University of Manchester. |
| 1968-1969 | Visiting Fellow of Clare Hall, Cambridge. |
| 1968-1969 | Smuts Visiting Fellow in Commonwealth Studies at the University of Cambridge. |

## Publications

### Books, Monographs and Articles

### Books

| 1998 | Author of *Reaping the Whirlwind: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka*, Penguin Books, New Delhi. |
| 1997 | Editor of a two part volume of documents on *Sri Lanka* in the British Documents on the End of Empire series. Part I - *The Second World War and the Soulbury Commission 1939-1945*, Part II - *Towards Independence 1945-1948* published by the Stationery Office for the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in the University of London. |

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| 1995 | Author of *Regional Powers and Small State Security: India and Sri Lanka, 1977-1990*, Woodrow Wilson Center Press and the Johns Hopkins University Press, Washington D.C. |
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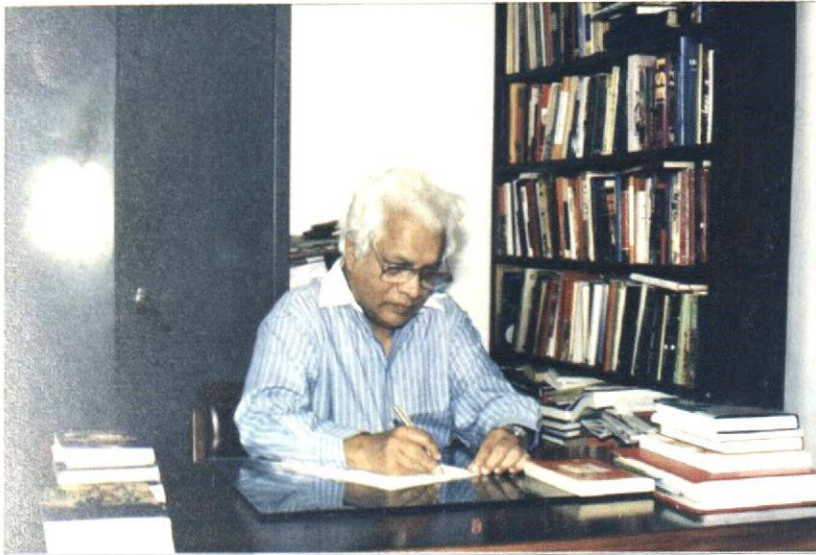
Kingsley de Silva BA Hons (Ceylon), PhD (London), DLitt (London)



President J R Jayewardene (right) at the launching of the book History of Sri Lanka by Professor Kingsley de Silva (left). The others in the picture are Mr. Christopher Hurst (Hurst Publishers) and Mr. Parthasarathy (Oxford University Press, Madras), Colombo 1981.

The members of the University Grants Commission, December 1982. Professor Kingsley de Silva is second from the right. The others (from L to R) Professor Emeritus A W Mailvaganam, Professor Charles Dahanayake, Mr. W M Wijeratne Banda, Professor Stanley Kalpage and Dr. S M Refai.

The first Board of Directors of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies met in Bad Homburg, West Germany in June 1984. From L to R: Seated Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy (Sri Lanka), Professor Kingsley de Silva (Sri Lanka); Professor Suma Chitnis (India); Standing Professor Dietmar Rothermund (W Germany) Robert B Goldmann (USA), Dr S W R de A Samarasinghe (Sri Lanka), Dr Neelan Tiruchelvam (Sri Lanka) Dr Uma Eleazu (Nigeria), Absent: Professor Charles Hamilton (USA).



Professor Kingsley de Silva at the opening ceremony of the new Bank of Ceylon Headquarters, Colombo, May 1987. Also in the picture are (from L to R) Dr Warnasena Rasaputra, Dr Nimal Sanderatne, Justice Mark Fernando, Mr. Chari P de Silva, President J R Jayewardene, and Minister of Finance Ronnie de Mel.

Professor and Mrs de Silva as chief guests of the annual prize-giving of Girls' High School, Kandy in March 1988. The Others in the picture are the school Principal, Mrs T K Ekanayake (left) and Deputy Principal, Mrs S Perera.



President J R Jayewardene addressing the inaugural ceremony of the Conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia held in Colombo, August 1988 with Professor Kingsley de Silva in the chair.

Professor Kingsley de Silva presenting the first volume of the J R Jayewardene biography to President R Premadasa, 1989. The others present are Mr. Ranjith Wijewardene and Mrs. Hema Premadasa.



The opening ceremony of the International Conference on Buddhist Societies in Stability and Crisis in Kandy in July 1994. The picture shows Professor Kingsley de Silva and Professor Pensri Duke of the Royal Institute in the Grand Palace, Bangkok.

Participants at the Conference on Ethnic Conflict, Conflict Management and Resolution in Central and Eastern Europe and South and Southeast Asia sponsored by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Sri Lanka and Laszlo Teleki Foundation, Hungary at the Teleki Castle, Szirak, Hungary, May 1996. Professor and Mrs de Silva are in the upper right part of the picture.

With the staff of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies - August 1991 (from L to R)
Chalani Lokugamage, Bernadine Pathberiya, S W R de A Samarasinghe, Kanthi Gamage,
Chandra de Silva, Kingsley de Silva, Nalini Weragama, Erangani Karunaratne. (in front
from L to R) T M Jayatilake, Samarakoon Bandara.



Professor and Mrs de Silva with the staff of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies
1999. Others in the picture (from L to R) Chalani Lokugamage, Sumedha Abhayaratne,
Anzul Jhal, Vasantha Premaratne, S W R de A Samarasinghe, Yvette Ferdinands, Kanthi
Gamage, Kusum Wijeratne, G H Peiris, Iranga Atukorale, Samarakoon Bandara.

# Millennial Challenges for Developing Nations

## S W R de A Samarasinghe

There are three inter-related themes that have emerged as fundamentals that would determine the future of developing countries as they enter the next millennium. They are democracy, broad-based sustainable development, and violent conflict. The countries and regions that establish democratic governance, move towards broad-based sustainable development, and are free of violent conflict will succeed and prosper. Others will fail and get increasingly marginalised from the international system. The fundamental political, economic and security changes that occurred in the global system in the last two decades have left the average developing country with very little choice in this matter. The purpose of this essay is to examine this process and review future prospects for developing countries in the context of current and evolving global conditions.

*Global Context*

Very few, if any, anticipated even as recently as in the mid-1980s that we would approach the new millennium with the United States of America (US) as the sole super power, the Soviet Union and Marxist-socialism as relatively brief episodes in human history, and a world that is rapidly moving towards a level of integration that was inconceivable two decades ago.

The following key features will characterise the global political economy at the beginning of the next millennium. In economics the capitalist market system will prevail as the best available method to allocate scarce resources efficiently. Liberal economic reforms in Russia, the New Independent State (NIS) countries, China, India, and elsewhere suggest that there is no prospect of a serious roll back of this process. The global economy is getting increasingly integrated. Following the East Asian financial crisis the international community is talking of a new financial architecture. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank (WB) will change in response to emerging global financial and economic needs. However, it is most unlikely that there would be any radical overhaul of the present global financial institutions and arrangements. If official US thinking and the emerging financial structure of the European Union (EU) are any guide, state intervention in financial markets will be even further discouraged. The new financial architecture will be market-driven.

Politically the last three decades of the twentieth century have been highly favourable to liberal democracy. Authoritarian regimes from Central and Eastern Europe to Asia, Africa, and Latin America have collapsed to be replaced by some form of democratic government. From 1974 when the "Third Wave" of democratisation began (Huntington 1991:14) more than

sixty countries have undergone this transformation. Western democracies led by the US that are anxious to establish democratic governance as a universal norm are in a more powerful position today than they ever have been to promote this ideal.

The international security system is dominated by the sole super power, the US. As the Balkan crisis from Bosnia to Kosovo has amply demonstrated European powers play second fiddle to the Americans under the umbrella of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the only significant military alliance with at least a semi-global reach. At present Russia matters in international security only because it possesses nuclear weapons. Otherwise its economy is in ruin, and the military decrepit. China is still economically weak to pose any serious threat to US hegemony. However, US strategists see both Russia and China as important players with potential for strategic alliance. Japan, with a weakened economy following the recession of the mid-1990s, is comfortable to go along with the US that provides it security. Then there are a small group of third level "regional" powers such as India, Iran, and Nigeria that would love to assert more independence from the global system, especially from the influence of US, but are unable to do so especially due to their limited economic capacity.

*Economic Conditions*

Fifty years ago the terms "Third World" or "Developing Countries" described an economically fairly homogenous group of countries. This no longer is the case. At one extreme are some countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with an annual per capita income of less than US $200. At the other extreme are what the World Bank (1999) defines as "upper middle income" countries, some with a per capita income of over $9,000. In 1997, 47 of the 130 countries that the World Bank reported were "low income" countries with a per capita income of $785 or less, 56 were in the middle income ($786 to $9,655) group, and the remaining 27 were in the high income ($9,656 or more) category.

For the purposes of this essay what is important to note is that the circumstances and economic interests among the low and middle-income countries vary a great deal more today, than, say, fifty years ago. As a country moves up on the income scale, typically, its link to the global economy becomes stronger. It is also less dependent on foreign assistance, and has relatively more control over trade. The extent to which a country has achieved broad-based sustainable development is bound to vary. However, it is safe to assume that the upper-middle income countries (per capita income $3,125 to $9,655) are generally on a sustainable development path.

In contrast the low-income countries are economically weak, and highly dependant on foreign assistance to sustain investment, and in some cases even basic welfare. The economies are not yet in a position to benefit to any significant degree from globalisation. Some of the countries in this group, especially those in Sub-Saharan Africa, have regressed economically in the past three decades, with the per capita income in the mid-1990s no more, and sometimes even less than what they had in the late 1960s. For example, in the period 1975-84, the

average per capita income in Sub-Saharan Africa excluding South Africa was $412, and in the mid-1990s, $311 (World Bank 1998).

However, the above differences notwithstanding, the low and middle-income countries generally share a belief in a market-oriented economy. Most countries also believe that greater integration with the global economy is unavoidable, and that they would stand to benefit from it.

*Political Conditions*

The global trend that Huntington has dubbed the "Third Wave" of democratisation has seen more than 60 countries experience democratic transitions since 1974. They have come from all continents, vary in size and economic status, and have a variety of historical backgrounds. In short the third wave is global in its scope.

There is no agreed definition as to what constitutes a democracy. Diamond (1996) reported that by 1995 there were between 76 and 117 democracies, depending on how democracy is defined. The higher number included all "electoral" democracies, and the lower number only those that qualified as "liberal" democracies. The initial step taken towards democracy in most of these countries that emerged in the Third Wave was to have held a "free and fair" poll to elect a government. However, democracy is much more than holding periodic elections. Many of these countries have had a bumpy journey to establish and nurture democratic institutions. The experience of the last two decades suggests that it is easy to backslide into authoritarianism (Diamond 1996). It is also evident that democratisation is a non-linear and complex process that is influenced by a variety of factors, some domestic, and some international. Thus many of the new democracies are confronted with the challenge of consolidating and sustaining democracy.

*Violent Conflict*

The third principal element that will define success or failure of development in the next millennium will be the presence or absence of violent intra-state conflict. Conflict can both be peaceful or violent. When peaceful, it is the driving force that leads to change in dynamic and progressive societies. The ability of a society to channel conflict towards peaceful and sustainable political discourse is a hallmark of political maturity. However, in a large number of developing countries, and in several of the NIS countries, conflict has moved in a violent direction. Much of the violent conflict has an ethno-political base. The protagonists are minority groups or communal groups who challenge the legitimacy of the state for a variety of reasons ranging from real or perceived political and economic discrimination to cultural, linguistic or religious persecution.

According to Gurr and Haxton (1996) ethno-political protest, rebellion, and communal conflict have shown, in terms of a five-year moving average, a long-term gradual increase from the 1940s to the 1970s, followed by a sharp escalation in the 1980s and the early

1990s. However, Gurr (1996) reports that a closer look at the data from 1985 to 1995 suggests that all three forms of conflict, ethno-political protest, rebellion, and communal conflict peaked in intensity in the early 1990s and then began to subside.

A somewhat contrary set of numbers is produced by the European Platform for Conflict Prevention and Transformation – EPCPT (1998). It notes that while "high intensity" conflict has declined marginally from 1995 to 1997, "low-intensity" conflict, and "violent political protest" have actually risen significantly in the three-year period. These differences in figures arise partly due to differences in data, and partly due to differences in definition. Whichever set of figures is accepted, the fact is that violent conflict has played a destabilising and negative role in most of these countries. In some extreme cases such as Somalia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone it has led to state collapse. In many more the state is partly dysfunctional or has no authority over large swaths of land that the government claims to rule.

The sharp rise in violent conflict is clearly associated with the end of the Cold War. Most notably the withdrawal of support of the super powers to some regimes and groups has allowed conflicts that were, held in abeyance to come into the open. Some of the violent conflicts in countries such as Somalia and Rwanda are examples. Such conflict, absent under the Soviet regime, became a common feature in several NIS countries.

There are two major reasons for the international community to be concerned with the rise of violent intra-state conflict. First, the human cost. Typically about 90 percent of the casualties of intra-state conflict are civilians. According to the Untied Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) by the mid-1990s there were about 18 million refugees and over 24 million internally displaced persons globally, mostly as a result of violent conflict.

The second major negative of violent conflict is the harm it causes sustainable development. Normal economic activity is disrupted, and development is slowed down or even reversed. Internal wars usually cause destruction of infrastructure, and loss of income and output. The political system is destabilised, and in some cases poses a threat to democracy. Violent conflicts are also associated with environmental damage. They also have social costs in terms of divided families, and destruction of communities. The culture of violence that takes root and the destruction of values and norms can also have long-term negative consequences.

*Democracy*

Consolidating and sustaining democracy are the principal political challenges faced by developing countries that have chosen democratic governance. This is a complex process that has given rise to many debates. One reason for the debate is the lack of agreement on what democracy means, and how to achieve it.

As Beetham (1993:55) notes it is relatively easy to agree on the concept of democracy. The concept of democracy, in its simplest form, can be defined using the two Greek words

*demos* (people) and *kratos* (rule) that combine to make the word democracy, meaning "rule by the people." This is the classical idea of democracy. Beetham elaborates this concept as a "mode of decision-making about collectively binding rules and policies over which the people exercise control, and the most democratic arrangement to be that where all members of the collective enjoy effective equal rights to take part in such decision making directly – one, that is to say, which realises to the greatest conceivable degree the principles of popular control and equality in its exercise..." However, there is little agreement on the theory of democracy that is needed to understand the political process associated with the concept democracy.

Theories of democracy attempt to make this basic concept operational by prescribing how democracy might be realised, in what institutional form, and the content of democracy. Perhaps the best known and most widely applied theory of democracy is the Western liberal theory that stresses political competition. Joseph Schumpeter's now classical definition of competitive democracy perhaps best represents this tradition: "The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote." (1947:269) Two points are worth noting. Firstly, this is a theory of political democracy. Secondly, it is a theory of democracy that focuses on the procedural (input) aspect of the political process.

Dahl's definition of democracy as an "elective polyarchy" complements and extends the Scumpeterian theory of democracy by incorporating an element of pluralism to it (Dahl 1971). His approach also retains the procedural/input framework but is more participatory and inclusive.

Extending Dahl's concept of polyarchy, Larry Diamond (1990b:2-3) defines democracy as a "system of government that meets three essential conditions: meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and groups (especially political parties) for all effective positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, at least through regular and fair elections, such that no major (adult) social group is excluded; and a level of civil and political liberties – freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to from and join organisations – sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation."

The great strength of the liberal theory of democracy lies in the stress that it places on personal rights and political and civil liberties. Rights such as personal security rights – the right to life (no summary execution), the right not to be tortured, the right to due process of law, etc., – personal expression rights – the right to speak, and the right to assembly etc., – and political participation rights – the right to vote, and run for political office etc. –, are the classical "first generation" rights. There can be no political democracy without these. The three personal security rights mentioned above are primal rights. According to the UN Charter of Human Rights the signatory countries even under national emergency cannot suspend them. They are simply inviolable. Thus for democratic consolidation to occur these rights have to become inviolable in the country in question.

Beyond this, however, the argument becomes more complex. First, there are those who favour the extension of democracy beyond the political sphere to the economic and social. Largely due to Marxist-socialist influence, economic rights – right to work and earn an income, access to education and health etc. – have also been increasingly recognised as legitimate rights. Leaders from developing countries frequently stress social and economic rights as against civil and political rights. For example, there was a sharp division of opinion along these lines between the two sides at the 1993 Vienna Convention on Human Rights. Today it is debated whether women have reproductive rights in addition to all the other "regular" rights that they share with men (see Dixon-Mueller 1993:3-28).

Held (1993) advocates that true democracy would prevail only when the international system itself is democratised. This means reducing the powers of the leading Western countries in the UN and other global institutions. Discussions about reform of the UN Security Council are one such example. This, at this stage of the evolution of the international system, remains more an ideal than a reality. Thus most theories of democracy are limited to the individual country level. They usually recognise the interrelationship between political and socio-economic factors. The principal concern, however, is with political democracy.

As Sartori (1987a:xi) points out, the contemporary theory draws a distinction between "ideal system and reality." There is a "fact-versus-value" tension. The question of interest, especially to those who want to promote democracy is, to what extent and in what manner are ideals realised and realisable. The liberal theory of democracy when applied to developing countries falls short of the ideals that it propounds at least in three respects. First, non-elected public officials make critical decisions that are largely outside the purview of elected officials. Second, the military frequently exercise power even when democratically elected governments exist. Examples from Asia, Africa, and Latin America abound. Third, although the government is elected, the majority may discriminate the minority. At this stage democracy becomes the dictatorship of the majority.

To rectify these shortcomings Schmitter and Karl (1991) have added three important qualifications to the Schumpeterian formulation of competitive theory of democracy. First, citizens must be able to influence public policy between elections. Second, properly elected governments must be able to exercise power without control by unelected officials. Third, the polity must be self-governing.

Sartori (1987a:152) makes the important point that the above formulations are Western conceptions of democracy that limit it to the input side (procedural element) of the political process and hence inadequate as a theory of democracy for developing countries. He notes that the state is a key actor in developing countries. Thus a theory of liberal democracy that stresses the limitation of the role of the state is not always relevant to these societies. What is required is a theory of democracy that incorporates the outcomes of the political process as a feedback to the competitive input process.

The output side of democracy relates to elements such as political stability, protection of minority rights, and the ability to achieve economic progress with a reasonable degree of social equity. If the output of competitive democracy does not fulfil these minimum requirements, competitive democracy on the input side is not meaningful to those who are on the losing side, be it a minority, or any other group such as the urban or rural poor. From this point of view a model of political democracy that simply restricts its focus to civil and political rights would be inadequate. It will also have to include social and economic rights.

*Multiple Models*

This brings us to the question whether there is a single model of political democracy. The answer is both "yes" and "no." It is "yes" because to qualify as a democracy in terms of the definitions that I have discussed above, a system of government must ensure peaceful competitive political participation in an environment that guarantees political and civil liberties. The answer is "no" because in different historical and cultural traditions, democracy could mean different things to different people. For example, as Huntington (in Diamond and Plattner 1993a:xi) notes, democracy in Japan deviates from the Western model because in that country there is competition for power but (until perhaps more recent times) no alternation of power.

Schmitter and Karl (1991) also note that there is no one form of democracy. In some countries it is democracy by consensus (e.g. the new constitution in South Africa) and in others it is by competition. In some power is shared by the majority and minority(ies) (e.g. Malaysia) and in others power is exercised by the majority (e.g. Sri Lanka). East Asian democracy will always be influenced by a Confucian community-oriented approach that places less importance on individual rights and more on group rights, a view that is contrary to the American tradition of democracy that gives primacy to individual rights. In some democracies there is more public authority action (e.g. Sweden) and in others there is more private action (e.g. USA). Discussing the case of Islamic countries in the Middle East, Sisk (1992) argues that it is not appropriate to simply categorise countries as "democratic" and "authoritarian." He asserts that there are many "hybrid" regimes that combine elements from both. For example, in some pacific islands competitive political systems are based not on traditional political parties but on competing family groups and individuals (Freedom House 1993:78).

*Democratisation*

I define democratisation as a process of political change that moves the political system of any given society towards a system of government that ensures peaceful competitive political participation in an environment that guarantees political and civil liberties. This is a concept that captures the dynamic quality of democratic evolution in any society but especially in developing countries.

Beetham (1993:55) notes that at any given moment all societies occupy some point along a political spectrum that extends from dictatorial rule to democratic rule as defined

earlier in this essay. The movement along this spectrum is a non-linear process. How does democracy get established in non-democratic societies and how is the process of democratisation sustained? Does external factors have a decisive influence on the process? What is the relationship between economic development and democracy? These are some of the questions that we shall review in the remainder of this essay.

The principal forces that led to the democratic transition in the Third Wave were internal to the country in question (Whitehead 1986; 1998). However, this does not mean that external factors have not played a role. The demonstration effect was an important factor that sustained the Third Wave. For example, in South Asia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal in that order moved towards democracy in a short space of time. The heightened concern of the international community for the protection of human rights and minority rights has also been helpful. So has been the pressure of donors who at times have made the availability of foreign aid conditional to recipient countries that protect human rights and adhere to democratic practices. The facilitation of democracy through technical assistance in areas such as the judiciary and the legislature has also made some contribution to the process. This means that to a limited extent democracy can be "learned."

Historical evidence points to a complex set of factors that initiate and sustain the process of democratisation in a variety of economic, political, and social environments (Diamond 1990a). Historically some developing countries such as India and Sri Lanka in Asia and Botswana in Africa have maintained democratic systems that they "inherited" from the former colonial rulers in a complex interactive process of decolonization. The countries that entered the democratisation process under Huntington's "Third Wave" that started in 1974-75 with Portugal, Spain and Greece came from a variety of backgrounds. Some, especially the Latin American countries, were relatively rich middle income societies but others such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Tanzania and Uganda were among the poorest in the world. The political systems that preceded the democratic transformation varied from authoritarian monarchies (e.g. Nepal) to authoritarian socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, military dictatorships in Latin America and tribe-based authoritarian regimes in Africa. Typically civil society was weak but traditional primary groups such as ethnic and tribal alliances were strong in many of these countries. The civil societies were in various stages of development depending on the historical circumstances of each country. For example, in Central and Eastern Europe civil society institutions were essentially under the control of the state. To conform to the liberal model of democracy that have to become autonomous of the state (Schmitter 1991:25).

Typically it has been a political or economic crisis or both that led to the start of the process. Beyond that, however, it is difficult to generalise. The path to democracy is rich in variety in terms of the groups involved, the methods adopted and so forth.

In general there was some kind of popular movement for democracy in almost every country. The role played by the different segments of society in such movements has varied a great deal from country to country. For example, the military and the Catholic Church played

an active role in the Philippines. In Bangladesh the students, bureaucracy and the professional classes took the lead and the military remained neutral. In Thailand the business community was supportive of the democracy movement that had a large student involvement. In Burma the students, a section of the intelligentsia and the Buddhist clergy were in the forefront of that country's abortive movement for democracy. More recently in Indonesia the students led the agitation for democratic reform. In Poland the trade unions led the way. In most Central European countries the professional classes, especially intellectuals and writers were in lead roles.

*Civil Society*

Civil society is defined as all intermediary private and voluntary organisations that lie between the primary units of society such as individuals, families, clans, ethnic groups and so forth and formal state agencies and institutions (Schmitter 1991). The role of civil society in moving countries from authoritarian to democratic regimes has varied widely. In countries where some space existed for such organisation in the pre-democracy era, they were catalysts for change. In others, especially in many Central and Eastern European countries, except for relatively small clandestine underground organisations, private voluntary organisations (PVOs) free of state control simply did not exist. They have been established only after democratic reform.

Civil society is a necessary but not sufficient condition for democracy. As Freedom House (1993:81) points out "a society that does not have free individual and group expression in non-political matters is not likely to make an exception for political ones." The nature and composition of civil society can differ from country to country. However, for democracy to prosper civil society institutions must be autonomous of the state. In Central and Eastern Europe where the tradition has been for the state to dominate civil society this can be a problem in democratisation. Starting from the Polish trade unions that led that country's movement towards democracy, civil society institutions in Central Europe have struggled to free themselves from state control.

The question arises as to under what conditions civil society can best develop. One hypothesis is that a viable civil society cannot exist if there are large economic and social inequities. The reason is that the more powerful will dominate civil society organisations to the exclusion of the less powerful who normally would constitute the majority. This argument underscores yet again the point made earlier that a political democracy will find it difficult to survive without social and economic rights and some degree of equity.

An alternative hypothesis is that a strong civil society cannot exist without a free enterprise market economy. One reason is that free enterprise normally gives rise to multiple interest groups that compete with each other. Free enterprise also creates wealth in the hands of individuals who are then free to promote civil society organisations that stand for ideals that they support and are not beholden to the state.

In the last decade or so the international donor community has used civil society organisations, NGOs and PVOs, not only to promote democracy but also to promote development. This perceived link between democracy and development is important because it suggests that there is a mutually harmonious means to achieve two major goals of broad-based sustainable development

*Democracy and Development*

The concept of development until relatively recent times was defined narrowly to mean the growth of national output. However, now it is given a much broader definition. Here we define development as sustained and equitable growth that is environmentally sustainable and which takes place in a climate of freedom that gives the people civil and other liberties to enhance their economic and socio-cultural choices. This in essence suggests what may be called broad-based sustainable development (BBSD). BBSD by definition includes democracy. One interesting question then is whether economic and social development more narrowly defined helps to achieve democracy.

One of the most popular hypotheses is that socio-economic development (modernisation) brings about democracy. In this view democracy is a "higher order" need that follows "basic needs" such as food, shelter, and health. The latter are prior needs that must be satisfied (Maslow:1954). Some theorists (e.g. Cassinelli 1961) argue that "a modern democratic state can exist only in a society that has solved the problems of material well being." Dahl believes that adequate institutions and a citizenry, especially a middle class, receptive to democratic ideals, must exist for democratisation to take place. All these views are in accord with what is often described as the "Lipset thesis" (Lipset 1959; 1963) that economic development not only leads to democracy but that it is essential for democracy to come into being.

Taking a cue from this there are many Third World political leaders who subscribe to the view that basic material needs must be met before their societies can practice democracy. Some go even beyond and assert that there is a trade-off between democracy and development. If they have to choose between the two, many say that they would prefer the latter. We need to verify the historical validity of these arguments.

As Stephen Haggard (1990) notes, in the long run there is a definite positive association between economic prosperity and democracy. In general the rich industrialised countries enjoy democratic institutions and freedoms. Conversely it is rare to see democracy thrive under conditions of economic deprivation.

Diamond (Marks and Diamond 1992) finds "human development" to be the most powerful predictor of the likelihood of democracy. He notes that there is strong historical evidence to support the theory that development promotes democracy. Hadenius (1992) examines the relationship between democracy and development using statistical models based

on the assumption that democracy is the dependent variable. He finds some support for the relationship but determining causality is a problem in some of the cases.

Huber *et.al* (1993) have argued that historically, capitalist development has helped to establish and sustain democracy by weakening the landlord class and strengthening the middle class and working class.

The above arguments notwithstanding, in general, the evidence is weak to support the view that development always brings about democracy. In some countries (e.g. Central and Eastern Europe, and more recently in Nigeria and Indonesia) economic failure has acted as a catalyst to bring about democratic change. In some others (e.g. South Korea and Taiwan) economic success has acted as a catalyst. Yet in some others such as Singapore economic success has failed to move the regime towards a more democratic dispensation.

Does slow or inadequate development undermine democracy? The answer, at least in terms of the South Asian experience, is ambiguous. For example, India's annual per capita GDP growth rate in recent decades has averaged around 2.5% to 3%. The country is faced with a high unemployment rate and extensive and acute poverty. In Sri Lanka too growth since independence in 1948 has not been sufficient to provide employment to the growing labour force and raise living standards. Economic pressure was one factor that led to the dark days of Indian democracy in the mid-1970s when Indira Gandhi imposed Emergency Rule on the country. In Sri Lanka a youth rebellion threatened the democratically elected government twice within a space of twenty years in the early 1970s and late 1980s. However, democracy has survived if not thrived in both countries. Clearly there is a wider explanation than economics – the depth and stability of key institutions such as the justice system and the media, institutional, the strength of the middle class, and so forth – to explain South Asian democracy (see Hermann and Richardson 1998).

Now we come to the second and broader question, does democracy help economic and social development? This is one of the most commonly raised questions in discussions on democracy and development. If democracy promotes development, the latter in turn will help to sustain the former. The two will become mutually reinforcing. It is also a particularly pertinent question for the donor community. If the answer is positive the case for linking foreign assistance to democracy becomes that much stronger.

At the theoretical level there are two opposing theses. Those who believe that democracy does not help development point out the following. Firstly, democracy encourages ethnic and other cleavages and creates instability that jeopardises development. Secondly, political elites respond to pressure groups that cause distortions in resource allocation. Third, democracy puts pressure on the rulers to redistribute ahead of growth. What is required for development is more saving and less consumption. That is easier to achieve under an authoritarian regime that can take unpopular decisions.

On the other side stands the compatibility school. They argue that democracy promotes civil and political rights, property rights, free flow of information and the rule of law, all of which are seen as pre-conditions to development.

What is the evidence for either thesis? There is no definitive answer in favour of either. Przeworski and Limongi (1993) who surveyed 18 studies on this question conclude that "politics do matter, but "regimes" do not capture the relevant differences." (p 65) Sirowy and Inkeles (1990) who surveyed the available literature notes that "democracy does not widely and directly facilitate more rapid economic growth" (p 150). The World Bank in its 1991 *World Development Report* (pp132-134) reached much the same conclusion. Successful economic development has occurred under both democratic as well as non-democratic regimes. The three South-east Asian countries Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore whose governments are relatively more authoritarian than those of India and Sri Lanka have done better in economic development than the latter two. However, Burma and the Philippines who also have had authoritarian regimes have done much worse than either Sri Lanka or India. Thus, based on these experiences it is difficult to argue that there is a democracy-development choice as such.

*Governance and Development*

The concept of governance has been defined in literature in two senses, one narrow and the other broad. The World Bank, for example, which uses it in the narrow sense, defines good governance as "sound development management encompassing public sector management, accountability, the legal framework for development and, information and transparency." (World Bank 1992:2) The World Bank uses this restrictive definition to steer clear of contentious politics.

Although "sound development management" may seem devoid of politics, in reality this may not be so. For example, the World Bank is expanding its programs that assist PVOS and NGOs. This is done by creating trust funds in recipient countries that channel funds to the latter. In most cases such as those established in Sri Lanka the funds are meant to help the poor through job creation programs and other social programs. Such programs serve to strengthen the non-state actors or civil society, which is bound to have repercussions on the balance of political power in that society.

The broader definition of the term governance refers to "good government of society" (Boeneiger 1992:267) This broader definitions of governance generally imply the legitimacy of authority, public responsiveness and public accountability of government. These conditions can be satisfied only by a democratic regime. Thus good governance means democratic governance. In this sense, there is no difference between the questions "does democracy help development?" and "does good governance help development?". However, good governance in the narrower (World Bank) sense could exist even in non-democratic regimes. In what follows I will discuss the issue from both viewpoints.

First, let us consider the relationship between the narrow concept of governance meaning sound development management, and development. Sound development management is seen as essential for sustained economic growth. However, it is entirely conceivable to have good governance and good economic growth without democracy. East Asian NICS generally had sound economic management that helped economic development with improved equity but were not democratic. A notable exception to this rule would be Indonesia that did very well economically until the recent financial crisis but not too well in governance even in the narrow sense of the term because of the lack of transparency and widespread corruption in economic management. But usually countries that do poorly in governance (corruption, lack of accountability, misallocation of resources etc.) also perform poorly in development. Many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are in this category. In retrospect it is arguable that Indonesia's economic crisis was also caused, at least in part, by bad governance.

Good governance can help the process of democratisation in two ways. Firstly, it promotes essential democratic practices such as accountability that helps develop a political culture conducive to democracy. Secondly, good governance helps economic development, which in turn can help nurture democracy. For example, the gradual democratisation of South Korea and Taiwan bear witness to this pattern.

*Democracy and Economic Reform*

A connected issue is the relationship between democracy and market-oriented economic reform to which almost every developing country is now committed. Even the severest critics of the market in developing countries generally concede two points. Firstly, that it is a generally efficient system to allocate resources for production. Secondly, that an independent civil society that a market economy produces is indispensable for democracy (Diamond and Plattner 1993b).

Does democracy help or hinder market reform? Theoretical arguments – several of which are common to the discussion in the preceding section – can be made in favour of both sides. Democracy can reinforce market-oriented development in several ways. The freer flow of information helps the market perform better. An accountable and transparent system checks corruption. The rule of law guarantees property rights that helps capitalist production. Democracy may also lead to reforms that transfer resources from privileged sections of the community – urban areas, to under-privileged sections – rural areas, that may foster more sustainable and equitable growth.

Democracy may also lead to non-market and anti-development solutions in resource allocation. For example, politicians may succumb to the pressure of lobby groups and sectarian interests. In a society that is politically mobilised along ethnic fault lines this could happen easily. Sri Lanka is one such example. Some of its affirmative action programs such as the one that distributed university places using criteria other than simple examination performance played an important role in precipitating the current ethnic crisis.

Moreover, if liberal democracy leads to a minimal role for the state, that too may be harmful to development. In the past in many developing countries the state may have been over-involved in the economy. Thus some disengagement may be justified. However, the state has to play a key role to create an adequate regulatory environment and fill the gaps created by market failure. Some note that an authoritarian government will be better prepared to take hard decisions in economic stabilisation and structural adjustment programmes.

The empirical evidence available to resolve the debate is inconclusive. The World Bank (1991:133-34) notes that the "democratic-authoritarian distinction itself fails to explain adequately whether or not countries initiate reform, implement it effectively, or survive its political fallout." Several authors (*Journal of Democracy* 1994) who reviewed the relationship between economic reform democracy have pointed out that it is possible for a band of technocrats to undertake the "first stage" of economic reform – stabilisation and a few institutional changes. However, they have concluded that more thorough going institutional reform is possible only if significant political support could be mobilised.

*Democracy and Equity*

We defined equity as an integral part of development. Does democracy promote equitable growth? In some countries, social welfare has improved as a result of democracy because the competition for the votes of the masses promotes welfare policies. Sri Lanka is an example. Sen (1981) has pointed out that it is a historical fact that famines have not occurred in democratic societies (e.g. India) but have occurred in authoritarian societies (e.g. China) where other circumstances were roughly comparable. That is because in democracies a free media alerts the authorities to an impending disaster and the rulers are more sensitive to the needs of the people.

However, even in the case of equity the rule is not without exceptions. For example, in China, under an authoritarian socialist regime, social welfare improved as a result of deliberate government policy to provide basic needs to the people. In the NICS of East Asia that had authoritarian capitalist regimes, social welfare improved partly as a result of economic growth – more employment and higher wages – and partly as a result of state policy that promoted health and education to facilitate economic growth. Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that in general, democracy, because it ensures political competition, offers superior distribution gains than an authoritarian regime (Olson 1990). Sirowy and Inkeles (1990:151) after assessing all the available evidence conclude that at least "political democracy does not widely exacerbate inequality."

The UNDP (1990) that looks at development from what it calls a "people-oriented" point of view asserts that "human development is incomplete without human freedom." This is more in line with our concept of BBSD. The goal of human development, UNDP argues, is to "increase people's choices; But for people to exercise their choices, they must enjoy freedom – cultural, social, economic and political" (UNDP 1991:20). It makes the point that "launching and promoting human development does not require the sacrifice of freedom..." (UNDP 1991:21) On the contrary, political freedom allows people to participate in decision-making

and paves the way to "truly people-centered" development. Sen (1994:32) has made a similar point that there are "extensive inter-connections between the enjoyment of political rights and the appreciation of economic needs."

*Democracy, Development and Violent Conflict*

We close this essay by tying up the third of our triumvirate, violent conflict to democracy and development. The essential point made here is that violent conflict can undermine both democracy and development. At the same time both democracy and development sensibly directed can help to avoid violent conflict.

We noted earlier in this essay that most violent intra-state conflicts occur in multi-ethnic societies. Thus the first question to ask is what sort of political arrangements would be appropriate for such societies to avoid violent conflict and channel disputes towards non-violent political processes. First, the broader polyarchic approach of Dahl is more appropriate for such a context. The important point is the stress on the "highly inclusive" level of political participation. Thus the mere presence of a system that permits for the "struggle for the people's vote" is not sufficient.

The nature of political and civil liberties in a multi ethnic society must take into account the ethnic factor in three important ways. First, personal security rights together with the right not to be discriminated on grounds of ascriptive classification – race, ethnicity, caste etc. – form the hard core of human rights. If they are well protected a society would have gone a long way towards achieving democracy.

Second, in more recent times, a set of group rights – right to self determination, linguistic and cultural autonomy etc. – have made their appearance as rights. The concept of group rights, however, has become controversial in many countries that have affirmative action programs to help disadvantaged groups. The current debate on affirmative action in the US is one prominent example. A second example from nearer home is the controversy that was provoked by the Mandel Commission proposal in India to increase quotas in state jobs and university places for scheduled and depressed caste groups.

Third, there is significant disagreement between western political leaders and non-western leaders regarding the relative importance of these rights. For example, East Asian leaders emphasise group and communal rights – e.g. security of the community – as against individual rights stressed by western leaders. Thus the Malaysian government views the *Bhumiputra* policy as a legitimate means of protecting and advancing the rights of an ethnic group. To Western eyes the policy may look like a violation of individual rights of the non-*Bhumiputra.*

The second major requirement for violence avoidance is to have a politically inclusive model of government. First there has to be power sharing at the centre to cultivate a sense of nationhood. For example, some have argued that a presidential system is more suitable for a multi ethnic society because it may empower the minority by bestowing on it the balance of

power. The election of the executive president of Sri Lanka by a nation-wide single electorate is cited as a case in point.

Second, the recognition of the right to self determination by minority groups and the right to linguistic and cultural autonomy have made devolution the best vehicle to grant such group rights. Thus devolution is a meaningful extension of democracy.

The developmental implications of such arrangements can be viewed from two perspectives. On the one hand, additional governmental structures can be costly and a heavy burden on a resource-poor country. Often there is unnecessary duplication and red tape. The devolved units of government may also not have adequate management capacity and technically qualified personnel to perform efficiently. On the other hand, if devolution improves economic efficiency and helps to maintain ethnic peace one would have the best of both worlds. However, we noted earlier that the efficiency argument was an empirical issue and may not always be realised. If devolution is necessary to maintain, ethnic peace, and reach a national accord for long term peace and stability the price is probably worth paying.

If so, devolution needs to be seen not as an economic investment but as a political investment to empower minorities. The "economic" payoff in such instances is an indirect and long term one arising from ethnic peace and political stability.

In this regard Sri Lanka and Malaysia are contrasting examples. Both countries have roughly equal populations. In 1960 Malaysia's per capita income was $283 and that of Sri Lanka $152. Today Malaysia enjoys a per capita income (US $4,680 in 1997) that is nearly six times as much as that of Sri Lanka's (US $800).

The differences in economic growth between the two countries have to be explained in terms of a multiplicity of factors (see Bruton 1992). However, ethnic peace enjoyed by Malaysia in the last three decades and the ethnic violence that has plagued Sri Lanka in the last fifteen years in particular are important elements of that explanation.

Malaysia has enjoyed uninterrupted ethnic peace and economic prosperity for nearly thirty years. That country's "ethnic peace accord" that is incorporated into the constitution has much inefficiency from a strict economic point of view. Its affirmative action program is just one such example. However, Malaysia would not have achieved the economic success that it has had without paying that price.

In contrast Sri Lanka's development has been seriously hampered by the ethnic conflict. The cost of the internal civil war after 1980 has been in the billions of dollars (Richardson and Samarasinghe 1991). It has detracted the attention of the national leadership and the people at large away from the development effort and towards ethnic strife.

Such experiences hold important policy lessons for those who wish to promote both democracy and development while avoiding violent conflict. One is to support programs of

devolution from a democracy perspective. The other is to promote economic development programs that lead to a) empowerment of minorities and the less powerful and b) lend them to implementation on a devolved basis rather than on a highly centralised basis.

*Conclusion*

Neither democracy nor development is easy to sustain in the long run. Not every democratic transition was sustained in the previous two "waves" (Huntington 1991:13-21). In the Third Wave one can cite Peru, Nigeria and Algeria as notable examples of countries that have backslid after making a beginning towards democratisation. Here again too much of generalisation is misleading. As Karl (1991) notes the democratic transition is characterised by a very high degree of uncertainty.

There are country specific reasons that drive the process either towards progression or towards regression. The nature of the bargaining process varies from country to country. In most Latin American countries and in some countries in Asia such as Pakistan and Thailand the bargaining takes place between the military and institutions of civil society, mostly political parties. In Central and Eastern Europe it is between the state and civil society. In Africa, frequently, it is essentially between ethnic or tribal groups.

A few key factors are found to be frequently recurring themes in the literature that discusses the issue of consolidation and sustainability of democracy. One is economic development and modernisation that we have already discussed. Another factor is political culture, which is the practice of tolerating different viewpoints and adhering to democratic norms and rules in political behaviour and government.

A third factor is historical tradition. Scholars such as Sartori (1987a; 1987b) and Austin (1990) who take a historical perspective of democratisation also stress the long time period that was required by Western countries to establish democracy. Austin notes that the "process of democratisation was long, over a period of slow enfranchisement, at a time of increasing prosperity." (p.14). Sartori points out that democracy has evolved to its present stage over a period of 2,000 years through a process of trial and error that incorporated historical learning of concepts such as power, liberty and equality. Two thousand years is a long time to wait. In any event, one hundred and fifty years ago no country had a political democracy as measured by current standards. Most European countries became democratic only in this century. Be that as it may, historical tradition is important. The implication is that it is not easy to establish and sustain a democratic political system in many Third World countries that lack the political culture and historical experience to nurture democratic institutions. The failures of or setbacks to democratisation can then be explained, at least in part, by the cultural/historical incompatibility hypothesis. But it is that very lack of democratic culture and tradition that makes the "can learn democracy" school argue for pro-active assistance in this field.

The school of thought, dubbed by Kusterer (1998) as the "can do" school, views democracy as something that can be taught/learnt. From this viewpoint, democratisation is not

a gradual evolution but a process that lays the foundation and creates a demand for democracy. Once introduced, given political culture, the sustainability of democracy and its consolidation depends on a complex set of factors such as regime legitimacy and performance, political leadership, social structure, socio-economic development (including socio-economic inequality and population growth), associational life, state-society relationship, political institutions (political parties, political party system, constitutional structure), ethnic relations, intra-country regional relations, the military and international factors (Diamond *et al* 1990a:9).

Sustaining broad-based economic development is equally difficult. In the developing world, those countries that have sustained economic development over a long period of time are the exception – mostly the Asian NICS – and not the rule. Sub-Saharan Africa has fared disastrously in the last two decades suffering from negative growth. Many of the Latin American countries also experienced negative growth in the 1980s.

The factors that act as impediments to sustainable development vary from political instability to bad economic policies to unfavourable international markets to environmental degradation.

The purpose of the somewhat detailed discussion on the linkage between democracy and development was to show the complexity of the relationship and the multiplicity of factors that influence that relationship. Ethnicity enters this picture only as one factor among many. How important that factor is to achieve sustainable democracy and development depends on the particular circumstances of the country in question.

The essays in Diamond and Plattner (1993a) illustrate this point. For example, Diamond, Linz and Lijphart argue for institutions and mechanisms that would mitigate ethnic and other such conflicts and cleavages and build consensus. Horowitz (1992) has argued on similar lines in advocating a governmental structure in post Apartheid South Africa. However, not everyone agrees. For example, Lipset asserts that economic conditions and political culture are the critical variables and not institutional form.

The fragility of the democratisation and development processes and the complexity of the factors that influence their sustainability are seen if only the different regions of the world are considered let alone individual countries. In Central and Eastern Europe a large number of factors listed above threaten sustainability of both. The process of democratisation in Latin America is not robust and institutions are poorly developed. Economic crisis then threatens to undermine whatever that has been achieved. In Sub-Saharan Africa the process has produced mixed results with relative successes in countries such as Uganda, Zambia and Tanzania and failures in many. The situation in Somalia and Rwanda are the extreme examples where the ethnic (tribal) factor has overridden everything else. Nigeria is another example where tribal, religious and ethnic (regional) conflicts and unfavourable economic trends have fed on each other to undermine democracy and economic stability.

The illustrative examples cited above raises a fundamental issue. That is the extent to which new institutions in a developing multi ethnic society will have to be free of these primary

ties to ensure sustainable democracy and development free of violent conflict. This is where the South and Southeast Asian stories become particularly relevant. The three Southeast Asian countries Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore have been far more successful than their South Asian neighbours in achieving sustainable development, albeit with a reduced form of democracy for the most part. All three have tried to downplay democratic pluralism and cultural pluralism to build a sense of nationhood. In contrast in the two democratic South Asian countries, India and Sri Lanka, cultural and religious pluralism have been dominant factors that shaped public policy. The language issue in Sri Lanka is one manifestation of this. The Hindu-Muslim religious rivalry in India is another manifestation. This has had a price. In the case of Sri Lanka economic competition took a destructive ethnic political turn. The present ethnic conflict originated, among other things, largely with disputes over job quotas and college places quotas that had linkages to the language issue. In the case of India the Hindu-Muslim issue bedevils almost every aspect of public policy from Indo-Pakistan relations to trade policy to the distribution of budget funds between military and civilian uses. The challenge that multi-ethnic societies such as Sri Lanka face as they move into the next millennium is to develop a set of institutions and nurture a political culture that would help eschew sectarian violence to focus on broad-based sustainable development.

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# Nationalisms Today and Yesterday

## Michael Roberts

### The Intellectual Milieu and Knowledge

The horrors perpetrated by the national socialist regime of Germany have conditioned the evaluations of nationalism by the intelligentsia in the West since 1945. In general, nationalism has been regarded with reservation, if not antipathy. Not surprisingly, such distaste is quite marked in the writings of an older generation of Jewish scholars, such as Elie Kedourie, Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm.[1]

In the colonial lands ruled by various Western powers the intellectual milieu, till recently, was quite otherwise. The anti-colonial struggle of diverse nationalist forces was looked upon with favour – and even fervour. The Indian nationalist struggle against the British served as an exemplar for many Asian and African intellectuals. Such an exemplary instance, embodied in the icons of Gandhi and Nehru, placed the accent on a secular shade of nationalism.

This intellectual climate did not wholly discount more religious forms of nationalism – of the sort seen in Burma, Sri Lanka and Pakistan in the 1940s-1960s. The claims of Buddhist spokesmen in independent Sri Lanka or Ceylon, to the effect that the Christians had disproportionate influence and that a catholic cabal organised influence in unsavoury ways, received a sympathetic hearing from many local academics. Moreover, the forward thrusts of Sinhala Buddhist nationalists who mobilised themselves under the banners of the Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna and the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP) (in which the Sri Lanka Freedom Party under S W R D Bandaranaike was the dominant force) gained considerable legitimacy because they were linked with the claims of the have-nots challenging the haves. That is, these demands represented a populist groundswell of nativists and radical socialists attacking the westernised and the privileged. As a result, the Sinhala Buddhist ideology was no longer deemed a "communalism." After the 1956 electoral transformation both foreign and local scholars gave it legitimacy as a "nationalism."[2]

A critical plank in the programme espoused by the MEP was the demand that Sinhala should be immediately rendered into the language of administration. This not only hit at the interests of the English-educated elite, but also undermined those of the Sri Lankan Tamils – who had major stakes in the government services and professional fields. Immediately, indeed during the lead up to the elections in 1956, Tamil interests coalesced

around the Federal Party which, till then, had only received a secondary share of the Sri Lankan Tamil votes.

The subsequent jostling and conflict around this issue led to anti-Tamil riots in Gal Oya in 1956, mob attacks on Tamils living in Sinhala areas in May-June 1958 and a Tamil *satyagraha* campaign in the early 1960s. The ideological ingredients which inspired the Sinhala Buddhist upsurge of 1956 were also evident in the JVP movement of circa 1966-71, the university admissions policy of the United Front Government in the early 1970s and the intimidatory practices against Indian Tamil plantation labour during the implementation of land reform circa 1972-73.

Such developments in their turn[3] inspired the Sri Lankan Tamil activists from within and without the Federal Party to escalate their demands: they desired total separation.[4] Their reconstruction of the Tamil word for Sri Lanka, Ilam or (Eelam), converted it into a state-to-be made up of the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

Articulated for the early 1970s, this demand gathered momentum and enabled militant groups of Tamil youth, the "boys" as they were referred to by Tamils of the older generation, to displace the traditional leadership of the Tamil United Liberation Front (a re-working of the Federal Party) as a power in the north and east of the island. There were over 30 revolutionary groups of "boys" at one stage in the early 1980s. While some withered away, the principal groups have been decimated or subsumed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which established its power over extensive areas of the Northern and Eastern Provinces since the mid-1980s.

This is not the place for a detailed recounting of Sinhala-Tamil relations and other developments from the 1970s and 1980s. Suffice it to note that, (i) Tamils living in the Sinhala-dominated areas were subject to pogroms[5] in 1977 and 1983; (ii) that over the last twenty years one has seen a spate of atrocities committed both by the Tamil militants and the armed forces answering to Colombo; and (iii) measures of ethnic cleansing in the Northern Province under the Tiger regime which victimised the handful of Sinhalese as well as the Muslim minority previously resident in the region.

Such excesses have moved several scholars to adopt a critical stance towards the nationalisms which Sri Lanka has witnessed in both the British and post-independence periods. Several expressions of nationalism have been depicted as "chauvinist" and "fascist." Such pejorative characterisations have even been extended to the Sinhala Buddhist upsurge of the 1950s and 1960s, even by certain scholars who applauded these political forces during that point of time. Such re-considerations on their part have been bolstered by the influence of a younger generation of scholars who did not experience the 1950s era. If cover design and title are adequate evidence, some of these writers even desire the "unmaking (of) the nation," adopting a post-modernist position which would, by implication, splinter the Sri Lankan cosmos into an itsy-bitsy-teeny-weeny land of atomised individuals.[6]

In pointing to such intellectual tendencies, then, my preamble underlines that which is a commonplace: knowledge is not neutral and is subject to the context of production. The subjectivity of each author necessarily conditions his/her interpretation. This is not simply a story of scholars being influenced by their ethnic background as Tamils, Sinhalese or whatever. Indeed, there are several Westerners who have revealed themselves to be highly partisan in their analyses. Such leanings are usually obvious, however, to anyone with background knowledge. What I wish to highlight here are the leanings that are less obvious, namely, those associated with the interpretative subjectivity of theoretical orientation. Such orientations vary: empiricist positivism of a transactionalist sort, Marxist transactionalism, psychological functionalism, Foucaultian de-constructionism of various hues and a contextualised hermeneutic approach weighted towards culture (an orientation which I favour) are among those which feature in the Sri Lankan historiography. Not all authors are reflexive about their leanings. Readers, nevertheless, have every right to demand that authorial subjectivity does not preclude each author from confronting positions and data that are antithetical to their positions. Unfortunately, however, the writings on the ethnic conflict are replete with essays whose selectivity of omission (either in facts or pertinent literature) appear to be as studied as glaring.

## Communitarianness and Nationalism

The nationalist ideologies which one has witnessed in Sri Lanka during the twentieth century differ considerably from the thinking which inspired the liberation struggles of the past,[7] whether that of the Tamils in the Kingdom of Jaffna opposed to the Portuguese intrusion or the sustained resistance of the Sinhalese in the Kingdoms of Sitawaka and Kandy to the different imperial regimes. Not all liberation struggles are necessarily nationalisms.

Nationalism involves a fusion of several elements. Firstly, it is sustained by a collective identity which has developed out of a varying combination of factors –commonly sets of cultural practices of an everyday sort associated with cuisine, coiffeur and rite; supposed kinship; language; territorial associations; and common institutional context.[8] Secondly, this collective identity is both inter-subjective and relational; and involves distinctions from contiguous neighbours in ways which sustain a group's sense of "Us-ness" – its boundaries in opposition to "Them," viz. various named Others.[9] Thirdly, a patriotism that centres on this collectivity and treats the men, women and children (in trans-gendered and gendered ways) as an exclusive community. And finally the concept of a nation (or nationality) together with the theories of self-determination and popular sovereignty which argue that this collectivity and its institutional forms must receive one's terminal loyalty.[10]

Understood thus, it can be said that the latter half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of two strands of nationalism in British Ceylon: viz. a trans-ethnic Ceylonese nationalism and a Sinhalese nationalism. Both these ideologies developed in opposition to

the domination of the British. At the individual level they could overlap – and one of the tasks of the future historiography should be to identify the ways in which these strands of anti-colonial opposition shaded off into each other. One part of this enterprise calls for a careful delineation of the distinctions and overlaps between Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and Sinhala nationalism through a focus on the political expressions of Sinhala Christian (Protestant and Catholic) activists.

While a lively Hindu revitalisation movement emerged among the Tamils from the 1840s, following the inspiring lead provided by Arumuga Navalar (1822-79), on present knowledge it does not appear feasible for us to speak of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism in the British period. Navalar challenged the hegemonic claims of the Christians from the position of a Hindu Saivite; his school readers have no reference to Tamil of Jaffna history; and "being Tamil meant being Saivite and speaking Tamil (and Sanskrit)."[11] This was in keeping with the general propensity in the Hindu world and among Tamilians to shy away from histories of states tied to the chronological succession of kings. Val Daniel indicates that "most Jaffna Tamils are not deeply concerned about their ancient kings, kingdoms and dates" – indeed they "are indifferent to such a history." Their reflections on the past are weighted towards the "Hindu religious and Tamil cultural heritage of dance, literature, architecture and sculpture."[12] Such leanings towards heritage rather than state history have a transcendental religious cast; its "puranic history" in Chatterjee's terms.[13] Perhaps for these reasons Sri Lankan Tamil activists in British times do not seem to have spoken of a Tamil *jatiya* (or its equivalents) in any sustained manner.

Nevertheless, there was a well-developed sense of being Tamil that was sustained by a range of everyday practices, not least feelings of pride in their Tamil dialect in ways which separated them from the 'less correct' Tamilians of India as well as those caste-based practices that maintained endogamy. Thus, one can speak of a Ceylon Tamil communitarianness or ethnic consciousness, just as one can speak of Malay, Borah, Parsi, Colombo Chetty, Burgher and Mohammedan Mðor (i.e. Muslim or *marakkala)* communitarianness – collective identities which did not prelude internal distinctions, but which were nevertheless sustained by everyday interactions and ritual preferences that distinguished these collectivities from each other.[14] In the English language such types of collective affiliation were recognised, both in everyday speech and political statements, by the term "community."

The group consciousness of the Ceylon Tamils in British Ceylon, I aver,[15] was heightened and sustained rather than weakened by the hegemony of the Vellalar caste within the community.[16] This communitarianness provided the foundations for the explicit theory of nationalist rights espoused by the Vellalar leaders of the Federal Party in the late 1940s (see below: note 54). One cannot overestimate the importance of such foundations· and the sense of "Ceylon Tamilness" which they sustained – if for no other reason that they separated the Ceylon Tamils from the recent migrants known widely as Indian Tamils and rendered the latter quite wary of the political confederations which Ceylon Tamil activists have attempted to impose on them from time to time.

When the Federal Party played the numbers game from 1949 onwards and attempted to extend its political clout by speaking of the rights of "Tamil speaking peoples," one saw an ambit claim which also attempted to embrace the Muslims (i.e. Mohammedan Moors) who were 6 to 7% of the population and generally used Tamil dialects as their mother tongue.[17] Very few people in Sri Lanka were fooled by such a claim. The Muslim Moors were recognised to be a distinct community – albeit one with internal regional variations.

Neither did the Muslim leaders play ball with the Sri Lanka Tamil leaders. Ever since the 1940s their political strategy has differed from that of the Ceylon (Sri Lanka) Tamils.[18] This distinctiveness has been sharpened since the 1970s as the long-standing hostility of Tamils and Muslims in the Eastern Province entered the front reaches of the political field of manoeuvre. This development has emerged in part because of the growing politicisation of "backwood regions" in Sri Lanka; and in part because the Tamil Eelamist groups have insisted that the Eastern Province – a British creation – is part of "their traditional homelands,"[19] a claim that would place the Muslims in the Eastern Province, a body with significant territorial concentrations in the southern parts of Eastern Province, under the hegemony of the Sri Lankan Tamils. In the result the EP Muslims have emerged as an important interest group within the political firmament – a body that is able and willing to give a territorial cast to its claims, albeit one that is not based, thus far, on a claim to nationality (or nationhood).

Likewise, the Indian Tamil leadership in the southern and central areas is showing signs of territorialising its claims as an interest group. This has been made possible by two processes: (a) the extension of citizenship rights to these people by the UNP regimes of the post 1977 era; and (b) an increase of their population by birth and internal migration over the years to the point where they now constitute the biggest single group (47% in 1981) in Nuwara Eliya District in the tea-growing central highlands. Ironically, the latter process has been encouraged by the violent attacks and terrors to which they were subject in the early 1970s, 1977 and 1983.[20]

## Collective Identities in British Ceylon

Contrary to theories fashionable for India today neither the caste communities nor the various ethnic groups which one found in British Ceylon were "inventions" or creations of the British *raj*.[21] To argue thus would be to overestimate British power and render the local peoples into malleable beings. Such categories as *marakkala* or *yona*, *kabari*, *damila* and *sinhala* existed in the Sinhala language before the British and the Portuguese eras (and Tamil equivalents would probably have existed). The relative openness of Sinhala (and Tamil?) society made for a pluralism that accommodated, and even absorbed, migrants. The Sinhalaisation of Malayali or Tamil-speaking immigrants over the centuries did not eliminate the reproductions of various communal distinctions; rather they reinforced them.

Such migrants were absorbed into specific Sinhala castes – indeed bodies of migrants could even become the core founding element in a new Sinhala caste. Caste, then, was a critical organising principle in the pre-British social order. But castes formed a segmentary pattern within each community, with the Govigama serving as the central core and apical reference point in the Sinhala case, and the Vellalar fulfilling a similar role among the Tamils in the extreme north. Caste endogamy also helped, through unintended consequence, to reproduce the distinctions between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, while also separating these peoples from the Moors (*marakkala*).

In the medieval and early colonial periods Sri Lanka was an integral part of the Indian Ocean trading networks. The traffic in people and goods between the Indian subcontinent and the island was such that the Dutch who had interests in the Coromandel and Malabar coasts, referred to all the Malayali and Tamil personnel in the island as "Malabars." The British continued this nomenclature for a short while, but they quickly shifted to the local usage: viz. Tamils. Unlike the Dutch, moreover, they ruled the whole island. And they quickly dismantled the old mercantilist practices and gave less weight to caste by abolishing the institutionalised system of forced labour services.

In a word, the British established an institutional framework conducive to a market economy and capitalist entrepreneurship. This meant standardised bureaucratic practices – which extended to statistical records such as census operations and blue books. Such routinised practices organised the local people through naming, naming which supported the consolidation of collective objects, viz. European, Malay, Burgher, Moor, Sinhala etc.[22]

Such names were derived from pre-British practices, as learnt from the local headmen and the European descendants becoming known as Burghers. But under the British order they received a greater systematisation. The boundary lines may also have been sharpened by the permeation of an either: or epistemology associated with Enlightenment thought and rationalised bureaucratic-capitalist modalities.[23]

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the work of Indological scholars (e.g. Max Muller, Caldwell) also introduced new understandings of the terms "Aryan" and "Dravidian." These linguistic concepts received a racial twist. The understanding took root – among all and sundry – that the Sinhalese were an Aryan race and that the Tamils were Dravidians. As the monumental achievements of the Rajarata civilisation were revealed by exploration and archaeological work, the Sinhalese in particular were able to contrast their contemporary situation with the glorious days of the past. One must, however, beware of reading the late twentieth century into the late nineteenth century. Pride in such civilisational pastness extended beyond the Sinhalese to many other Ceylonese: to Burghers and Tamils for instance. The colonial context ensured that.

Long before such Indological inputs, however, the English-educated Ceylonese were reading about the history of the British constitution and drinking at the well of European literature. Illustratively, therefore, one can say that the political philosophy of

such writers as John Locke as well as the romantic sentiments of Goethe, Carlyle, Wordsworth, Thomas de Quincy and Mazzini were imbibed by a small 'class' of individuals emerging from the Colombo Academy and the missionary schools. In brief, the theories of liberalism and nationalism were now available to the people living in British Ceylon. In a colonial context these two theories were synonymous in their implications: to argue that the executive (i.e. the Governor) should answer to the legislature potentially amounted to a plea for self-determination. That is, one had the ingredients at hand to hoist the British on their own ideological petard. Such intellectual inspirations also introduced a language of rights that differed in principle from the mode of propitiation associated with petitionary pleas to gods and high officials.

The rights were the rights of "Ceylonese," a term coined by the British to embrace all the coloured residents in the island and one that was usually a synonym for "natives" within the island. In the hands of locals who had read Locke and Mazzini – those wielding the weapon of rights – the term became a nationalist claim. The full flowering of this language was during the first half of the twentieth century, but its roots can be traced to the 1840s. This "Ceylonese nationalism" was of ecumenical cast – embracing and attracting Parsis, Burghers, Tamils, Moors, Malays, and Sinhalese.[24]

Ceylonese nationalism had to share 'space' with other strands of opposition to the British colonial order. In overview one can delineate three other major strands: (a) a Hindu revitalisation movement; (b) a Buddhist revitalisation movement; and (c) a Sinhala revitalisation movement which stridently protested against the decline of the Sinhala people in the face of Westernisation and the economic activities of a clutch of *para jati.*

The Hindu revival and its relationship to Tamil communitarianness has already been attended to briefly. While Buddhist revivalism, Sinhala nationalist sentiments and Ceylonese nationalism influenced each other and even overlapped at points, in any summary review it is convenient to consider these parallel strands separately. The emphasis throughout will be on the ideological content of these movements. Space does not permit me to dwell on the material circumstances of surplus appropriation and political subordination which promoted specific grievances that fuelled such movements at particular moments.

One of the overarching contextual conditions promoting all forms of resistance was the cultural imperialism of the British. The British personnel in Sri Lanka had no doubt about the superiority of their civilisation and technology. They looked down upon the "natives" – a term which could be deployed as an epithet, but was also a neutral label encompassing all local residents and Asian migrants. More often than not, in the British conception the Burghers were among the natives. But some Britons also viewed the Burghers as "half castes" – in explicit denigration which regarded them as embodiments of the vices of both worlds.[25]

The searing force of such pejoratives as "half caste," "blackey" and "native" inspired intense resentment. This was especially pronounced among the emerging middle class of educated Ceylonese. A new generation of young Burghers took up the cudgels in the early 1850s. Their journal, *Young Ceylon,* was literary in emphasis. But it was inspired by Mazzini's Young Italy concept. And where the British used the terms "Ceylonese" and "natives" synonymously as descriptive labels, these early nationalists gave the concept "Ceylonese" a political emphasis opposed to the miscellaneous rag-bag inscribed in the term "natives." In keeping with these inclinations they purchased the *Examiner* newspaper in 1859 and ran it as an organ which could show the world that the "children of Ceylon [would] speak for themselves."[26]

The *Examiner* survived till the 1890s. By then it was only one of the many vehicles of Ceylonese nationalism. Such aspirations were most pronounced among the middle class made up of lower-middle echelon government functionaries, merchants, plantation owners and members of the liberal professions.

The economic aspirations of this class were restricted by the racist emphases in British recruitment policy which constrained local access to the higher levels of the administration. The demand for "Ceylonisation," therefore, became a major plank in nationalist effort from the 1880s right through to the 1930s.[27] Though motivated in part by class interest, such demands must be understood against the circumstance of intense resentment at British colour prejudice and a parallel antipathy to the "colour bar" at the door of British clubs. When a leading official used the Trinity College prize-giving in 1906 as an occasion to emphasise the belief that Ceylonese did not have the character to hold the higher level jobs, the uproar and public protest was quite massive: Burghers, Tamils, Sinhalese and others were united in castigating the British government.[28]

By this stage, the early twentieth century, the demands for political reform inspired by the political philosophies of liberalism and nationalism had become vociferous. The examples provided by the Irish and Indian nationalist movements encouraged the Ceylonese spokesmen in these efforts. Events in the neighbouring sub-continent of India were avidly followed and provided several of the concepts (e.g. "*swaraj*" and "*swadeshi*") which were voiced from time to time. With the significant exception of the temperance movement, the Ceylonese reformers did not mount a mass agitation: the pace of constitutional reform between 1920 and 1931 obviated such a need. The story of reform has been detailed very capably elsewhere, notably by K M de Silva, and does not require recounting here.[29] The transfer of sovereignty to the island people, as Ceylonese, was slowed down by the Second World War, but eventually occurred in 1948.

The British confidence in their superiority extended to the religious realm. Especially in the early-mid nineteenth century this expressed itself in religious bigotry. The Evangelical missionaries and their sympathisers reviled the indigenous religions as "idolatrous," "pagan" and demonic – a mark of primitivism. Through their educational work and other activities they set out, with supreme confidence, to convert the "heathens."

Utilising the relative tolerance of the British order, Roman Catholic missionaries also participated in the latter process – profiting from the existence of a substantial number of indigenous Christians since Portuguese times.

As indicated earlier, Tamil resistance to these processes commenced in the 1840s in the form of a Hindu Saivite movement of revitalisation. Likewise, at about the same time, ola-leaf manuscript rebuttals of Christian arguments as well as petitions and protests expressed Buddhist opposition to the activities of the missionaries.[30] More widely articulated and sustained Buddhist resistance commenced in the 1860s as a number of *bhikkhus* and their lay supporters took to print and public platform in combating the Christian claim to superiority. The advent of the Theosophists in the 1880s encouraged the Buddhist reformers to start their own schools. By then several Buddhist laymen were active in this revitalising endeavour. Numerous associations, with the Buddhist Theosophical Society (1880), the Maha Bodhi Society (1891) and Young Men's Buddhist Association (1898) the most significant among them, served as institutional centres for this work. Their counter attacks often took a polemical form. It also pitted Sinhala Buddhists against indigenous Christians (Sinhala, Burgher, Bharata, Tamil). There were several localised confrontations between Buddhists and Catholics in the late nineteenth century. Such tensions have to be comprehended within a context which involved a competition for hearts and minds, a competition which encouraged symbolic claims to space and status.[31]

One of the leading spokesmen for the Buddhists was Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933). He was subsequently adopted as a cultural symbol by the Sinhala Buddhist forces of the 1950s. The publication of his writings in 1965 has resulted in the overestimation of his influence in his own life time because several scholars have failed to attend to the many fronts on which Buddhist revitalisation occurred. For the same reason inadequate weight has been attached in the historiography[32] to a broad front of Sinhala nationalism seeking to raise the Sinhalese from a situation of decline. In this view, dating from about the 1870s and presented vociferously for many decades, the Sinhalese people were in a condition of degeneration bordering on doom: for their traditional customs and morals were on the slide in the face of Westernised life ways.

Such activists claimed that the situation was aggravated by the economic weakness of the Sinhala people and an apathy which permitted the several *para jatin* (British, Moors, Coast Moors, Tamils and Cochinese) to exploit them economically. What one sees here, therefore, is a strident economic nationalism linked to cultural revitalisation. To several Buddhists this included their religion, but others clearly focused on the Sinhala language and their *sirit virit* and *kulacaritra* (customs). These were concerns that were shared by several Sinhala Christian activists, such as Revd. J S de Silva and E A Abayasekera.

The various strains of Sinhala, Sinhala Buddhist and Ceylonese nationalism coalesced and overlapped to some degree in the temperance campaigns of the early twentieth century, in 1904 and 1912-15. These campaigns were marked by considerable

popular participation – indeed, involving support and organisational networks that would compare well with some of the localised agitations mounted by the Indian National Congress.[34] However the momentum that was being developed by the 1912-15 campaign was arrested by the outbreak of "the 1915 riots" which involved widespread attacks on the Moors by segments of the Sinhala population who felt that their nationality and religion had been insulted in the course of disputes over religious processions.[35] The British authorities focused on the leaders of the temperance movement as the alleged instigators of these attacks.

When political agitation commenced once again from 1918-19 the discussions centred upon constitutional reform. The foreground of politics was occupied by the Ceylon National Congress; and, from 1931, by the State Council and its Board of Ministers. The Sinhala ideology associated with such figures as Piyadasa Sirisena and D H S Nanayakkara nevertheless remained a powerful undercurrent (one that has not been adequately researched).[36] Sirisena attempted to launch a Sinhala Party in 1931; and such forces eventually gathered round S W R D Bandaranaike to constitute the Sinhala Maha Sabha in the mid-1930s.

These forces faced one major disadvantage. From the late 1910s any sectionalist claim on behalf of a specific community was deemed "communalist." In the lexicon of politics in both India and Sri Lanka, this was a dirty word. Those Tamil associations which kept apart from the Ceylon National Congress and sought communal representation and/or minority rights were likewise branded with this label. From the mid-1930s a virile young force, namely, the Leftists, joined in the barrage of rhetoric which denied legitimacy to the Sinhala Maha Sabha and the Tamil associations. Here, then, was a new form of nationalism – a Marxist line of radical nationalism which challenged the bourgeois nationalists of the Congress at the same time that they castigated the Sinhala Maha Sabha and G G Ponnambalam. This position led them to oppose any co-operation with the British during the Second World War, a war deemed imperialist. The panache of the Leftists in the LSSP and Ceylon Communist Party (CCP) was such that they attracted many young men whom, as later events were to show, were more Sinhala nativist than deep-red Marxist.

## The 1940s and Beyond

In the mid-late 1940s the foreground of politics was occupied by the newly formed United National Party under D S Senanayake and the various left parties. The sectionalist forces under G G Ponnambalam and S W R D Bandaranaike were deemed "communalist" and thereby placed on the defensive. In any event both leaders were inveigled into the UNP by the attractions of ministerial office in independent Ceylon (Sri Lanka).

There were, nevertheless, impending signs of the future Sinhala upsurge of the underprivileged. Take the discussions surrounding the Declaration of Fundamental Rights

proposed by the Ceylon National Congress (CNC) in March 1945: one such right was embodied in the motion that "The culture, language and script of the minorities shall be protected." At committee level, Jayantha Wirasekera and Peter Galloluwa proposed that the words "language and script" should be deleted.[37] Their amending motion was defeated. But this attempt gains in significance from their social background and subsequent developments. On 26 May 1946 these two individuals were among those who vehemently opposed J R Jayewardene's motion to the effect that the CNC should merge with the new UNP. Their opposing motions were defeated, but they were part of a significant minority who could be broadly characterised as symbols of Maradana ranged against Cinnamon Gardens.[38] What is more, these Maradana Congressmen linked up with disaffected members of the right-wing elite to sustain the CNC into the year 1950, constituting what I have called "The Congress Rump."

At what turned out to be their last annual sessions, in January 1950, the members of the Congress Rump hurled invective at the UNP. The latter was castigated for supporting the continuing hegemony of the English language, thereby rendering "the vast majority of people ... [into] foreigners in their own land"; and for thinking "in pounds sterling instead of the Ceylon rupee" and for their "thraldom to a foreign mentality."[39] That such populist and nativist stirrings were not confined to the right flank of the political spectrum is indicated by a major split that occurred within the ranks of the LSSP (R) in October 1953 – when one third of the membership broke away. This event has been unresearched, but the composition of the breakaway group (led by P H William Silva, Henry Peiris, T B Subasinghe and Somaweera Chandrasiri) and fragmentary data suggest that the language issue and indigenist concerns were one set of factors promoting the split.[40] That such personnel coalesced with members of the UNP who followed Bandaranaike into the SLFP in 1951-52 and with local council personnel, ayurvedic physicians, vernacular teachers and bhikkhus in supporting the SLFP-led thrust of "linguistic nationalism" (K M de Silva's phrase) in 1956 is established knowledge. This thrust, in its turn, alarmed Tamils in ways that brought the Federal Party to the fore as the principal force representing the Sri Lankan Tamils. To trace this development we must return to the last decades of British rule.

There is a remarkable absence in the political vocabulary of the various associations and activists claiming to speak for Sri Lanka Tamil interests in the period 1918-46: there is no sustained reference to the concept of "nation" (or nationality). Rather their pronouncements in the English language refer to "the Tamil community" and speak of "minority rights."[41] Thus informed, Tamil activists worked in alliance with spokesmen for other minorities, notably the Moors (i.e. Muslims), to seek safeguards against potential domination by the majority Sinhalese population, when G G Ponnambalam emerged as their leading activist in the mid-1930s, he not only demanded weightages which would have drastically curtailed Sinhala representation, but also cultivated connections with British interest groups in Sri Lanka and London as counterweights to the specific pressures being exerted by the State Council for a further devolution of power.

This was hardly endearing to many Ceylonese and Sinhalese nationalists. It also alienated several Sri Lankan Tamils. The Tamil radicals of the day were attracted by the LSSP and the CCP. Tamils provided several active personnel for virtually all the Left parties till the 1960s. The abandonment of the principle of parity for Sinhala and Tamil by the LSSP and CCP in 1964, therefore, was a major development. Thereafter, new generations of Tamil radicals had no hearth in the south. Their energies went into the youth wing of the Federal Party (later TULF) and, from the early 1970s, into revolutionary Eelamist cells seeking a separate state for the Tamils.

That is to jump ahead. What requires emphasis is the remarkable fact that the first association to conceptualise the Tamils as a nationality was the CCP. This took place in October 1944 when the CCP presented a "Memorandum on a Federal Constitution" to the Working Committee of the Ceylon National Congress. Here, and in supporting resolutions, it was held that both the Sinhalese and the Tamils were (i.e. "are") "distinct historically-evolved nationalities." That is, each collectivity was a

> historically-evolved stable community of people, living in a contiguous territory as their traditional homeland, speaking a common language, having a common economic life and psychological make-up, manifested in a community of culture...

As such, they were deemed to have "the unqualified right to self determination;" and the proposed constitution for independent Ceylon should take "multi-national form" – including a "Chamber of Nationalities.[42]

The critical definition is straight out of *Stalin's Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*.[43] While the memorandum was drafted by Pieter Keuneman and A Vaidialingam, it is possible that it was also moulded by Heidi Keuneman, an Austrian-Marxist of Jewish parentage who was probably aware of the works of Otto Bauer and Karl Renner on the nationalities question.

It is unclear whether the CCP's thesis inspired the handful of Tamil politicians who broke away from the Tamil Congress in 1948-49 and formed a new party devoted to the Tamil-speaking peoples in Ceylon. Led by S J V Chelvanayakam, this minority believed that Ponnambalam's Tamil Congress was not adequately attentive to the danger of Sinhala hegemony. Nor would they tolerate the disenfranchisement of the "hill country Tamils"[44] by two acts of parliament in 1948-49. They established the Ilankai Thamil Arasu Kadchi, or "Ceylon Tamil Party for a Tamil Government"[45] in December 1949. This was the Tamil label. But, as in much politics, there were two faces. Their English face was "Federal Party."

The Federal Party's punch line lay in the assertion that the "Tamil-speaking people in Ceylon constitute[d] a nation distinct from that of the Singalese [sic] by every fundamental test of nationhood," namely, history, language and territorial habitation.[46] The assertion purported to embrace the Indian Tamils and the Muslim Moor communities, but,

as everyone knew, did not have any mileage among most of those who spoke for these communities. Stripped bare of such ambit claims, the Federal Party's emergence is nevertheless significant. It marks the moment when the sectional patriotism and communitarianism of the Sri Lankan Tamils had commenced its conversion into a sectional nationalism. But such commitments to the Sri Lankan Tamil collectivity as a nation still remained within a confederative affiliation to Ceylon – and thus to Ceylonese nationalism in opposition to Britain, India and other nations in the firmament.[47] The poetry penned in Tamil by Comasuntara Pulavar and P P Pillai as well as the prose of the *Marumalarchi* group in the 1930s and 1940s was within the framework of a Ceylonese nationalism; and thus in step with the political stance advocated (in English) by H S Perinpanayagam. In these Tamil works, such as *Ilankai Valam* (The Bounty of Lanka), Mother Eelam denoted Lanka.[48]

Examining this statement of the Federal Party some 40 years later, as the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe crumbled into national segments, the renowned historian, Eric Hobsbawm, finds the claims unconvincing. To him, this document is a typical illustration of the "fuzzy, shifting and ambiguous" criteria through which nationalists as well as social scientists seek to define nations.[49] Such an evaluation is instructive – not as a valid comment on the Federal Party, but as an illustration of a gross failure on Hobsbawm's part, a failure that arises from a positivist, a-sociological and culture-deaf search for an objective definition of a nation in the same precise way as an ornithologist describes a bird.[50]

Though informed by conversations with Kumari Jayawardena, Hobsbawm's assessment of the Federal Party's claims is also undermined by his lack of specialist knowledge regarding the Sri Lankan Tamils (separated here, from the other Tamil speakers embraced by the grandiose ambit-claim). He does not attend to two critical dimensions which underpinned the formal legal vocabulary of the inaugural Federal Party statement and gave it pulsating blood.

In the first place the FP activists were impelled by fears associated with their geo-political situation. As the 1946 census confirmed, the Sri Lankan Tamils were only 11% of the population. Thus outnumbered, the considerable stakes they had garnered for themselves in the liberal professions and government services would be at risk as the politics of influence in independent Ceylon was subject to the force of Sinhalese numbers unrestrained by the British hand. Thus, Tamil material interests and their interstitial 'colonies'[51] in the southern/central parts of the island would be at stake.

Secondly, behind the cold language of the claim to nationhood, was the sense of being a Sri Lankan Tamil, that is, the inter-subjective experience of communitarianness nourished through everyday practices of cuisine, coiffeur, rite and talk, bolstered as these were by boundary lines brought out during interactions with Malays, Burghers, Sinhalese, Muslim Moors, Britons etc. Such inter-subjective experience would, more often than not, be crystallised through personal memories that extended beyond kinfolk to space in the form of place(s). A man bred in Manipay would be a Tamilian and a Jaffna man in and

through his being as a Manipay man.[52] And a woman from Manipay would be a Tamilian and a lady of Jaffna through being a Manipay lady.

Insofar as the Sri Lankan Tamil political community has been Jaffna-centered in focus,[53] such territorial orientations emphasised the distinctions between the Sri Lankan Tamils on the one hand and the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka and those in Tamil Nadu on the other. The caste snobbery of the dominant segments of the Sri Lankan Tamil community served to emphasise their distinctiveness from the plantation workers and the many labourers in Colombo who were Tamils of recent migration.

Such communitarianness among the Sri Lankan Tamils was built on heterogeneity: local-territorial, caste, religious and other distinctions and affiliations. This heterogeneity was subsumed and embraced by the bonds of culture and language. This in turn was made possible by the centricity of the Jaffna Peninsula on the one hand and the political weight of the Vellalar caste on the other. Such processes gave room for shifts in the definition of Tamilness which marginalised some groups (e.g. Nalavar and Pallar; or Catholics and Protestants). But such ambiguities in definition should not be seen, in positivist fashion, as a weakness, but as a sign of resilient strength – for such claims mark an area of internal dispute and reflection over that which is valued. Where high caste Tamil assert that the Pallar are not Tamil,[54] they are exercising a form of caste hegemony which excludes those deemed *avarna*. And in doing so are valorising Tamilness in core terms that relegate other Tamils (the *avarna)* to the fringes.

Such internal debates often strengthen rather than weaken collective consciousness – for they generate conflict, and thereby concentrate attention on that which is considered central and/or essential. The history of Irish nationalism is replete with internecine conflicts which appear to have intensified Irish militancy.[55] In like manner the sharp rivalry between different groups of "boys" in the 1970s and 1980s ensured that the militancy of Tamil nationalism would be sustained – for the presence of like-minded rivals gave no scope for compromise with either the moderate Tamil parties or the state in Colombo.

When it emerged in late 1949, the Federal Party was a small dissident group lagging behind the Tamil Congress led by Ponnambalam in its vote-gathering capacity for several years.[56] But the push in the south for a Sinhala Only programme confirmed its predictions and pitch-forked the FP into the leading representative of the Sri Lankan Tamils. Its attempt to secure Tamil interests through the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1957 came to nought because the SLFP unilaterally abrogated the deal. This set in motion a process of politics which has enabled the Tamils to claim, with justification, that they have been the victims of a chain of broken promises.

This history transformed the sectional nationalism of the Sri Lankan Tamils into a separatist nationalism. It is a tragic tale that has not ceased to reproduce a litany of tragedies year in year out. To those generations that lived through the 1940s and 1950s the tragedy is quite awesome. They have seen the powerful Ceylonese (Sri Lankan) identity of

Tamil peers and friends dissipate before their eyes.[57] And the signs of the bitter impasse and conflict seen in the 1980s and 1990s were evident in the early 1970s, albeit unheeded by most.[58]

The structured reasons for such developments have been outlined in previous studies and are wellknown.[59] What requires fleshing out are the various lineaments of Tamil ideology expressed in Tamil and English during the twentieth century. This work is beginning, but much of the writing in recent years is as patchy as inadequate.[60]

Two notes can be etched by way of concluding remarks on the development of Tamil nationalism to the point where its most adamantine and hegemonising arm, the LTTE, has sustained a *de facto* state for several years. Though violently hostile to the TULF since the 1980s, the LTTE has always admired Chelvanayakam and refer to him as "Thantai Selva," Father Selva.[61] This line of continuity is compounded by a central tenet in their approach to Tamil-Sinhala relations, viz. an insistence that the demands of the Tamils are not a question of minority rights, but one of national self-determination.[62] It appears that they attribute this concept to Lenin rather than the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.[63] This is an indication of the socialist strains in Tiger ideology – strands of thinking rooted in the world of youth politics in the 1960s and 1970s (in Lanka, London, Paris, etc.).

While we must attach weight to the various Western intellectual inspirations behind Tiger and Tamil nationalism, it is vital for us to comprehend that such conceptual legitimations gain their force from a deep attachment to their culture and heritage among Tamil activists from all walks of life. It is the combination of intellectual inspiration and communitarian patriotism within a context of grievances (both real and imagined real) that empowers the LTTE nationalists. These cultural springs have also provided the strands of devotional loyalty to their gods which have enabled them to fashion bands of suicide assassins and fighters.[64] But their very successes in the military field in the late 1980s and the 1990s have rendered them into the new rulers of substantial segments of the Sri Lankan Tamil population. The "boys" of yesteryear are now "masters," part of a regime geared for war in pursuit of Eelam. The siege mentality promoted by their situation has consolidated tendencies within the LTTE which predated such circumstances, tendencies which some Tamil observers regard as "fascist."[65] Amidst all the peculiarities and specificities of the Tamil Tiger story, therefore, their case becomes yet another instance of a global phenomenon: where a step towards national liberation becomes a jack-boot.

## Notes

1. See Kedourie (1970); Gellner (1983); Hobsbawm (1990). A more recent characterisation of nationalism as atavistic and medieval is the pungent and readable work by Ignatieff (1993) which uses Serbia, Croatia, Kurdistan etc. for its message.

2. For instance, Farmer (1964) and Kearney (1967). See the comments on this subject in Roberts, 1995, pp 258-259.

3. The summary that follows is constrained by space; and is as incomplete as inadequate.

4. The spate of recent writings has not exhausted our crying need for a comprehensive analysis of Tamil politics from the 1960s onwards. For some information, see A J Wilson (1966) & (1994a); D Hellmann-Rajanayagam (1986), (1992), (1994a); M R Narayan Swamy (1994) and Manogaran and Pfaffenberger (1994).

5. See, Michael Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation. Sri Lanka: Politics, Culture and History*, Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995, pp 184-185, according to which, in the use of the term 'pogrom,' "One needs to follow the lead taken by those writers who have described the events of July 1983 as a "pogrom" and apply this label to the clashes in 1915. The innovative use of this label to characterise the attacks on the Tamils in southern Sri Lanka in 1983 has been questioned by K M de Silva. His bible is the *Oxford Dictionary*, which defines pogrom as "an organised massacre, the annihilation of any body or class, especially of Jews; an organised persecution or extermination of an ethnic group, especially Jews; and especially in Tsarist Russia" (quoted by de Silva). De Silva, therefore, sees the terms as specific to Central and Eastern Europe and as involving "officially sanctioned and officially directed persecution or extermination of an ethnic group, a despised group confined to …ghetto," 1988, p 87.

6. See Jeganathan and Ismail, 1995.

7. Such liberation struggles have also been interpreted as nationalist struggles: by no less a person than K M de Silva, 1979. Cf K M Silva, 1981, pp 107-112.

8. Because the combinations vary, there is considerable historical variation in the specificity of collective identities of a communitarian ethnic sort ( as distinct from those of class or gender). This renders it impossible for anyone to devise an universal definition or theoretical conceptualisation of such group sentiments. Those scholars directed by an a-sociological and empiricist search for precise definitions of a generalisable sort, such as Hobsbawm, 1990, pp 3-10, are – not surprisingly – stymied by the phenomenon. This is as it should be: they are barking up the wrong tree.

9. Barth's seminal essay is important for its focus on boundaries, but is vitiated by its fallacious insistence that "the critical focus of investment… becomes the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses," 1969, p15. Cultural practices and their meanings are an integral facet of boundary-making.

10. This formulation has been informed by the reading that moulded Roberts (1979a) as well as subsequent anthropological readings in connection with teaching courses on "Ethnicity."

11. Hellmann-Rajanayagam (1992: 31) and (1994b: 60). Also Bastin (1996); Sivathamby (1990: 178-79) and Hellman-Rajanayagam (1989). Unfortunately, I had no access to Richard Young, *The Bible Trembled: the Hindu-Christian controversies of nineteenth century Ceylon*, Vienna: Indological Institute of the University of Vienna (1995) when this essay was drafted.

12. Daniel (1989: 27-28) and *passim*. Also see Hellman-Rajanayagam (1994b: 55-56). Daniel's argument must be qualified by attentiveness to the influence, over time, of Western discursive practices associated with education. Histories of Jaffna in this mode commenced in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, often being composed by Christian Tamils. Hellmann-Rajanayagam (1992) is especially useful here.

13. Chatterjee, 1994.

14. Here, I am elaborating a position noted in Roberts, 1979, pp 38-39. More recently, Hellman-Rajanayagam (1992) has developed an argument about Tamil "ethnic consciousness" in the British period which accords with my contentions. However I have less faith in Karl Deutsch's cybernetic communication approach than she does; and have disagreements with her understanding of Sinhala nationalism.

15. This summary, and that which follows is not derived from any researches among Sri Lankan Tamil people on my part. It is presented on the basis of (1) general anthropological principles; and (2) an understanding of parallel processes among the Sinhalese – garnished by personal interactions with Tamils in Galle, Peradeniya and elsewhere from the 1940s through to the 1990s.

16. This is a widely known fact, but for a recent exposition of the historical reproduction of Vellalar power, see Bastin, 1996.

17. Conversations with Rob Jones, who conducted ethnographic work among Muslims in Aukana, awakened me to the considerable dialect variation among Muslims residing in Sri Lanka.

18. See K M de Silva, 1986, pp 227-235.

19. The idea that the Northern and Eastern Provinces constituted a "traditional homelands" was first advocated by Chelvanayakam and the Federal Party (Wilson 1994b:21). This is another indication of a measure of continuity between the FP and the LTTE in ways that mark both groups off from the pre-1948 Tamil claims.

20. Personal knowledge (early 1970s); K Tudor Silva (198?: 66-67) and unpublished work by Oddvar Hollup.

21. For e.g., see Dirks (1989) and Pandey (1990). For positions that are close to this *vis-à-vis* Sri Lanka, see Nissan and Stirrat (1990) and Spaeth (1991).

22. This is known in the literature as a process of "objectification": see Cohn (1987) and Handler (1988: 14-15, 6-8, 18, 26-27 & 31-51).

23. Roberts (1995: 37-38).

24. Therefore, when Hellmann-Rajanayagam states that 'the "national awakening" of Ceylon ... was... kept in suspension by British rule until after independence' (1992: 26), she is perpetuating a gross error.

25. Roberts *et.al.*, (1989: 47-49, 147 ff., 165, 168).

26. *Ibid.*, p 159; also pp 70-84, 155-165.

27. P T M Fernando, 1970 and Roberts, 1977, pp xciv and c.

28. Roberts, 1977, pp lxxi-ii.

29. K M de Silva (1981), chaps. 30-33 and (1986) : chaps 3-10.

30. See Young, 1996.

31. Re. this paragraph, see Malalgoda, 1976, Ames, 1973, Wickremeratne, 1993 and Roberts, 1993.

32. Important exceptions to this charge are Wickremeratne, 1993 & 1995 and K N O Dharmadasa, 1992.

33. See Roberts (1995: 158, 199-201); Roberts (1997: lxxv and xcii-iii); Wickremeratne (1993); and Roberts *et.al.*, (1989: 192-199).

34. Rogers, 1989; P T M Fernando, 1971 and Roberts, 1995, p 197.

35. Roberts, 1995, pp 204-208.

36. For fragmentary data, see Roberts, 1989.

37. Roberts, 1977, pp lxxxiv-v and 1995, pp 252-253.

38. "Maradana," here, is a shorthand for the working class and petit bourgeoisie of Colombo, while Cinnamon Gardens is a suburb representing the upper levels of the middle class.

39. Roberts, 1977, clxii-xvi and Roberts (ed.), 1977, Vol. III, 1659 ff.

40. A conclusion I reached during my interviews with LSSP activists in the late 1960s. Also see Leslie Goonewardene, 1960, pp 46-49.

41. K M de Silva, 1986, chaps 7-9 and Russell, 1982, *passim.* Also see Roberts (ed.), 1977, Vol. III, pp 2486-2497, 2140-2146.

42. Roberts (ed.), 1977, Vol. III, pp 2574-2604, with the quotation inset in the text being derived from the CCP Memorandum, p 2579. This compares closely with the wording in their Resolutions, p 2578.

43. See Stalin, 1940, p 8. Though Stalin was commissioned by Lenin in early 1913 to write this essay, it appears that it did not represent Lenin's opinions. Indeed, in the years that followed "neither [Lenin] nor anybody else bothered to refer to Stalin's article," Pipes, 1954, p 41. At the theoretical level Lenin expressed vehement opposition to the idea that a nation was an economic and psychological community, an idea at the heart of the Renner-Bauer thesis (*ibid*.p 39). But, down the track, he adopted the principle of national self-determination as a pragmatic measure which would encourage various segments of the population to join the Bolshevik revolution against the Tzarist order. He did not anticipate that such a right would be exercised (*ibid: pp* 45-46).

44. This phrase is used by Chelvanayakam in considered style to designate those identified as "Indian Tamils" in census works. More recently, social scientists have attempted to come up with other labels (also see Daniel, 1989). One problem with this designation is the fact that many Sri Lankan Tamils reside or work in the hill country. An even greater problem is posed by the fact that a large segment of the "Indian Tamils" reside outside the plantations, especially in Greater Colombo; and many of these folk have never had connections with the plantations because Colombo drew many immigrants directly from India. Thus, in 1921 there were 39,560 Indian Tamils in Colombo city alone, some 6.5% of the total Indian Tamil population.

45. Wilson, 1994a, 3n, 8, 62 ff.

46. Kearney, 1967, pp 94-95 and Wilson, 1994a, chap 4, espec. 74.

47. This is known to older generations who lived through the 1940s and 1950s. But also see Cheran, 1992, pp 44-45, 48) and Hellman-Rajanayagam, 1992, pp 40, 45).

48. Cheran, 1992, pp 44-45 and Youth Congress, Jaffna, 1939.

49. Hobsbawm, 1990, pp 6-7.

50. Hobsbawm, 1990, 5 ff.

51. I use the term "colonies" here in its normal dictionary sense, but I have inserted parenthesis in recognition of the fact that, in Sri Lanka, the term has a specific connotation associated with agricultural settlements (usually state sponsored) in the dry zone. This peculiar local usage has been (by accident) of considerable political value for Sri Lankan Tamil claims.

52. My caveats in fn. 15 above apply here. But also see Russell, 1982, chap 7 and Bastin, 1996.

53. A superb, ethnographically-rooted clarification of the manner in which the Jaffna Peninsula developed such central force as the site of authentic Tamil being during the course of the last 200 years is provided in Bastin, 1996. This essay was consulted after my own article was drafted.

54. Note: "While interviewing untouchable labourers in the Jaffna Peninsula during the 1970s, I was shocked to hear them refer to high-caste Vellalars using the term "Tamils" ...It turned out, significantly, that neither they nor the Vellalars considered themselves to be Tamils... Being "Tamil," I found, was tantamount to being "Vellalar"..., Pfaffenberger, 1994, pp 19-20. This is an important piece of ethnography. But it would be erroneous to conclude that (i) all Nalavars and Pallars, and all Vellalar, held such views in the 1970s; or (ii) to assume that Pfaffenberger's informants (or their specific Vellalar referents) would consider themselves non-Tamil when facing the Sinhalese in any situation. Furthermore, I hold that such segmentary Chinese-box structures of identity can be resiliently powerful; and should not be regarded as weak because shifting – in the standard behavioural science fashion adopted by Pfaffenberger as well as Hobsbawm.

55. A few days after this was written an IRA bomb in the docklands of London indicated that this process lives on within the IRA and Sinn Fein. The radicals of the 1970s, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, appear now as moderates whose position is threatened by younger radicals working in league with older hardliners such as Brian Keenan.

56. In 1952 in the electorates within the Jaffna Peninsula, the Federal Party received 25% of the vote, whereas the Tamil Congress received 38% – the rest going to Independents, the UNP and various Left parties.

57. Cf. The picture of Serbs and Croats in and around Krajina as depicted by Ignatieff, 1993, Chap. I.

58. Note Roberts, 1995, pp 23 and the pessimism in (1995) Chap. 10 which was drafted in 1975-76 and appeared in print initially in *Modern Asian Studies, 1978.*

59. Not surprisingly, I consider the best analysis on this subject to be Roberts (1995): Chap 10 (referred to above).

60. The most promising are Hellmann-Rajanayagam (1992) and Cheran (1992), while Bastin's essay (1996) on the Hindu revival provides a guideline to the manner in which scholars could situate their study of Tamil consciousness in the twentieth century.

61. Hellmann-Rajanayagam, 1994c, pp 170-171.

62. Hellmann-Rajanayagam, 1994c, p 178. Thus, note the LTTE emphasis on the practice of protocols of state during the peace negotiations in January-April 1995, Uyangoda, 1995.

63. Hellmann-Rajanayagam, 1994 c, p 178.

64. See Roberts, 1997.

65. Manikkalingam, 1995 and, for data, Hoole *et.al.,* 1990 and UTHR, 1992.

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# Marxism and the Millennium

## Dayan Jayatilleka

Looking back from the cusp of the second and third millennia, the October Revolution of 1917 remains the 'greatest' – in the sense of the defining – event of the 20th century. I would go so far as to argue that it is the pivotal event of the last two centuries. This is so for two reasons. Firstly the trajectory of the 19th century bourgeois revolutions of Europe, including the defeat of their left wing and the crushing of proletarian uprisings seemed to have paved the way for the Socialist revolution of 1917 and the model of the state that was erected. (The drowning in blood of the Paris Commune resulted in a 'never again' determination on the part of Russia's Bolsheviks). Secondly, all important events of the 20th century in considerable part, either led to (World War I), were spin-offs from, or reactions to (including the rise of Nazism) October 1917 and the State that resulted from it. Therefore, Eric Hobsbawm was wrong when he defined the 20th Century as a 'short' one, extending from 1914 to 1989. I would counter-pose the thesis of a 'long twentieth century' extending from 1848 (or 1871) to date.

Seventy five years ago this January, Lenin died.

Eighty years ago this March, the Communist or the Third International (which went down in history as the legendary Comintern) was founded by Lenin in Moscow, symbolising and embodying the vision of world revolution and world wide socialism. Fifty years ago, in 1949, that vision seemed realisable with the Chinese Revolution having triumphed and the USSR having become a nuclear power. With the world's largest and the world's most populous countries within the socialist camp, it only seemed a matter of time. Ten years later, the vision was dented by the incipient split in the socialist camp, but the world revolutionary process was still ongoing with the victory of the Cuban Revolution and indeed had extended for the first time to the Western Hemisphere. Thirty years ago the once proud socialist camp was no more, armed clashes had broken out between its two main citadels; by the end of the year, 1969, Ché, Ho Chi Minh and Carlos Marighela were dead – but the world revolutionary process was still a reality, centred on the titanic struggle of the Vietnamese against the mightiest superpower on earth.

Is it possible to recapture the emotions of a mere twenty years back in the year 1979, when despite the pro-US foreign policy trajectory of China, the faith in a world revolutionary process felt fully vindicated? In that year alone, the Iranian people overthrow the Shah, the isolation of the Cuban Revolution was broken and Ché seemed reborn in the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua; the horrendous Pol Pot and Hafizullah Amin aberrations were overcome by Vietnamese and Soviet forces respectively in Kampuchea and

Afghanistan – and the historical moment was symbolised by Fidel Castro assuming the Chairmanship of the newly radicalised Non Aligned Movement in Havana (in which capacity he addressed the UN General Assembly the next year and received a standing ovation).

But 10 years ago, in 1989, that vision was stood on its head, beginning with the defeat and extinction of the German Democratic Republic.

What is the scenario today, in 1999, and what might things look like a decade down the road?

If the 'negation' of the world revolutionary process and socialism took so short a period, then having been through "the suffering, the patience and the labour of the negative" (Hegel: The Phenomenology of Mind) at least from the collapse of the USSR in 1991, is it not possible that the 'negation of the negation' may also take a similarly short time? Is there a case now for historical optimism?

## Marxism's Prospects

Where does Marxist Socialism – as distinct from Western Social Democracy, Leftism, Progressivism and anti-Imperialism in general – stand at the end of the century? And what are its prospects?

Marxism may be disaggregated into three aspects or dimensions: (social) scientific paradigm, ideology/doctrine, political movement. The latter two dimensions have a more or less autonomous existence. Any ideology or doctrine can survive only if it stands in some relation to an existing organised collective or if it gives rise to such a collective. In sum, ideology or doctrine requires an organisational form, a body of men and women united in common purpose, be it as precursor, accompaniment or resultant of that ideology. So it is with Marxism. Marxism as an ideology requires a Marxist political movement. So long as the Cuban Revolution remains alive and socialist, Marxism as a political faith will survive.

Whether Marxism has a future as a political movement though, depends crucially on whether or not the Communist Party of Russia and its allies win the elections scheduled for December 1999 and the year 2000. The 20th century is ending in one important sense in the manner in which it began, with Russia as 'the weakest link in the chain of imperialism.' If the resurgent Communist movement in Russia is unable to make a breakthrough by next year then Marxism as a political movement will not outlive the 20th century by many years. Nor by extension will Marxism as a political ideology. The converse is also true: if Gennady Zyuganov wins, (aided by Russian reactions to NATO expansion and criminal aggression in Yugoslavia) the resultant shock to the global stock markets may well trigger the next stage of the world economic crisis, the first stage of which was the East Asian one. In such a context the social instability and impoverishment

may cause an upswing in the prospects for Communist political movements – and resurgence of the viability of Marxism as an ideology; though it must be added that non-Marxist protest movements will probably be the primary manifestation.

Matters are somewhat different with the fate of Marxism as an intellectual trend.

The influence and fortunes of a philosophical (or social scientific) school of thought are relatively autonomous of political facts on the ground. The most dramatic example is of course ancient Greek thought (philosophy, science and fine arts) and its rediscovery and revival during the Renaissance. Inasmuch as the struggle between the haves and the have–nots continues and shall continue within the iniquitous world system, there will always be critical and liberationist tendencies and discourses which may find space for this or that aspect of Marxist thought. In that specific and limited – but important – sense Marxism may witness the most surprising and unpredictable rediscoveries, reassertions and re-accommodations.

## What is Marxism?

All said and done, what is the irreducible strength of Marxism? What is its lasting relevance? Let us answer that by means of an even bolder operation, attempting to confront an even more fundamental question: 'what is Marxism?.'

Marxism is a philosophy and theory of contradiction and struggle. It is a theory that uncovers and illumines the contradictions and latent conflicts inherent in society, economy, politics and history. It is also a theory that provides methodologies and perspectives for struggle. Finally it is a philosophy that provides guidance and inspiration in and for the process of struggle as central to strategies for change (i.e. for altering or obtaining outcomes).

In this sense – and not solely as a historical contribution – Marxism will always have a place in human thought within the domain reserved for political philosophy and the social sciences (including economics). It will retain its utility just as the compass, the telescope and the rifle retain theirs, though these are improved upon in terms of sophistication by successive, even revolutionary modifications and versions.

As a 'tool of thought' (Truong Chinh) and 'weapon of criticism' (Marx) then, Marxism remains unsurpassed. This does not mean that this weapon cannot and should not be supplemented by others – be it radical psychoanalysis, liberation theology, postmodernism or post-structuralism. The problem is when Marxism as a weapon of criticism and indeed as the main weapon of criticism is sought to be supplanted and not just supplemented by these and other schools of thought. It is a problem because of the relative superiority by far of Marxism – and conversely, the relative inferiority by far of its

competitors. A great many philosophies, ideologies, religious doctrines and schools of thought, some long anterior to Marxism and others 'subsequent' to it (e.g. Feminism) have focused on and decried injustice in this or that sphere of society or even in society as a whole. However none before or since have the variegated, ramified – yet internally linked – massive conceptual apparatus Marxism has, or more accurately is. There are ancient philosophers whose insights into human behaviour, politics and history make them far superior thinkers to Marx. However when it comes to the critique of society as a whole – i.e. a complex unevenly structured totality with many domains (economics, politics, ideology etc.) – Marx is probably the greatest genius produced by humankind. Again let me qualify: there are other far older philosophers who afford a more essential grasp of human society – but not a more sophisticated and extensive critique of it. Marx was therefore arguably the greatest critical genius and Marxism the most superior critical philosophy and social science produced by humanity certainly in the second millennium – with no visible signs of supercession in terms of superiority/width of application as we enter the Third.

This being so, attempts to substitute 'post Marxisms' or pre Marxisms (or a combination thereof) for Marxism as the main weapon of critique of society, benefits only the *status quo*. The iniquitous world system (which Andre Gunder Frank argues has a continuous history of at least five millennia) can only benefit from the application of lesser weapons of criticism!

This is true for another quite important reason which I adverted to earlier: Marxism is not only a weapon of criticism, it contains within it a guiding attitudes and strategies for struggle. Marxism is not only the unsurpassed theory for understanding the world, it is also the unsurpassed philosophy for changing it in a fundamental radical sense. Latter day Marxist thinkers, including outstanding ones like Nicos Poulantzas, Ralph Miliband and Regis Debray were quite wrong when they asserted that Marxism has no theory of politics. Marx and Engels wrote extensively on the various phases of the bourgeois revolution in Europe, specially France and Germany. Their journalistic corpus and joint correspondence covered politics in Britain, America and the colonies. Their incessant interventions within the First and (in Engels's case) Second Internationals – and the German Social Democratic Party in particular, constitute the third swathe of their political writing. All of these provided Lenin with enormous inspiration, explicit points of reference and a clear perspective for his own Herculean political project.

Taken together, the political writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin have a relevance far beyond the confines of their times and circumstances. I would argue that they contain a politics, case studies of brilliant political analysis, a set of strategies and tactics as well as a philosophy of politics for the perennial use of the dominated classes (just as Kautilya and Machiavelli contain perennial political guidelines for the privileged and ruling classes) transcending their concrete origins. Marxism-Leninism then is definable as the organic political philosophy of the working classes and oppressed peoples of the world. As a subset, the military writings of Mao and Giap on peoples war constitute the organic military philosophy of the world's oppressed. Mao and Giap are the Clausewitzes of the

oppressed, opening up as they did, 'the continent' of military science to the dialectical method and historical materialism.

Thus Marxism is a tool-cum-weapon with multiple uses – as a method of analysis and critique and a strategic orientation for struggle and change. As we leave behind the second millennium for the third it is therefore still the best theory for understanding the world while striving to change it – two indispensably interrelated tasks.

The problem for Marxism has been a schism or asymmetry that opened up rather like a huge pair of scissors roughly in the final quarter of the 20th century. While Marxism has remained a weapon of criticism of unsurpassed calibre, the 'criticism by weapon' of the existing system has increasingly been carried out under the banner of non-Marxian, sometimes anti-Marxist, doctrines. The world system is global and Marxism has been the most universal available system of thought. However the operation of the phenomenon of uneven development has brought particularisms – national, ethnic, regional, local – to the forefront of reactions to that world system. Often these particularisms are coupled with quasi universalisms or pseudo universalisms, broader than nationalism but identifiable with certain civilisations or cultures. Here one refers of course to religious or religion-based militancy.

These movements, ethno-religious/ethno-national, have found their philosophies to be faster, more effective vehicles of mobilisation than leftists found Marxism to be. True, such doctrines have greater emotive power and can do great damage to the status quo. But as much as the core mechanism of the unjust world system remain economic, Marxism remains the deepest going critique – and socialist transformation the deepest going structural change – of that system. The competing doctrines and programmes are intrinsically incapable of affecting the world system in so fundamental a sense. Thus, no doctrine – religious, ethno-nationalist, post-modernist, feminist – goes to the root of things i.e. is as radical as Marxism.

Plainly put, NATO does not mind if a leading public personality is a feminist (however radical) or a post-modernist, or a member of an NGO representing a 'new social movement,' but it does mind if he/she is a communist or a nationalist or some combination of the two! This is because the material reality of the world order is one of imperialism and capitalism – not patriarchy. And that is what counts. No political personality was more of a model for today's intellectuals than the Czech leader Vaclav Havel – and on 23 April 1999 there he was at NATO's 50th anniversary summit in Washington, a literate lackey of the global power elite. Bill and Hillary Clinton, Tony and Cherie Blair, Vaclav Havel: all pinups of the post-modernist/feminist/deconstructionist intelligentsia of 'civil society' – and all committed to the project of global dominance and intervention; all partisans of the B-2 Stealth bomber and the naval blockade.

One of the challenges for Marxists in and of the new millennium is to close the scissors, to seek to bring into congruence the weapon of criticism and the criticism by weapon. This is not meant as advocacy of a return to an armed struggle strategy, but if such a strategy is rendered (or deemed) inevitable by the vanguards of the oppressed, their practice should sought to be inspired, guided and equipped with the Marxist weapon of criticism i.e. Marxist theory, strategy and the humanitarian values and ethics of Peoples War.

To maximise the chances of such an outcome, Marxists at the turn of the millennium – today's Marxists – have certain tasks and responsibilities.

Which brings us to one of the most interesting temperaments of the 20th century – Ernesto Ché Guevara. Already while a militant, rigorous and exacting Marxist – Leninist, Ché was envisaging a Post Marxist Marxism! He wrote:

> "When asked whether or not we are Marxists, our position is the same as that of a physicist or a biologist when asked if he is a 'Newtonian' or if he is a 'Pasteurian.'
>
> There are truths so evident, so much a part of peoples knowledge, that it is now useless to discuss them. One ought to be 'Marxist' with the same naturalness with which one is 'Newtonian' in physics and 'Pasteurian' in biology, considering that if facts determine new concepts, these new concepts will never divest themselves on that portion of truth possessed by the older concepts they have outdated. Such is the case, for example, of Einsteinan relativity or of Planck's 'quantum' theory with respect to discoveries by Newton; they take nothing at all away from the greatness of the learned Englishman. Thanks to Newton, physics was able to advance until it had achieved new concepts of space. The learned Englishman provided the necessary stepping-stone for them.
>
> The advances of social and political science, as in other fields, belong to a long historical process whose links are connecting, adding up, moulding and constantly perfecting themselves. In the origin of peoples, there exists a Chinese, Arab or Hindu mathematics; today, mathematics has no frontiers. In the course of history there was a Greek Pythagoras, an Italian Galilio, an English Newton, a German Gauss, a Russian Lobachevsky, an Einstein etc. thus in the field of social and political sciences, from Democritus to Marx, a long series of thinkers added their original investigations and accumulated a body of experience and of doctrines.
>
> The merit of Marx is that he suddenly produces a qualitative change in the history of social thought. He interprets history, understands its dynamic, predicts the future, but in addition to predicting it (which would satisfy his scientific obligation), he expresses a revolutionary concept: the world must not only be interpreted, it must be transformed. Man ceases to be the slave and tool of his environment and converts himself into the architect of his own destiny. At that moment Marx puts himself in a position where he becomes the

necessary target of all who have a special interest in maintaining the old – similar to Democritus before him, whose work was burned by Plato and his disciples, the ideologues of Athenian slave aristocracy." (Ideology of The Cuban Revolution - 1960).

This view seems to have been one shared by two other luminous and creative minds, namely Amilcar Cabral of Guinea Bissau and Carlos Fonseca Amador (founder of the Nicaraguan Sandinistas). These were practitioners of an applied Marxism. There was however an observable distinction between their discourse and that of Ché, who kept pushing the boundaries of Marxism outward from within, remaining explicitly and avowedly Marxist while being genius enough to envisage and recommend a de-ideologised and largely scientific future for Marxism which could be incorporated into social science in particular and thus into the mainstream of scientific thought.

I would argue that Marxism as 'theoretically practised' by Ché is a necessary stepping stone to Marxism as envisaged by Ché. Jon Lee Anderson and Jorge Castaneda's massive biographies finally put paid to the lie that Ché was claimable or assimilable by Trotskyism of any stripe and gives conclusively proof of his explicit and repeated support for Stalin. His Marxism was thus a particularly dialectical synthesis: a rejection of the 'soft' Marxism of the de-Stalinizers, a strong support for Stalin, a sympathy yet non identification with Mao and the Chinese line, and a fiercely independent – near heretical addressing of certain problems of Marxism. An unusual combination then of hard orthodoxy (Stalin), a total rejection of dogmatism, and an 'edge of the envelope' creative Marxism. This combination of orthodoxy and extreme unorthodox is precisely what characterised the Marxism of Antonio Gramsci (and his predecessor Antonio Labriola), and of course those theologians of the Catholic Church such as Thomas Aquinas and Teilhard de Chardin who managed to produce that synthesis of continuity and change in philosophy that was necessary for the doctrine to adapt, survive fightback and move into the future.

My conclusion is that the two types of Marxism – of Ché and Amilcar Cabral – i.e. of creative/explicit Marxism and applied/implicit Marxism – are the two legs that contemporary Marxists have to walk on, the twin theoretical practices they have to engage in, the dual modes they have to function in, if Marxism is to have in the 21st century and the third millennium the future that Ché strategically envisaged for it.

## Two Targets, One Enemy

While Marxism has to be applied and developed absolutely omnidirectionally and continuously so, with no subject area seen as too remote, abstract or too irrelevant, there are two main and inescapable contradictions which today's Marxists must address themselves to. These contradictions constitute the main axes of advance for Marxism or two strategic targets that Marxism has to engage at this time.

1)      At the level of politics: The struggle against the hegemonic project of the sole superpower. The US hopes to maintain and protract the historical moment of unipolar hegemony. This is manifested in its aggressive, interventionist and militaristic policy of degrading the sovereignty of independent states. This policy of serial state cleansing is meant at changing the norms of the global state system, deconstructing the global political super structure and redrawing the world map. The aim is quite simply world domination.

In response the strategy should be one of a global anti-hegemonic alliance based on the defence of national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. This alliance would include countries, nations and peoples. It would also take many concrete forms ranging from the Belarus President's idea of an anti-NATO bloc to a world wide movement of solidarity with Russia in the event of a Communist (or Communist-nationalist) victory at the elections.

2)      At the level of economics: The new phase of imperialism, that of globalisation, and its strategy neoliberalism are characterised by a) an unprecedented integration of the world economy b) a new global division of labour c) information technology as the hegemonic means of production d) the predominance of speculative-financial capital over manufacture and consequently the dominance of that faction of capital within global and local power blocs e) the asymmetry between the new needs of the mobility of capital and the old political superstructure of the world i.e. the sovereign nation-state based inter-state system which corresponded to the needs of the earlier phase of imperialism f) a rapid increase in both pauperisation and polarisation on a world scale and g) a rapid shift in wealth towards the speculative-financial bourgeoisie in the metropolitan centres and their nationally sited facilitators, the dependent comprador bourgeoisie, in the Third World.

The response to this requires the construction of the broadest possible anti-comprador untied fronts bringing together all possible classes and strata (including the middle and perhaps even the big manufacturing bourgeoisie) in a bloc against the neo-liberal model. While this front must be as inclusionary as possible the initiation must not wait for the incorporation of this or that segment of the bourgeoisie and the whole project must pivot upon a programme capable of rapidly raising the standards of living of the majority of the populace.

Two corresponding united fronts then mirror parallel strategies: an anti-hegemonic front and an anti-comprador front. Common to both is the recognition of the main enemy and the primary aspect of the primary contradiction – imperialism. It is on the whetstone of anti-imperialism (which organically includes the struggle against its national local allies), that Marxism can continue to be sharpened. This refers to Marxism as theory and as intellectual trend – and not just as political ideology and doctrine. For Marxism as theory has to be sharply demarcated from academic or professorial (as Rosa Luxemburg called it) Marxism – actually Marxology – with its sterile, narrow and self serving

scholasticism. Conversely these twin strategic tasks are not compulsory papers that Marxists of whatever stripe must answer! Rather they are indispensable points of reference and invaluable sources of inspiration.

Which brings us in conclusion to the old question of theory and practice – or what used to be called the unity of theory and practice; a formulation that almost forgot that this unity is not a simple, mechanical unity but a dialectical one i.e. a complex contradictory unity. It is nevertheless an unity: true theoretical insights are possible if motivated, even if only in the last instance, by an attempt to change things in the direction of social progress. Conversely, qualitative change for the betterment of the downtrodden is possible only when guided, illumined and informed by an advanced theory i.e. by a system of 'correct ideas' (as Mao put it). Theory involves and requires struggle – with its concomitant labour, pain and sacrifice. Struggle requires theory. Genuine theory translates itself into promptings to action, into concrete incarnations – which in turn come up against the resistance of the old, the conventional and the oppressive. In short, genuine theory gestates practice, struggle. Serious struggle on the other hand prompts reflection, generalisation, conclusions. Struggle thus leads into the realm of serious conceptual thinking i.e. of theory.

# Problems of a Small State in a Big World

John M Richardson Jr.

## Setting the Stage

Small states face a perennial dilemma. Global economic trends and political events significantly impact their economic and political well being, but state leaders may have little power to alter these trends and events. For more than three decades Kingsley de Silva's prolific writings have reminded us that Sri Lanka is a small state in a big world – to be fully understood, its history, economic development and civil conflicts must be viewed from an international economic and political context.

This article shows how fluctuations in global commodity, currency and financial markets adversely impacted Sri Lanka's economy and contributed to growing domestic political instability. Domestic political instability, especially protracted conflict between the Sinhalese dominated central government and Tamil militants, increased Sri Lanka's vulnerability to meddling from South Asia's dominant power, India. Indian involvement provided Tamil militants with training, resources and a safe sanctuary. Training, resources and a safe sanctuary helped militants create a wasting military stalemate, with uninvolved rural villagers and members of Sri Lanka's once vibrant Jaffna community among its most tragic victims. The wasting stalemate became part of a vicious cycle that further worsened economic conditions.

Detailed analysis focuses on Sri Lanka's first four decades of independence, from 1948 through 1988. Choice of the 1948-88 time frame was partly idiosyncratic – in the process of writing a larger work on Sri Lanka's post independence history,[1] I have compiled an extensive body of data on this period. There is, however, scholarly justification as well. Most problems now facing Sri Lanka's government can be traced to policy initiatives and events that preceded the end of J R Jayewardene's presidency. Since 1988, the posture of Sri Lanka's political leaders, even dynamic personalities such as Presidents Ranasinghe Premadasa and Chandrika Kumaratunga, has been more reactive than proactive. Prior to 1988, Sri Lanka's leaders had greater, albeit not unlimited, discretion in coping with the economic and political problems that challenged their nation. *Both* external events *and* political choices contributed to the precarious circumstances Sri Lanka now faces.

## Sri Lanka's Economy in a Global Context

Since gaining independence in 1948, Sri Lanka's leaders have faced the challenge of managing an export oriented economy, subject to fluctuating international markets, while pressured by

demands from rising popular aspirations. Aspirations were fuelled by near universal education and democratic political competition. In general election campaigns, politicians of both parties promised to deliver economic development, good jobs for all and broad ranging social benefit packages. After election victories, voters expected those voted into power to keep their promises. Often, defeat in the next election was the penalty for failure. Reconciling ambitious economic development and social welfare goals with the realities of limited export income became – and remains to this day – a major problem.

Sri Lanka's post-colonial economic structure complicated the task of economic development. Export production was dominated by the plantation sector, especially the tea plantations. Until the 1970s, plantations were largely foreign owned. Sri Lankans viewed subsidised monthly supplies of rice as an inalienable right, to be tampered with by politicians at their peril, but domestic rice production was insufficient to meet local needs. Government imports had to fill the gap between demand and supply. Government wheat imports and subsidies also kept bread prices artificially low, another benefit that was taken for granted by the public.[2]

Analyses by international experts and successive development plans emphasised the importance of industrialisation and diversification, focused on producing high quality, high value-added products to sell in both domestic and export markets.[3] For British colonial rulers, however, creating an economy that would lay the foundation for industrialisation and diversification had not been a priority. At the time of independence, Sri Lanka's industrial base was fragmented and undercapitalised. Physical infrastructure, technical expertise and entrepreneurial skills were inadequate to support broad-based economic development. Domestic credit markets, dominated by foreign bankers, often spurned local business initiatives. Thus progress in developing non-agricultural export industries and domestic industries that could provide alternatives to expensive imported goods was slow. In 1948, export earnings, almost exclusively from tea, rubber and coconuts, contributed more than 30% to Sri Lanka's GNP and even more to government revenues. In most years, 50% of export earnings came from the tea plantations alone.[4]

## Coping with a Benign Environment: Sri Lanka and the International Economy, Prior to 1970

It is surprising how little this economic picture changed during Sri Lanka's first twenty-two years of independence. When Dudley Senanayake's "Middle Path" government left office in 1970, tea, rubber and coconuts still accounted for 88% of export income, with tea comprising more than 50% of the total. Moreover, Sri Lanka's economy had been unable to curb its appetite for imports. Because imported raw materials and intermediate products comprised 75% of the inputs to manufacturing, industrial expansion actually increased import costs. Petroleum for industry and motor vehicles accounted for about 10% of the import bill. Petroleum imports, too, were growing as the economy modernised. More than half of Sri Lanka's foreign exchange was spent on food and drink, with rice and wheat comprising half of that total. Sri Lanka still imported about 20% of its rice in 1970. Government obligations to

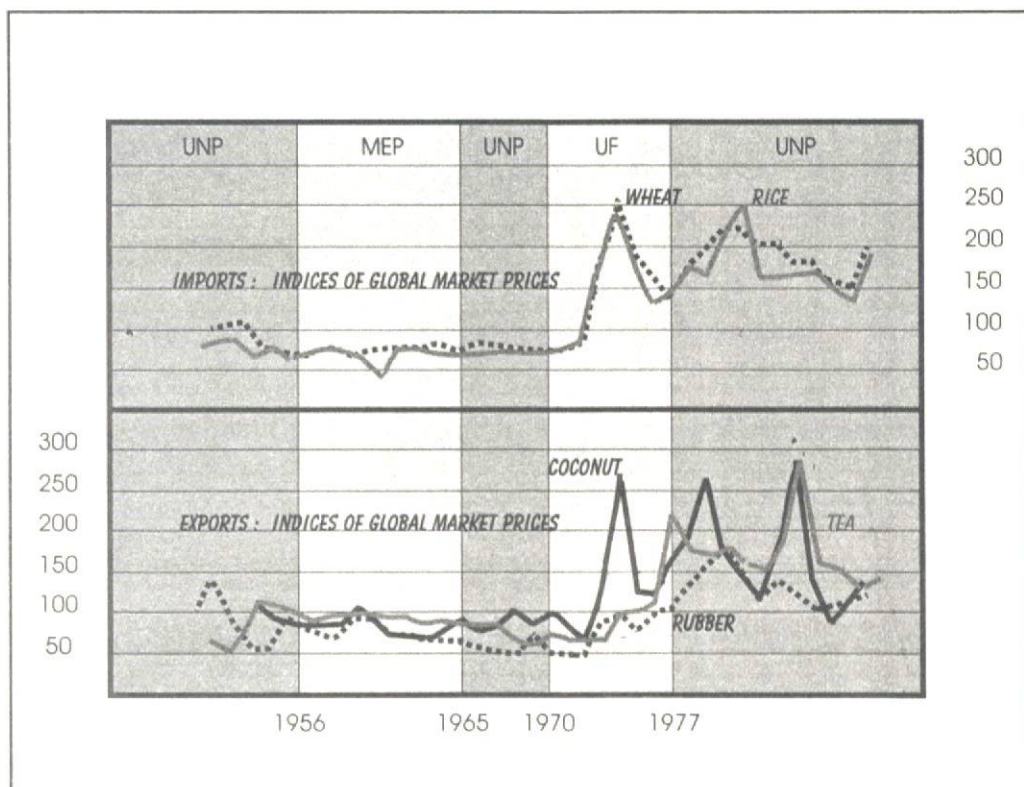provide free and subsidised rice meant that the figure could be much higher in years when harvests were poor.



*Figure 1: International Market Price Indices for Major Imports and Exports (1948=100)*

A useful picture of Sri Lanka's position *vis-à-vis* the international economy can be seen in Figures 1 and 2, which compare indices of Sri Lanka's principal exports and imports for the period 1948 through 1988. The indices reveal a benign economic environment, from Sri Lanka's perspective, prior to 1970. Price fluctuations in major imports and exports were modest. Tea prices rose by 44% in 1954 and remained above the 1950 levels for more than a decade. Petroleum prices remained low and stable until the creation of the OPEC oil cartel pushed them upward, beginning in 1973. In this benign environment, any hardships resulting from structural vulnerabilities in Sri Lanka's domestic economy were mild and transient. Successive governments could initiate ambitious social programmes, shift from one development model to another and postpone tough economic management decisions, with few political costs. The only exceptions were current account deficits in 1952 and 1966, which pressured two UNP governments to save foreign exchange by cutting the politically sacrosanct rice ration.[5]
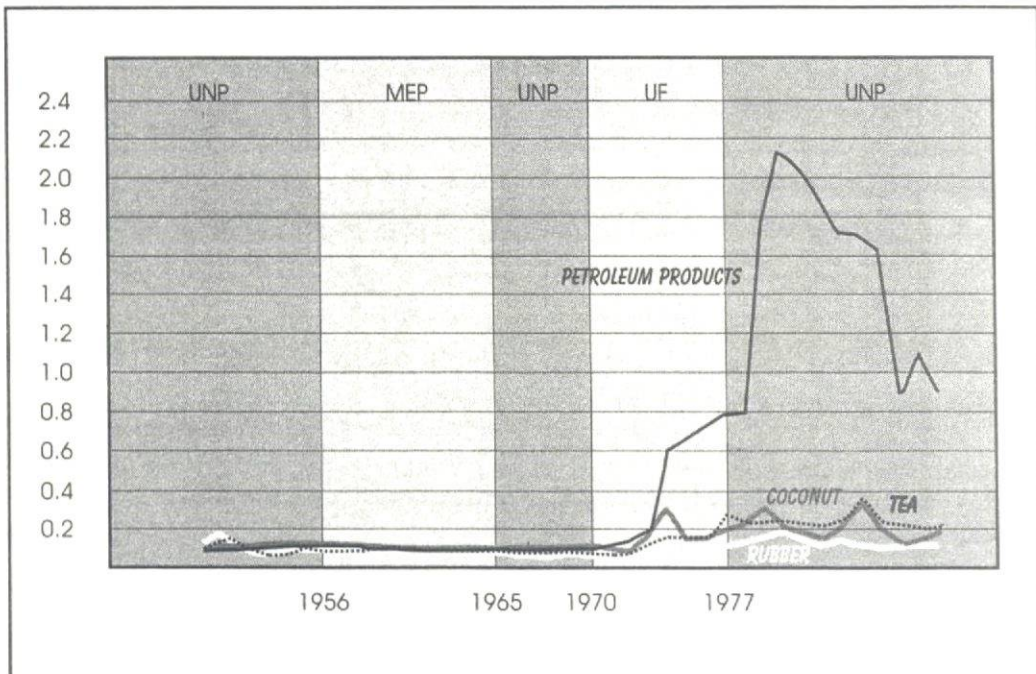
*Figure 2:* International Market Price Indices for Tea, Rubber, Coconut and Petroleum Products
(1948=100)

Benign global economic circumstances meant that Sri Lanka's relationship to the global economy ranked low on political leaders' list of priorities – domestic political and economic agendas, plus international politics ranked higher. Apart from the two current account deficits, there were no significant shocks. However the economy's resiliency for dealing with future shocks steadily eroded. This left Sirimavo Bandaranaike's government only limited and politically unpopular options when it was buffeted by externally imposed economic crises in the early 1970s. Trends in four related indicators – *terms of trade, merchandise balance of trade, foreign debt* and *foreign assets* – show how Sri Lanka's capacity to cope with a more hostile international economy weakened between 1948 and 1970.

Stagnant commodity prices, coupled with an increased demand for consumer goods and intermediate goods necessary to sustain expanding industrial production contributed to steady deterioration in Sri Lanka's terms of trade (Figure 3). Deterioration was most precipitous during Sirimavo Bandaranaike's first term in office (1960-65). This was primarily due to the declining performance in Sri Lanka's industrial sector which was adversely impacted by nationalisation and by import substitution industrialisation policies. Half-hearted attempts to reinvigorate commerce and industry under Dudley Senanayake failed to reverse the trend.[6] The terms of trade index's forty point decline between 1948 and 1970 reflected an economy that had become far more dependent on imports and far more vulnerable to adverse fluctuations in international commodity prices than at the time of independence.
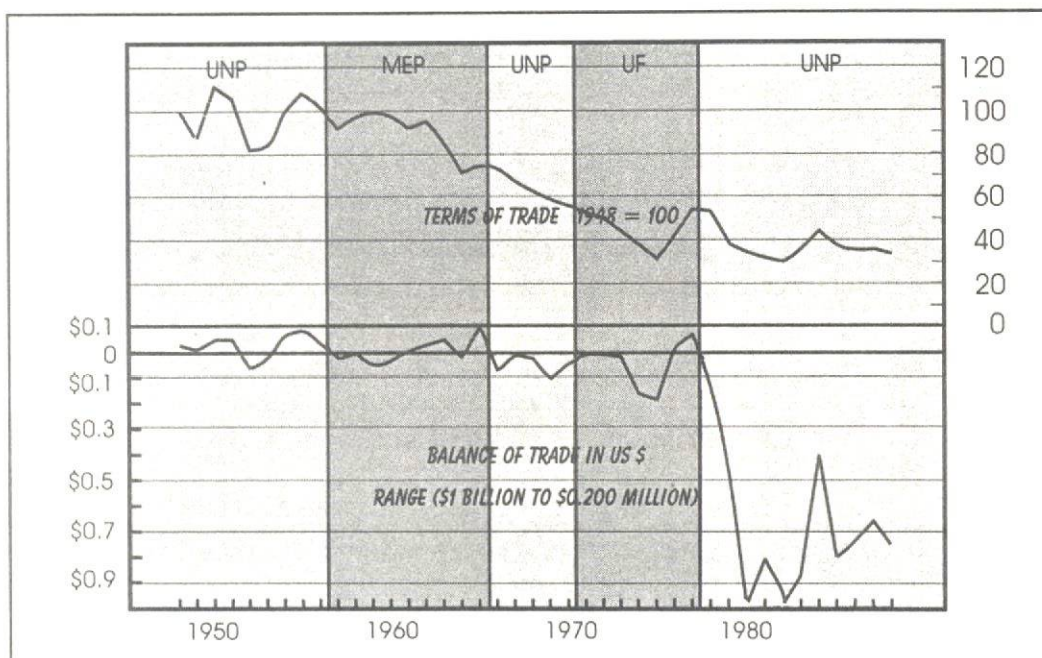
Figure 3: Terms of Trade (1948=100) and Merchandise Balance of Trade

This growing dependency and vulnerability was also reflected in Sri Lanka's merchandise trade balance (Figure 3). There were trade surpluses in seven of the eleven years after independence (1948-58) and the overall balance for the period was a $216 million surplus.[7] In the next eleven years (1959-69), there were only four trade surpluses. The overall balance for this period was a $122 billion deficit. More frequent and larger trade deficits necessitated increased borrowing from international donors and commercial lenders. Between 1948 and 1969, Sri Lanka's foreign debt increased more than eight-fold, from $38 million to $231 million (Figure 4). More ominously, Sri Lanka's economic growth lagged behind its foreign indebtedness. From a low of 2.7% of GNP in 1951, foreign debt had experienced a fourfold growth to 11.8% of GNP by 1969.

Needed foreign exchange to cover trade deficits was obtained not only by foreign borrowing but by depleting external assets. Sri Lanka had gained independence in an enviable financial position, internationally. Its external assets of $301 million were sufficient to cover more than a full year of imports and were equivalent to nearly a third of a year's GNP. By 1969, external assets had dropped to $38 million, sufficient to cover only about two months of imports and less than 3.5% of a year's GNP.
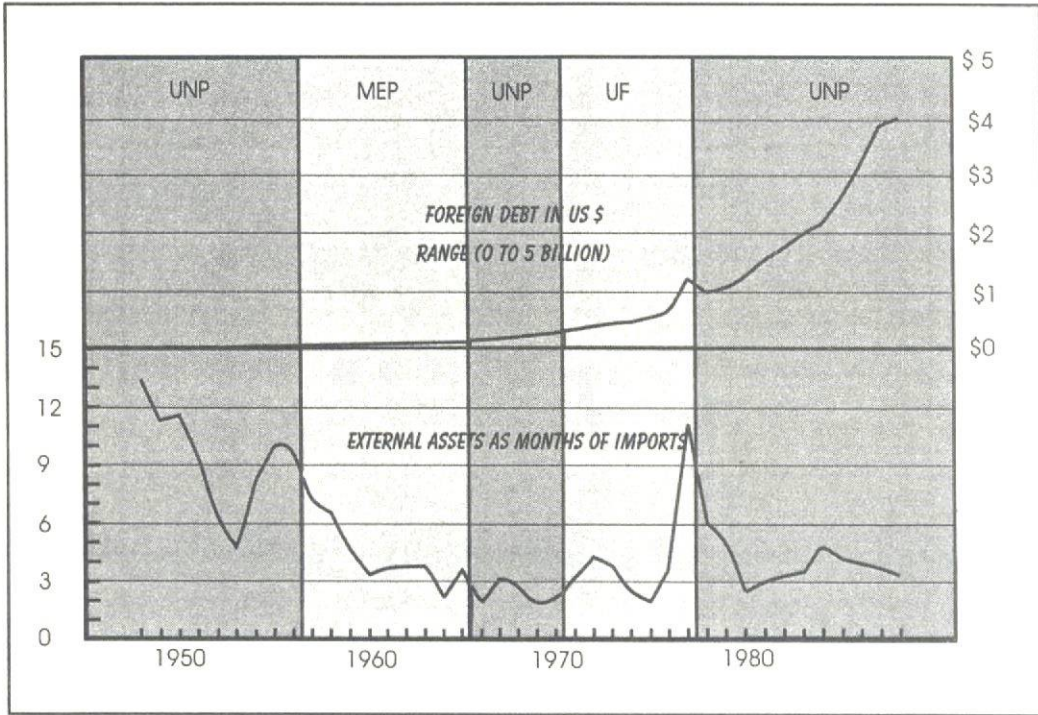
*Figure 4: Foreign Debt and External Assets (Expressed as Months of Imports)*

## Lost Opportunities

In the twenty-two years following independence Sri Lanka's political leaders were given a window of opportunity to remedy structural problems of the commodity based export dependent economy that had been bequeathed to them by the British. As we have seen, they failed to take advantage of this window. Lack of information does not appear to have been the problem. While the economic philosophies of successive governments differed, both sought advice from outside experts, strengthened analysis capabilities, and gave major planning roles to talented professionals.[8] Internal and external studies pointed to dependence on a few commodities for foreign exchange, chronic balance of payments deficits, a weak industrial base and government deficit spending as problems.[9] Planning documents enacted in 1954, 1959, and 1966 set targets which, if met, would have left Sri Lanka in a far stronger economic position than it found itself in 1970. Increasingly sophisticated Central Bank reports on the state of the economy documented the failure to meet those targets. Policies of successive governments provided examples of short-term political and economic concerns being given priority over longer-term development goals to which those governments had committed themselves in principle. Beginning in 1971, Sri Lankans began paying the price for this ordering of priorities. Shortly after a landslide general election victory swept Sirimavo Bandaranaike's left leaning United Front government into power, the international economic environment became more volatile and hostile. Now, the unresolved structural economic problems of twenty-two years began to have a serious, adverse impact on the well being of many Sri

Lankan citizens. United Front leaders were forced to implement draconian measures that threatened their popularity. The opportunity to address long standing structural problems in Sri Lanka's economy, without major dislocations, had been lost.

### Coping with a Hostile Environment: Sri Lanka and the International Economy from 1970-1977

What does it mean to label Sri Lanka's international economic environment "more hostile" during the 1970-88 period. Characteristics of the new international economic topology can be seen by comparing pre-1970 and post-1970 periods in Figures 1-4, above. After 1970, commodity price trends were more volatile and unpredictable. Beginning in 1971, international prices for rice, wheat, and especially petroleum rose rapidly while tea and rubber prices lagged (Figure 1). Among Sri Lanka's major exports, only coconut prices kept pace with increases in the price of rice and wheat. By 1974, due primarily to the formation of the OPEC cartel, petroleum prices had soared to more than six times their 1970 levels, dwarfing all other increases (Figure 2). Crude petroleum price increases, along with higher prices for derivative products such as chemicals, diesel and petrol, hurt Sri Lanka's nascent industries, but produced few immediate hardships for the nation's largely rural population.[10] However steep increases in the prices for imported rice and wheat, which the government distributed free or at heavily subsidised prices, were an entirely a different matter.
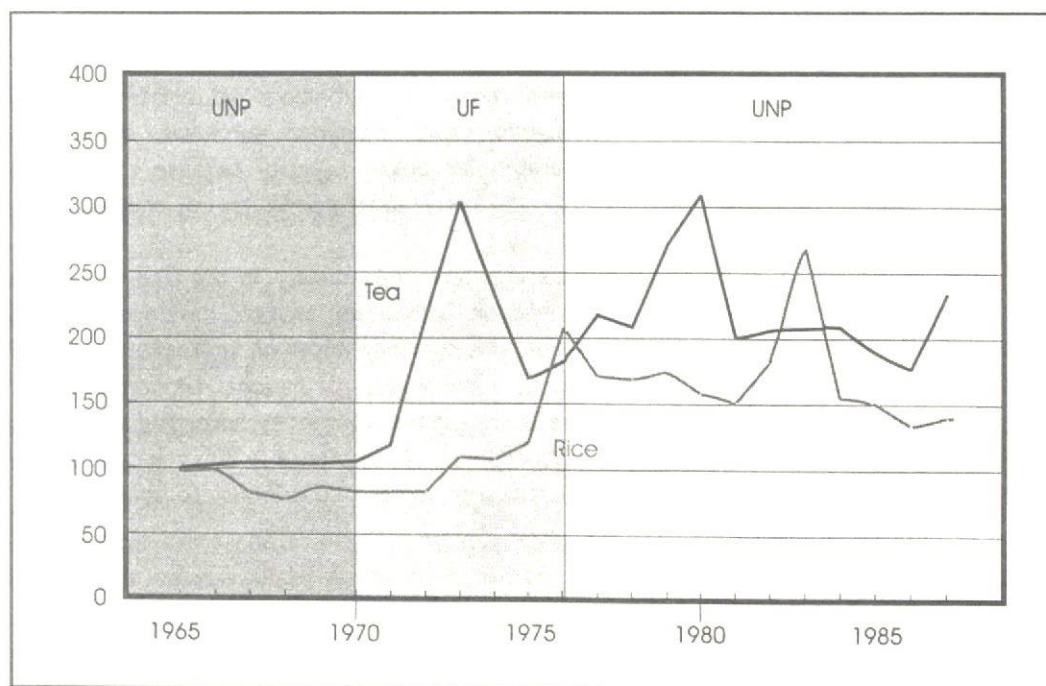
*Figure 5: International Price Indices (1965=100) for Tea and Rice, 1965-1988*

The dilemma that out-of-phase price fluctuations created for Sri Lanka's leaders shows up clearly in Figure 5, which compares rice and tea prices on international markets during the period between 1965 and 1988. Rice prices inched steadily upward after 1965 and rose by nearly 300% between 1971 and 1974. Increases of this magnitude in Sri Lanka's most vital staple food were unprecedented. Tea prices, on the other hand, remained below 1965 levels until 1975. Eventually, tea prices more than doubled, while those of rice fell. This temporarily relieved the pressure on Sri Lanka's economy,[11] but too late to rescue Sirimavo Bandaranaike's weakened government from a devastating 1977 General Election defeat.

Details of how these price fluctuations impacted domestic politics are well known to students of Sri Lankan history. Sirimavo Bandaranaike's United Front Coalition had won office on a platform which promised that government managed distribution would make "goods in everyday use" widely available to all Sri Lankans at cheap prices. The amount of rice distributed free was to be restored to 1966 levels. Better wages and full employment were targeted as high priority goals in the government's five-year plan. Plan goals were to be achieved by nationalising all heavy industry and by state controlled management that would diversify the economy and catalyse rapid growth.[12]

Rising trade deficits, coupled with limited foreign assets and questionable international credit worthiness forced a precipitous retreat from these promises. In the span of three years, Sirimavo Bandaranaike's government was forced to cut subsidies and raise prices for staple foods. Wheat, milk and sugar were rationed and the distribution of free rice was eliminated. Shortages and distribution bottlenecks meant hours of waiting in long lines for food, an experience that many Sri Lankans still remember. Ambitious industrialisation plans were slowed by shortages of foreign exchange for capital equipment purchases. When new factories were completed they often operated far below capacity because the foreign exchange necessary to purchase raw materials and intermediate goods was not available.[13]

Another consequence of Sri Lanka's economic vulnerability, in the face of a more hostile economic environment, was high inflation. When the world's developed nations unilaterally abandoned fixed exchange rates in 1971, currency values on international financial markets became, especially for small nations, a barometer of national economic health. Currency was valued by international traders like any other commodity, according to the laws of supply and demand. Chronic trade deficits and lack of confidence in Sri Lanka's economy helped to drive the international value of the rupee downward, contributing to domestic inflation (Figure 6).

Inflation estimates for a nation such as Sri Lanka must be interpreted with caution, but the unprecedented price increases in basic goods during this period are well documented. Between 1970 and 1977, the International Monetary Fund's inflation index[14] shows that price increases averaged an unprecedented 11% annually, with rates exceeding 20% in 1973 and 1974. High inflation discouraged private saving and nullified improvements that wage increases would have provided. Official indices of real wages showed little growth, with government employees faring worse than those in the private sector. Purchasing power of government sector wages declined in every employment category, with teachers experiencing the most severe decline – more than 10%.[15]
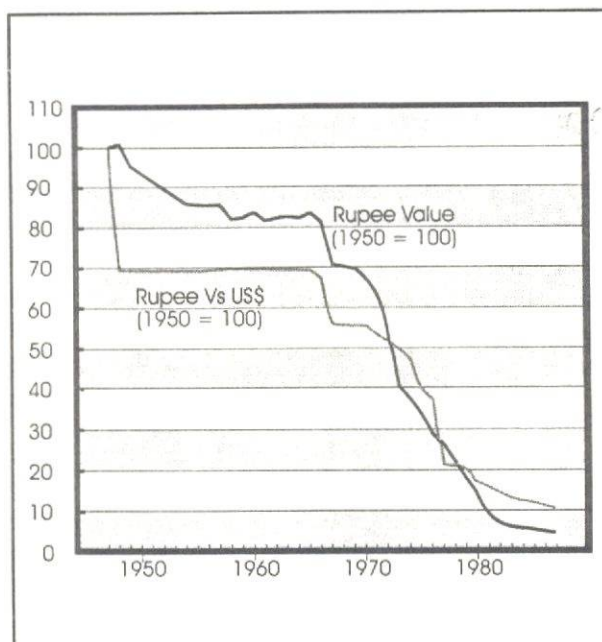


*Figure 6. Indices for the International Value of the Rupee (in $US) and for the Domestic Value of the Rupee (1950=100)*

In combination, the economic ills that have been described – trade deficits, rising debt, failures in economic management and inflation – produced stagnation. This shown in Figure 7, which compares Gross National Product (GNP) in current prices with GNP in deflated prices ("real" GNP). While there are disputes about precise rates of inflation, most observers agree that Sri Lanka's economy was stagnant or nearly so throughout Sirimavo Bandaranaike's term in office.

A severe and politically destabilising consequence of economic stagnation was high unemployment. Like estimates of inflation, estimates of employment are impossible to calculate precisely, however, there appears to be some consensus that the number of "unemployed" grew from around 12% to around 20% between 1970 and 1977.[16] By 1977, probably more than one million men and women, many under twenty-five years of age, were seeking jobs and unable to find them.

Critics point to shortcomings in the United Front's Marxist inspired policies as principal causes of Sri Lanka's economic problems during the 1970-77 period.[17] The analysis presented above suggests a need to qualify this widely held point of view. Economic policy and management shortcomings, to be sure, cannot be ignored. The enlarged central planning bureaucracy was cumbersome, stifling, suffused with politics and deficient in needed analytical competence. The state controlled purchasing/distribution system that was supposed to cope

with food shortages in an efficient, equitable manner created bottlenecks and disincentives that made things worse. By and large, state management of major industrial concerns and plantations compounded scarcity problems by using resources inefficiently. Under politically appointed managers, employment rolls in the expanding state sector grew but, with all too few exceptions, quality and productivity did not. Moreover, when it must have been apparent to all but the most ideologically blinded that *dirigiste* industrial, agricultural and trade policies were not working, the Prime Minister acceded to additional doses of the same medicine, prescribed by her Marxist political allies. This made an already ailing patient sicker.
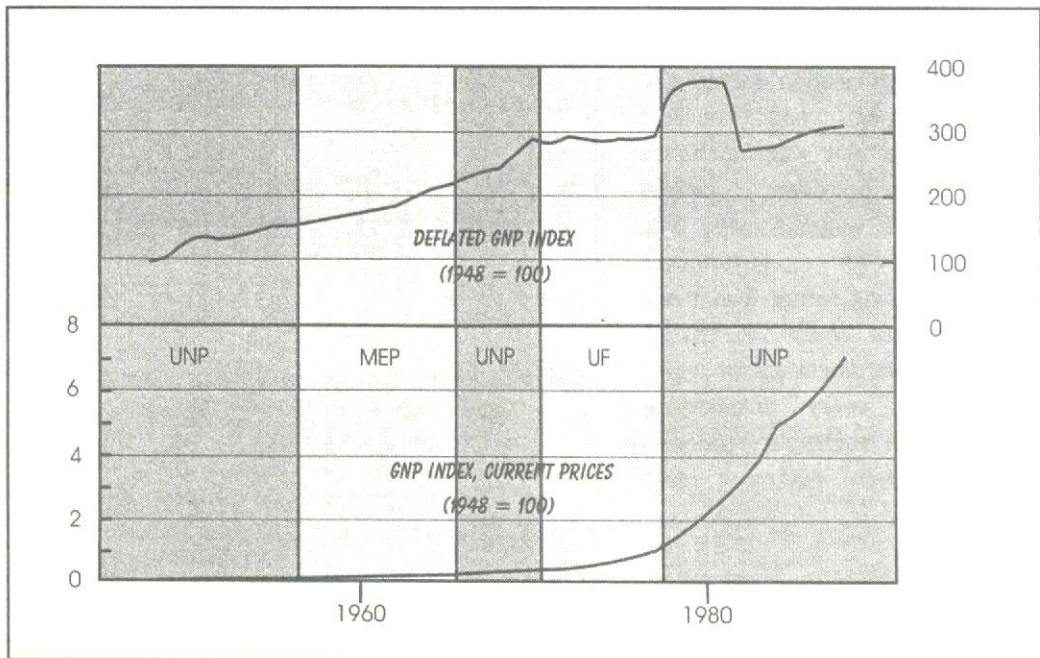


*Figure 7: Indices (1948=100) of GNP in Rupees at Market Prices and 1948 Prices*

Having acknowledged these shortcomings it is not clear that Sri Lanka would have fared much better economically under a government headed by Dudley Senanayake. The shocks of rising import prices and stagnating tea prices were caused by factors over which Sirimavo Bandaranaike had little control – international commodity market fluctuations and bad weather. The vulnerability of Sri Lanka's economy to those shocks resulted from twenty two years of economic policies that were expedient rather than foresighted. Probably United Front's 1970 electoral landslide was a blessing in disguise for the UNP and its leader to be, J R Jayewardene. If Dudley Senanayake had won in 1970, his government would have borne the brunt of popular resentment that Sirimavo Bandaranaike faced. There would have been no overwhelming mandate for J R Jayewardene's open economy programme in 1977.

## Promoting Growth and Reducing Vulnerability: The UNP's "Open Economy" Programme

Open economy reforms were guided by a "free market" philosophy that emphasised structural adjustment and export led growth. Broad goals included improving economic efficiency, stimulating growth, diversifying industry and linking Sri Lanka more closely to the international economy. Specific initiatives included establishment of export processing zones, reduction of the government's role in industry, elimination of some public sector monopolies (but not total privatisation),[18] investment incentives, lowered trade barriers and floating the rupee on international currency markets. An overwhelming parliamentary majority and, soon, enhanced powers as Executive President, enabled Jayewardene to implement many of his proposed reforms within less than two years.

How effectively did the open economy programme attain its goals? The question cannot be answered unambiguously because after 1984, violent conflicts involving Tamil militants and later, Sinhalese militants increasingly distorted economic performance. In the next section of this article, the relationship between these conflicts and economic performance will be examined more closely.

Viewing the Jayewardene years, from 1977 through 1988, through the prism of indicators used to evaluate economic performance during Sirimavo Bandaranaike's term in office, reveals a mixed and discontinuous picture. Turbulence in the international economy continued as the norm. By 1980 petroleum prices had increased threefold. Rice prices remained high, rising again to 1974 levels in 1980. Government policies that limited distribution of subsidised rice to those in need, coupled with significant increases in paddy production made this less of a problem, however. Another negative factor was the rise in interest rates, internationally, which had an increasing impact on Sri Lanka as the size of its foreign debt rose.[19] On the other hand, strong, albeit volatile markets for tea, rubber and coconuts benefited Sri Lanka, though government efforts to improve plantation sector productivity made little headway.

Four-hundred percent growth in garment and textile production was a major success story of the open economy programme. This was the major contributor to an increase in manufacturing exports from 24% of total exports (in 1979) to 48% (in 1988). Another open economy priority, tourism, grew rapidly between 1977 and 1982, aided by aggressive promotion and a boom in tourist hotel construction. But tourism is highly sensitive to political instability. Sri Lanka's tourist industry was hard hit by the escalation of the ethnic conflict that began in 1983 and by intensification of Sinhalese militant (JVP) attacks against the government, beginning in 1987 (see below). By 1988, most tourist hotels stood nearly empty and the costs of defaulted loans for hotel construction added to the government's financial burdens.

Figure 7 (above) provides a revealing overall picture of economic performance during the Jayewardene years although the impact of inflation on economic well being between 1981

and 1982 was certainly less precipitous than the deflated GNP index shows. The first open economy years were boom years by any standard as the release of pent-up demand, infusions of investment and relaxation of import controls fuelled economic expansion. Beginning 1980, the overheated economy was simultaneously hit by rising petroleum and rice prices, and declining tea, rubber, and coconut prices. This resulted in a precipitous drop in the balance of trade, creating pressures for foreign borrowing at a time when international interest rates had risen to their highest level since World War II. Borrowing to fund the highly touted Accelerated Mahaveli Development [irrigation] Project, President Jayewardene's top development priority, further added to the foreign debt burden.

Sri Lanka's international financial position in 1980 and 1981 resembled the position that had led Sirimavo Bandaranaike to impose austerity measures in 1972 and 1973. With a general election looming on the horizon, however, such measures were out of the question for the politically astute Jayewardene. Instead his government's policy was to maintain high levels of government spending, covering domestic deficits with Central Bank "loans" which expanded the money supply and further fuelled inflation. Sympathetic foreign donors, who supported Jayewardene's pro-Western political tilt and free market rhetoric, were receptive to government requests for larger infusions and funds to tide it over the balance of payments crisis.

Prospects for a quick recovery, followed by a second period of rapid growth, seemed promising in the Spring of 1983. Commodity price fluctuations had shifted in Sri Lanka's direction, improving the balance of payments picture. Interest rates fell and international financial markets became more stable as developed nations began putting their economic houses in order. Victory in a snap election guaranteed Jayewardene six more years as Executive President. He further solidified his position by orchestrating a much-criticised referendum in which Sri Lankans voted to keep the 1977 Parliament, with its four-fifths pro-government majority, in power for another six years.[20] With a free hand to shape economic policy for six more years, Jayewardene believed he could set Sri Lanka on an irreversible trajectory to become one of the next the "Asian tigers."

## Coping with a Hostile Political Environment: How Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict Became Internationalised

Why did a man widely regarded as one of Sri Lanka's most sophisticated and astute political leaders fail to achieve the goals that he had envisioned for decades? Since the 1950s, J R Jayewardene had advocated policies that acknowledged his nation's economic vulnerability as a small state in a big world.[21] But the policies he pursued as Executive President failed to fully take into account Sri Lanka's international political vulnerability. The process by which Sri Lankan domestic politics, especially the politics of communal relations, became more vulnerable to outside political forces bears striking similarities to the process of escalating economic vulnerability described above.

A topology of how violent conflict escalated in Sri Lanka, shown in Figure 8, is a useful starting point for this comparison. Depicted is an index that measures monthly intensities of violent political conflict.[22] While violent political conflict, including ethnic conflict, has never been absent from Sri Lankan society, violence did not begin to escalate out of control until the 1980s. What factors contributed most to this escalation and what role did external forces play?
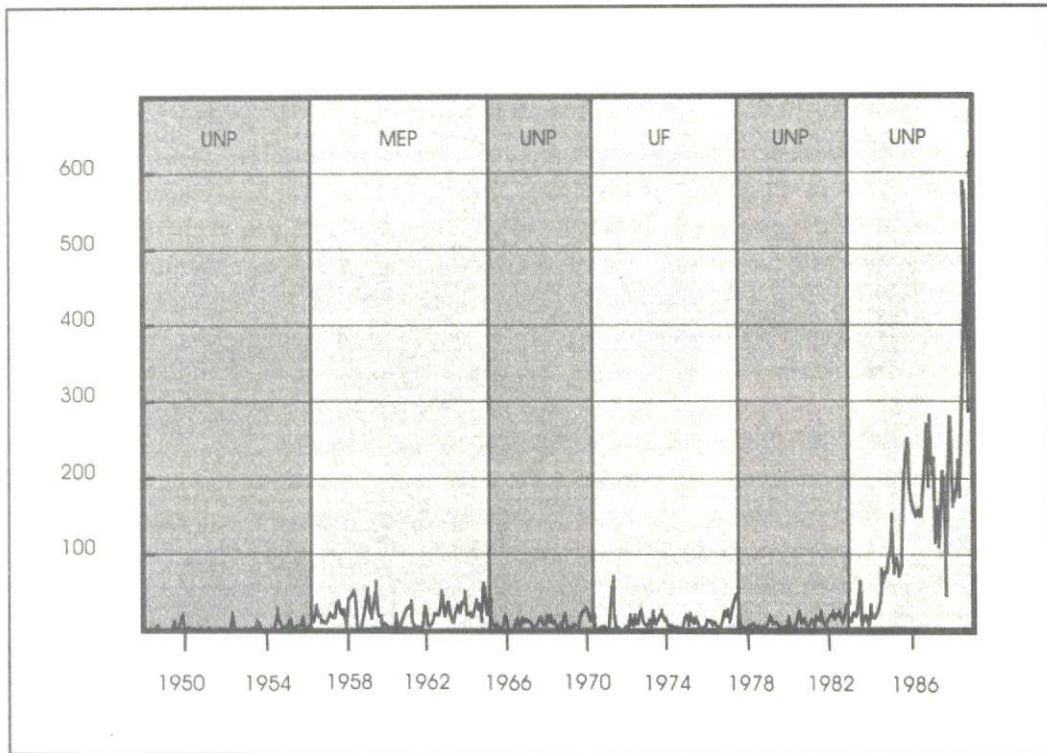


Figure 8: Monthly Intensities of Violent Political Conflict, 1948-1988

Outbreaks of violent conflict occur spontaneously, but protracted conflict is an *organised* phenomenon in which militant groups are key actors. Intolerance of compromise and commitment to attaining millenarian goals by using violent force distinguish such groups. Young men – and sometimes women – of military age comprise their core membership. Charismatic – even mythical figures lead them and maintain group cohesion through rigorous, military-style discipline and propaganda that reinforces xenophobic ethnic stereotypes. When militant groups become strong, the task of – let alone resolving – protracted violent conflict is greatly complicated. Redress of grievances that motivated militant groups to coalesce in the first place is no longer sufficient to move toward a non-violent political order. Political polarisation and destruction of any middle ground where compromise might be sought typify militant group tactics.[23]

Two militant groups, the *Janata Vimukti Peramuna* (JVP)[24] and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were pivotal in organising and sustaining armed conflict against Sri Lanka's government. Both external political forces and domestic political decisions contributed to a climate that helped mobilise support for these groups and shaped the roles they played.[25]

Prior to 1970, Sri Lanka had no organised militant groups capable of mounting a serious threat. Like the economic circumstances examined above, her political circumstances, while not without turbulence, could be described as "relatively benign." Thus, in the realm of political and social order, too, there was a 20 or more year window of opportunity when political leaders might have remedied problems that subsequently contributed to militancy. By the late 1960s, however, many young men and women had become alienated from a government that seemed distant, unresponsive, and self-serving. For many Sinhalese youth, especially those living in the densely populated south, the promises of S W R D Bandaranaike's populist revolution were unfulfilled. They faced class discrimination, high unemployment and limited economic opportunities. The climate was ripe for a messianic leader, Rohana Wijeweera, who promised that supporting his new political movement, the JVP, would make a difference in their lives.

The JVP's 1971 insurrection was defeated by a combination of poor organisation, timely government action and intervention by foreign powers, especially India. Later, young Tamil militants who faced similar economic problems plus ethnic-based discrimination, studied the defeat of their Sinhalese counterparts carefully. The JVP's insurrection made revolutionary violence against Sri Lanka's government a concrete possibility, but young Tamil militants viewed Bangladesh's successful independence struggle as a more useful model. Mujibur Rahman's Awami League would almost certainly have been defeated, they knew, but for India's intervention. Tamil militant leaders concluded that gaining foreign sanctuaries would be an essential component of their revolution and, further, that Indian military forces might intervene in an armed independence struggle under some circumstances. Provoking Indian intervention became a major strategic goal.[26]

Sri Lanka's political leaders also drew lessons from the JVP insurrection. Attending to the concerns of Sinhalese youth, they concluded, was essential to Sri Lanka's future political stability. Consequently, they accelerated reform programmes that included land redistribution and wealth taxes along with discriminatory practices in employment and higher education favouring Sinhalese youth. As we have seen, however, the government's options were severely limited by a more hostile international economic environment. The austerity programme that accompanied reforms made almost everyone worse off and the subsequent economic stagnation impacted young men, both Tamil and Sinhalese, most severely.

Faced with the loss of political support due to unfulfilled promises and economic hardships, it is not surprising that Sirimavo Bandaranaike's government, already elected on a Buddhist-Sinhalese nationalist platform chose to "play the ethnic card" even more strongly. Policies that equated *Sinhalese* nationalism with *Sri Lankan* nationalism, legally enshrined in a new "Republican Constitution," catalysed an escalating spiral of Tamil protests and repressive

government responses. In 1976, the Sri Lanka Tamils' two mainstream political parties constituted themselves as the *Tamil United Liberation Front*.[27] Their party manifesto pledged to establish an independent nation of *Tamil Eelam* in Sri Lanka's Northern and Eastern Provinces. The Jaffna peninsula's 700,000 strong Tamil community became a breeding ground for more than a dozen militant groups whose leaders believed that only violent revolution could attain this goal.
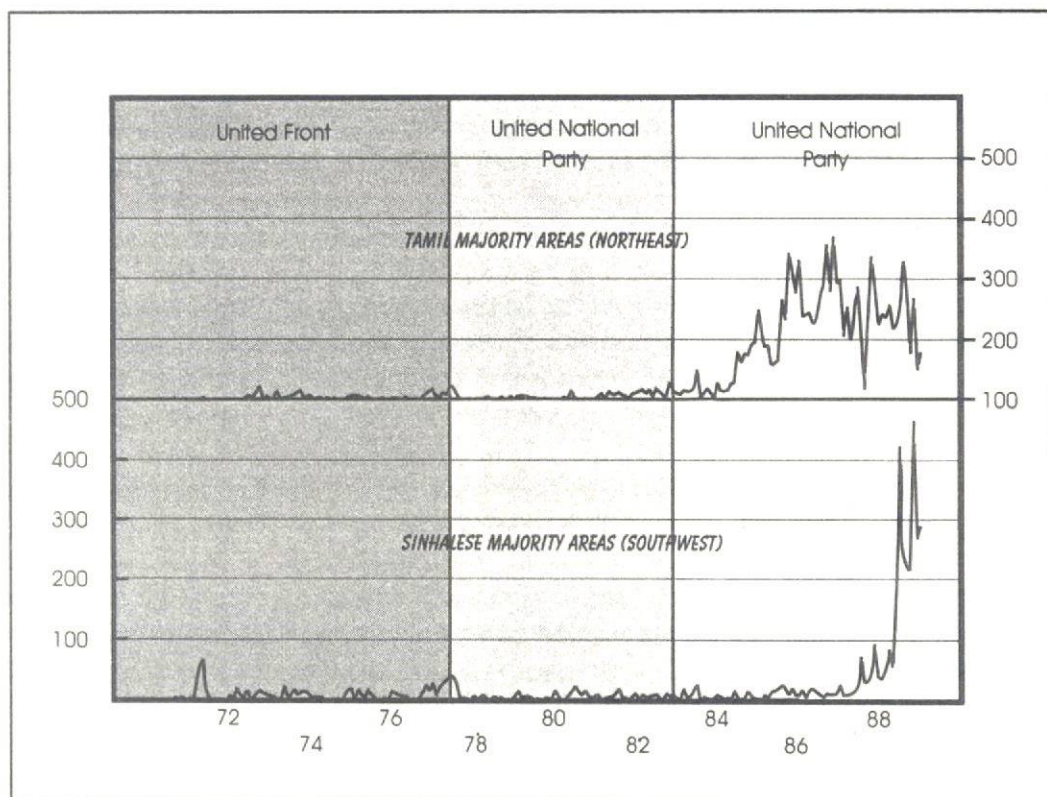


*Figure 9: Monthly Intensities of Violent Political Conflict by Region, 1970-1988*

The story of how Sirimavo Bandaranaike's policies contributed to deteriorating relations between Sinhalese and Tamil communities has been told often and well documented.[28] But assessments that Sri Lanka's protracted ethnic civil war was *caused* by these policies need to be weighed carefully. When J R Jayewardene assumed power in 1977, militant domination of Tamil politics was a possible, but far from inevitable scenario. The Tamil United Liberation Front, still Jaffna's most influential political movement, was open to conciliatory moves on sensitive issues. Jayewardene's overwhelming parliamentary majority and tight control over his own party provided him ample political capital to make concessions. Though militant groups had grown in stature on the Jaffna Peninsula and gained modest international visibility, their total number of hard core supporters was still minuscule, probably less than 200. They lacked the popular support, the recruits, the international funding and the foreign sanctuaries that were critical ingredients of their strength in the 1980s.

Examining Figure 9, which tracks the intensity of violent conflict in Sri Lanka's Tamil and Sinhalese majority areas is revealing. Prior to 1983, there were sporadic and well publicised outbreaks of violence, but the overall picture is one of relative stability. The ethnic rioting that began in late July 1983, catalysed a qualitative change. By early 1984 a pattern of escalating ethnic violence in Tamil majority regions appeared to be irreversible.

The story of the riots is well known.[29] On 23 July, a hit squad led by LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran ambushed a patrol of thirteen Sinhalese soldiers and killed them all. An ill-advised decision was made to move the bodies to Colombo, before returning them to their villages for burial. Arrival of the bodies at Colombo's main cemetery triggered violent attacks against neighbouring Tamil residents and businesses that soon spread to other parts of the city. Soon, many regions of the country were engulfed in anti Tamil rioting and the disturbances continued for more than a week. During the period when violence was most intense, members of the security forces, virtually all Sinhalese, either stood by or abetted the rioters. By the time order was restored, more than 600 Tamils had lost their lives, untold numbers had been injured and nearly 100,000 had become refugees.[30] Whether leading UNP politicians helped to organise the riots is still debated. However even J R Jayewardene's admirers agree that the President's indecisiveness, and, subsequently, his failure to publicly sympathise with Tamil victims made things worse.[31]

The combined impact of the riots, government ineffectiveness in responding and the widespread perception that UNP politicians were complicit, convinced many Tamils they had no future in Sri Lanka and swelled militant ranks. Descriptions of the rioting by international news media evoked widespread sympathy for Sri Lanka's Tamils, which was adroitly exploited by Tamils living abroad, including propagandists for militant groups. Militant groups benefited from donations by members of the large and growing Sri Lanka Tamil diaspora. International hostility toward Sri Lanka's Sinhalese dominated government and sympathy for Tamils created a climate in which leaders of South Asia's regional hegemony, India, saw a long awaited opportunity to clip the wings of Jayewardene's government and bring Sri Lanka more closely within its sphere of influence by supporting Tamil militants. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi also had personal reasons for making the life of Sri Lanka's President more difficult. Mrs Gandhi believed Jayewardene had personally insulted her during his 1977 election campaign and in a subsequent speech at the Commonwealth Minister's Conference. He had stripped her close personal friend, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, of her civic rights. Indira Gandhi was not one to ignore such slights. In sum, the 1983 riots *internationalised* Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, making the island nation far more vulnerable to political pressure from India.[32] Internationalisation of the conflict provided militant groups with the resources, training and foreign sanctuaries necessary to wage a protracted civil war. It also made foreign governments, without direct strategic interests on the Indian sub-continent, less willing to intervene on Sri Lanka's behalf.

India's pivotal role in training Tamil militants has been detailed in two works by Rohan Gunaratna and Narayan Swamy.[33] As thousands of young men joined militant groups, India's Central Intelligence Agency (RAW), in a sometimes uneasy collaboration with the Tamil Nadu State Government, established a network of training camps in Tamil Nadu. India provided not only training, but arms, ammunition and other military equipment. Leading militant groups

established offices in Madras, where organisers orchestrated recruitment, fund raising, propaganda and smuggling operations. India's foreign service establishment shielded these operations under a diplomatic umbrella, while discouraging potential allies from coming to Sri Lanka's assistance. By early 1984, hundreds of trained fighters were re-crossing the Palk straits, joining the guerrilla struggle against an increasingly beleaguered Sri Lankan army. The pattern of intensifying violence this produced shows up clearly in the top half of Figure 9.

India's involvement in Sri Lanka reached its apex in the summer and fall of 1987. Threatened with direct military intervention President Jayewardene's weakened government was forced to halt a promising military offensive against the LTTE, accept the introduction of an Indian expeditionary force into Sri Lanka and sign a peace accord that, in essence, acknowledged Indian hegemony in international security matters.[34] The arrival of Indian troops in the North catalysed a new rebellion in the South by a resurgent JVP. Thus India's role was pivotal in escalating both of Sri Lanka's civil wars.

In December of 1988, Sri Lanka faced a precarious future. Protracted civil wars in the North and South had devastated its economy. The Indian "Peace Keeping Force" occupied a third of the island, but had failed to make peace. Security threats had halted the train service throughout the island. On some days, the writ J R Jayewardene's government extended only to the Colombo suburbs.

## The Message of this Article

Sri Lanka's position as a small state in a big world produced challenges that adversely impacted economic performance, sovereignty and political stability. Changes in the international economy vitiated Sirimavo Bandaranaike's radical programme of economic reform and social transformation. Indian hegemonic meddling laid waste to J R Jayewardene's plans for transforming his island nation into the Singapore of South Asia.

But pressures imposed on a small state by a big world, that is by a volatile global economy and great power interests, are only part of the story. Sri Lanka was adversely impacted by external forces because it had become vulnerable to such forces. Decisions by Sri Lanka's leaders were instrumental in creating that vulnerability. Draconian measures were required, in 1971, because of unsustainable subsidy programmes, unresolved structural economic problems, chronic trade deficits and a dwindling stock of foreign assets. The June 1983 riots were spawned by a climate of hostility, resulting from failures of a generation of political leaders, both Sinhalese and Tamil, to deal effectively with communal differences. Those riots created a climate that made India's aggressive involvement in Sri Lanka affairs possible. Both J R Jayewardene's pro-Western foreign policy and his abrasive personal relations with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi motivated Indian involvement.

This article's message is straightforward, though not easily translated into specific policy recommendations. Small states in a big world face economic and political challenges that big nations do not. The greater a small state's vulnerability, the more likely it will be

adversely impacted by those challenges. When the international environment is benign, this should be viewed by leaders as a time for building economic and political resiliency.

In sum, leaders of small states do have options, especially in good times; they should be held accountable for exercising their options responsibly. Small states in a big world often face challenging circumstances, but need not be victimised by them.

## Notes

1. The working title of this partially completed manuscript is *Paradise Poisoned: Political Conflict in Sri Lanka.*

2. Snodgrass (1966) provides the most thorough treatment of Sri Lanka's postcolonial economy. More recent works include Rasaputra, *et.al.,* (1986), Bhargava (1987) and Karunatilake (1987), plus numerous specialised contributions.

3. For example, see *Papers by Visiting Economists* (Planning Secretariat, 1959), *Economic and Social Progress, 1965-1969* (Ministry of Finance, 1969), *The Economy of Ceylon: Trends and Prospects* (Ministry of Finance, 1971), Jiggins (1972), and Rasaputra, *et.al.,* (eds) (1986).

4. Unless otherwise noted, data on Sri Lanka's economy is from a database compiled by the author. Principal sources for this compilation are Central Bank *Reviews of the Economy* and *Annual Reports,* IMF *International Financial Statistics Yearbooks,* Economic Intelligence Unit *Country Reports* for Sri Lanka, Snodgrass (1966), and Peebles (1982), Karunatilake (1987). The Peebles volume is a particularly useful source for scholars interested in analysing long term trends in Sri Lanka.

5. K M de Silva and Howard Wriggins describe the political fallout from these deficit years in their two volume biography of J R Jayewardene (1988 and 1994). See especially Chapter 19 in Volume 1 and Chapter 8 in Volume 2.

6. Dudley Senanayake's Minister of Industry and Fisheries was Philip Gunawardena, often called the "father of Sri Lankan socialism." Gunawardena had served in S W R D Bandaranaike's government as Minister of Agriculture and Food. As a member of the Senanayake cabinet, he promoted industrialisation and diversification, but was unenthusiastic about proposals to strengthen the private sector's role in Sri Lanka's economy.

7. To facilitate comparisons with international data and compensate for the instability of the rupee, especially after 1970, most financial data are reported in US dollars.

8. Among the most notable of these were Dr Gamani Corea, who directed the Planning Secretariat of S W R D Bandaranaike's National Planning Council. Corea later held responsible positions with both UNP and SLFP governments and in the UN system. Godfrey Goonetileke, Director of Plan Implementation under Dudley Senanayake's "National Government" later founded Sri Lanka's prestigious Marga Institute.

9. See note 3, above.

10. To some degree this is an oversimplification. Rising petroleum prices contributed to rising fertiliser prices, although government subsidies cushioned the direct impact of these increases in Sri Lanka. Rising fertiliser prices were one of the pressures contributing to increased food prices.

11. The government used foreign exchange surpluses resulting from tea price increases to flood outlets with consumer goods that had not been available since 1971. Leaders hoped (to no avail, as it turned out) that this pre-election largesse would at least partially compensate for the negative impact of earlier shortages.

12. The Coalition's promises and plans were set forth in a twenty-five point *Common Program*, which became the main campaign document for all three member parties. For descriptions, see de Silva and Wriggins (1994), p 187, ff.; Wilson (1974), p 147, ff. and Wilson (1975), p 95, ff.

13. Capacity utilisation estimates are provided in the Central Bank's annual *Review of the Economy* publications. According to Vidanapathirana (1986, p 177), average capacity utilisation for the 1970-77 period was only 53%.

14. Deflators are calculated from the indices provided in the IMF *International Financial Statistics Yearbook*[s] for 1986 and 1991. This is only one of a number of indices that could have been used and any estimates need to be interpreted with caution.

15. *Review of the Economy 1979*, Statistical Appendix, Table 64. Reported wages were adjusted for inflation using the index described in note 14 above.

16. Studies that discuss the unemployment problem during this period include Tambiah (1986), pp 56-67, Karunatilake (1987) p 155, ff., Samarasinghe (1988), Shastri (1990), Philipupillai and Wilson, (1983) and Gunatilleke (1983). Many other books and articles point to unemployment as a serious problem during this period without providing details.

17. For example see de Silva and Wriggins (1994), pp 208-210; de Silva (1986), p 242; Karunatilake (1987), especially Chapter 6 and several of the essays in Rasaputra, *et.al.*, (eds), (1986).

18. There was major expansion of the private sector and of private investment during Jayewardene's term in office, however many nationalised industries remained in government hands. Electricity production and telecommunications remained in the public sector. Sri Lanka's government also continued to run buses and trains (private buses were allowed to compete) and to produce a number of commodities including tea, beer, milk products, soft drinks, petroleum derivatives and cement.

19. For example, the London Interbank Offer Rates rose from 7% in 1977 to 17% in 1979 and remained above 12% until 1982. The Singapore Interbank Offer Rates rose from 7% to over 15% during the same period (and to 18% the following year). Interest rates on loans from multilateral donors remained lower than commercial rates but exhibited comparable order-of-magnitude increases.

20. See especially the essays by C R de Silva, Mick Moore and "Priya Samarakone" in James Manor (ed.), (1984). Even J R Jayewardene's generally sympathetic biographers are critical of the referendum (de Silva and Wriggins, 1994, p 539, ff.)

21. See de Silva and Wriggins (1988 and 1994). As D S Senanayake's Finance Minister. from 1947 through 1951, Jayewardene advocated policies emphasising industrialisation, investment promotion, and agricultural self sufficiency. In 1966, he unsuccessfully supported reforms proposed by Indian Economist B R Shenoy that were an early version of "structural adjustment."

22. The index is based on a coding of more than 6,500 violent conflict events and has been described in detail elsewhere (Richardson, 1990 and 1991).

23. These themes are developed more fully in my paper *Understanding Violent Conflict in Sri Lanka: How Theory Can Help* (1991) and in a paper, co-authored with Shinjinee Sen (1997).

24. People's Liberation Front in Sinhala.

25. Comprehensive treatments of the JVP are found in Gunaratna (1990) and Chandraprema (1991). A detailed survey of Tamil militant groups is found in Swamy (1994). Hoole, *et.al.* (1992) provides a sharply critical view of Tamil militant groups from a Tamil perspective.

26. This account of Tamil militant thinking is primarily from Hoole, *et.al.* (1990), p 16, ff. and Swamy (1994), p 27, ff.

27. S Thondaman's Ceylon Workers Congress, the major political party representing Indian Tamil plantation workers, opted out of the Front and opposed secession. Indian Tamils, who lived mostly in the rural Central and Uva provinces had nothing to gain from an independent Tamil Eelam in the North and East.

28. For example see de Silva and Wriggins (1994), pp 340-347; de Silva (1986), pp 237-286; Wilson (1988), pp 127-133; Ponnambalam (1983), pp 151-188.

29. A number of the essays in Manor (ed.), (1984) focus on the causes and short-term consequences of the rioting. For other accounts from differing perspectives de Silva and Wriggins, Chapter 29, Tambiah (1986), pp 19-33; Piyadasa (1984), p 78, ff. and Spencer (1990), Chapter 8.

30. Many Tamils fled to Jaffna or Tamil Nadu. Others found limited safety in refugee camps near the cities and villages that had been their homes. Wealth and status were no protection from the rioters. Among their victims were businessmen, lawyers, doctors, university professors and senior civil servants.

31. For example see de Silva and Wriggins (1994), pp 561, ff.

32. See de Silva and Wriggins (1994), pp 568, ff. and de Silva (1995).

33. Gunaratna (1993); Swamy (1994).

34. See Kodikara (ed.), (1989).

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# Separatism in Sri Lanka: Changes in National and International Perspectives

## H L de Silva

Separatism has its underpinnings in the wider concept of national self-determination, a doctrine that has given rise to much controversy, and undergone significant change in the decades that followed the end of the First World War. The controversies stem from the inherent ambiguities involved in the idea and relate to such basic issues as (1) whether its is a right or merely a political principle (2) who the holders or beneficiaries of the right are (3) the precise content of the right and (4) the essential prerequisites for its due exercise.

It is outside the scope of this paper to examine all these issues in relation to Sri Lanka. The present discussion assumes that it is a legal right and that its consummation envisages, in appropriate cases, the status of independent statehood. The parameters of discussion in the light of current developments in this field are accordingly confined to the nature of the collectivity that is entitled to the right and the circumstances and conditions under which its exercise may be considered both lawful and legitimate.

No clear answers may yet emerge because legitimacy extends beyond the establishing of legal criteria and raises other issues, moral and ethical, of justice and equity, including political and economic viability, quite apart from the adverse impact of secession on other states. On these questions, a wide diversity of views is possible. The problem is further compounded, with regard to Sri Lanka, because of unsettled questions in historical research and enquiry that impinge on the validity of rival claims.

It is impossible to divorce the question of entitlement to the right from that of nationalism, which itself raises complex problems. Considering that it is not merely a legal question but also a political one, built upon a foundation of mythical beliefs with a heavy overlay of subjectivity and considering that there are no prescribed norms or standards for the evaluation of what appears to be an evolving concept, it will be seen that a consensus cannot reasonably be expected. It is not surprising that so volatile a concept has caused the destabilisation of many a state and if unchecked, portends chaos in the international order of the coming century. Recent events also show that very often a crisis caused by a separatist movement, seeking to subvert the very existence of a state tends to be resolved, not upon any legal or even any just and equitable norms, but upon geopolitical considerations, through coercive pressures exerted by the Great Powers upon the weak. These pressures are often obscured by sanctimonious rhetoric and exerted regardless of

the suffering and the deep sense of grievance felt by helpless victims of the conflict who have no real voice in the issues at stake.

Notwithstanding the salience of *realpolitik* in international relations, no sensible discussion of this question can proceed except in the context of international legal norms which are regarded as governing the world order. Though the concept of self-determination has historical roots that go back to the 18th century or even earlier, it is convenient for present purposes to note briefly its development as a 20th century phenomenon.

The best known, as well as its most ardent advocate, was Woodrow Wilson, though he was a party to its inconsistent application in redrawing the map of Europe after the First World War. The term was not expressly used in his Fourteen Points, though the underlying principle was reflected in the readjustment of boundaries and even in the determination of colonial claims in a vague reference to the interests of the populations concerned. Nor did the League Covenant itself make any specific reference to the principle though apparently imbued by its spirit. When the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires disintegrated, their territories were carved up according to private promises and secret agreements among the victorious allies and not upon an application of this principle. Despite Lenin's lip service to the principle, the USSR held within its grasp the multi-ethnic groups of Tsarist Russia.

While Germany was in ethnographic terms a coherent whole, her territory was divided up on a manner that deviated from the principle, and France and Poland benefited from its dismemberment, which once again laid the seeds of future conflict. Notwithstanding the expert knowledge of historians, cartographers and geographers whose services were sought, there were insuperable difficulties in reconciling viable political frontiers with the concentration of ethnic groups in the Balkans. The prevailing considerations in the adjustment of the new state boundaries were practicality and pragmatism. As Marion Newbegin, a British geographer at the Paris Peace Conference has observed,[1]

> "The notion that every little group of people which can, on more or less doubtful anthropological grounds be described as a "race," should have a ring drawn around it, and be regarded as a "nation" exercising the right of "self-determination" proves to be as impracticable as it is fantastic."

The non-recognition of the principle of self-determination in the Covenant of the League of Nations was an impediment to its development in the inter-war years. The Aaland Islands case represented the contemporary viewpoint. Three jurists were there required to determine whether the inhabitants of these islands off the Swedish coast were free to secede from Finland and join Sweden. Finland opposed the holding of any plebiscite contending that it was a matter to be dealt with under Finnish domestic jurisdiction and outside the competence of the League. These jurists stated[2]

"...positive International Law does not recognise the right of national groups, as such to separate themselves from the State of which they form part by the simple expression of a wish, any more than it recognises the right of other States to claim such a separatism."

This was for the reason that the grant or refusal of the right to a section of the population of determining its own political future was exclusively an attribute of the sovereignty of the state of which they were citizens. It was an affirmation of the principle of the territorial integrity of each state observing[3] that

"any other solution would amount to an infringement of the sovereign rights of a State and would involve the risk of creating difficulties and a lack of stability which would not only be contrary to the very idea embodied in the term "State," but would also endanger the interests of the international community."

These jurists went further however, and presaged views that gained currency in later years. Recognising that there were insuperable difficulties in achieving independent statehood they sought to assuage the situation through the recognition of the right of protection of a minority by guaranteeing to it "the maintenance of free development of its social, ethnical or religious characteristics." This was an eminently sensible view and a reasonable compromise which did not seek to infringe on the territorial integrity of the host state.

The Commission of Rapporteurs appointed by the League to recommend a programme of action for the Aaland Islands went further, observing that in such exceptional situations of oppression or denial the oppressed minority had the right of "separation" from the state. Despite the vast amount of writing on this subject during the last three-quarters of a century, it seems that we have not been able to arrive at a more acceptable solution than this, if recourse to force is not to be countenanced and state sovereignty is to be respected. Even so, the Great Powers in later years adopted double standards when it came to the colonies and the principle of self-determination was not recognised, even in the case of the mandated territories.

The same attitude of recalcitrance in its general application is evident in Winston Churchill's opposition to conceding the right of self-determination, (proclaimed in 1941 in the Atlantic Charter) to India, Burma and other parts of the British Empire. It appeared in the UN Charter in a somewhat attenuated and enervated form in Article 1(2)[4] of the UN Charter (1945), providing that one of the purposes of the United Nations was, "to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace." Even as so provided, the debate as to the meaning and interpretation showed significant limitations and restrictions as to its scope. It was firmly felt that self-determination did not mean the right of a minority or an ethnic group to secede from a sovereign country. Positively, all that it meant was that states should grant self-government

as much as possible to the communities over which they exercised authority and thus set a legal standard of behaviour.

A more creative trend is reflected in the General Assembly Resolution of 1960,[5] which related to the granting of Independence to Colonial countries and Dependent peoples, proclaiming "the right to self-determination by virtue of which they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development." This too did not apply to a minority within an independent state and expressly precluded any secession which involved the partial or total disruption of the territorial integrity of a country as being incompatible with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.

With the progress of de-colonisation, the principle of self-determination soon acquired a new strength and vigour undreamt of by the framers of the Charter. This is reflected in the two Covenants on Human Rights (1966) – the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which provided as follows:

> "All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they
> freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social
> and cultural development."

But vitally important questions: (1) who were the "peoples" contemplated? (2) how far did the right extend? (3) what are the preconditions for its exercise? And (4) how was the right to be implemented? were left unanswered. Prima facie the right was of a universal character embracing all peoples living in States, those already independent as well as those under alien domination. While there was no real dispute in regard to peoples living in conditions of subjugation, the rights of peoples in States which enjoyed sovereignty and independence raised questions of some complexity. These questions are of particular relevance to multi-ethnic countries like Sri Lanka.

Specifically, how do minorities stand with respect to these rights? The interpretation to be given to Article (1) of the Covenant had to be consistent with the provisions of the UN Charter because in terms of Article 103 of the Charter, in the event of any conflict between the obligations of the Members of the UN under the Charter and their obligations under any other international agreement, their obligations under the Charter must prevail. Under the Charter, not only has the sovereign equality of member states to be respected, the territorial integrity and political independence of all States could not be violated. Furthermore, special provision is made in Article 27 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights granting to persons who are members of ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities the right to enjoy their own culture to profess and practice their own religion and to use their own language. These rights were to be enjoyed by persons in their individual capacity and not as a group. Nor did Article 27 confer rights of political, economic, or social autonomy to any minority group. Accordingly, it is argued that

minorities as groups were not entitled under the Covenants to the right of political, economic, and social self-determination.

At the 25th Anniversary of the UN, the General Assembly adopted[6] the Declaration of Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among states (1970). A part of the Declaration was devoted to the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples. But it gave no definition as to what social groups (other than States in the international sense) were to be regarded as "peoples" for the purpose of according them the right of self-determination. Yet the Declaration while affirming the inviolability of territorial integrity, went on in a somewhat tangential manner, to make an important reservation:

> "Nothing in the foregoing paragraphs shall be construed as authorising or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair totally or in part the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States conducting themselves in compliance with the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples as described above and thus possessed of a government representing the whole people belonging to the territory without distinction as to race, creed or colour." (emphasis supplied)

The significance of the concluding words has been pointed out by Antonio Cassese.[7] From the terms of this clause it appears that the guarantee of territorial integrity was also conditional upon the State possessing a government that was representative of all the people inhabiting its territory, non-discriminatory in its policies and affording them equal access to the governing process. Accordingly, the inhibition against secession would not operate in the case of any ethnic group that was denied access to the political process on racial or religious grounds.[8]

It is, however, important to stress the fact, as Cassese does, that while secession is thus implicitly authorised by the Declaration, the conditions for its exercise had to be strictly observed. As he points out,[9] the "denial of the basic right of representation does not give rise *per se* to the right of secession. In addition there must be gross breaches of fundamental human rights, and what is more, the exclusion of any likelihood for a possible solution within the existing state structure." On this view, the movement for Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, it is submitted, would find it hard to qualify under the exception provided in this clause. But even under these stringent circumstances, there is no general agreement that secession is in the final even permissible. Indeed, state practice and the overwhelming view of states stand firmly opposed to secession.

To complete this brief survey of international instruments which formulate the right of self-determination, reference may be made to two other declarations. The first is the Helsinki Declaration, adopted in 1975 by thirty five states constituting the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). But here again, national minorities were excluded from the scope of self-determination. The right was secured only to entire

populations of sovereign states on the basis that a broadening of the right would disrupt national unity. The World conference on Human Rights in adopting the Vienna Declaration of June 1993, made no significant advance and merely recognised the right of peoples to take any legitimate action in accordance with the Charter of the UN to realise their inalienable right of self-determination.

It is one thing to determine the legal parameters within which the right to secede can be exercised, but quite another to rest assured that such limitations on the right would afford a State security against loss of its territorial integrity. A small militarily weak state like Sri Lanka stands in a very vulnerable position, as recent events have shown. Considered from the point of view of sovereignty and independence even the protection and patronage of a Great Power are of dubious value in the long run, considering the vagaries of power politics. Unhappily, it is the case today that a State which complies with the essential norms of democratic governance and maintains free institutions finds the task of meeting challenges to its internal security even more daunting than if it were a closed society.

It appears that so long as the conflict is not internationalised, a State often enjoys a relatively free hand at the hands of the international community in bringing anti-systematic violence under control, as it happened in the case of the JVP uprising both in 1971 and 1989. However misguided these insurrections may have been, they may from a certain standpoint be regarded, as movements for the liberation of a "people" in respect of their economic and social conditions, though not manifestations of ethno-nationalism. The superior fire power of the Sri Lankan State prevailed over them. In face, Sri Lanka had no difficulty in procuring lethal weapons for their suppression from those who now decline assistance on humanitarian grounds presumably because they were Marxist oriented revolutionary movements. History is replete with instances of double standards in regard to the application of the principle of self-determination – as seen in the case of Katanga, Biafra, Bangladesh, East Timor, Kashmir, Tibet, the Kurds, the Nagas and many other instances. In consequence, the moral and ethical weight of self-determination is open to question and the expression itself is now fast becoming a weasel-word in international discourse.

Whatever view one takes as to the legitimacy of the case made out by the Tamils of Sri Lanka for the establishment of a separate state, it is undeniable that it is a problem of the highest priority which successive Governments have failed to address effectively in the post-independence era. Is such failure due to a misunderstanding of the nature of the problem? Had its true nature been recognised would it have been politically feasible for the essential demands of the Tamils to have been conceded during this period when successive Governments rose and fell depending on how they coped with the aspirations of a populist democracy? The answer to the first question is probably in the affirmative and the failure to discern the true nature of the symptoms was perhaps due to the fact that they were articulated under the cloak of "communal discrimination" and not as a claim to self-

determination. They dated from Donoughmore times, which marked a watershed in the formation of a "Ceylonese national consciousness," though flawed at its very core, by reason of its strong ethno-nationalist basis. Although the second question is hypothetical, assuming the political leadership of that era had correctly discerned it, the accommodation of these demands would not have been possible in the context of competitive politics among the major parties, which was assumed to be the hallmark of a vibrant parliamentary democracy. There are many who now, with the benefit of hindsight, see it as a lack of foresight, sagacity and judgement on the part of the political leadership. But Sri Lanka had for decades been held up as a remarkably successful democracy, despite the crises it had faced and few would have predicted the dire straits the country would be in at the end of this century.

The excuse of a failure to recognise the true nature of the discontent is however of no avail to those who held office from the mid-seventies when this was clearly seen. It underwent a radical change in the eighties with Indian intervention in the crisis with consequences that proved disastrous to both countries. Although the grave error of aiding and supporting the rebel groups has been tardily acknowledged, yet little has been done to redress the damage and harm caused to a friendly country. It is not that the international community did not at the time understand the predicament of the Sri Lankan Government or appreciate its difficulties of dealing with cross-border terrorism with secessionist aims. In truth, it chose not to take serious note of the problem for geopolitical reasons.

Pursuant to the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, the enactment of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution (1987) providing substantial autonomy at the Provincial level was contemporaneously seen by most Tamil political parties as well as the International community, as a major advance over every other measure that preceded it. In the context of Indian involvement, it was however opposed by a significant section of the Sinhala majority who saw the amalgamation of the Northern and Eastern Provinces into one political unit as a precursor to the establishment of a separate state. This also precipitated the second JVP insurgency, till it was finally suppressed with an estimated loss of nearly forty thousand lives.

The Provincial Council system of devolution failed to be implemented in the very areas for which it was primarily intended, namely the Northern and Eastern provinces because the minimum degree of law and order for the maintenance of civil government did not exist by reason of the continuous and relentless attacks of the LTTE. Under the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, it was an essential presupposition of the constitutional arrangements foreshadowed that the LTTE would be disarmed by the Indian Peacekeeping force before the civil administration was re-established under the Provincial Councils System. This did not materialise, and it is idle to criticise its inadequacies or shortcomings, or point to the possible abuse of powers given to the Centre as grounds for rejecting the scheme before it was even given a fair trial in the very areas where this was necessary before any conclusion could be drawn.

The truth is that it could not be implemented because the LTTE did not permit its implementation. The reason is obvious. The LTTE was plainly not interested in anything which fell short of the grant of complete separation and independence, being confident both in its ability to win in a prolonged conflict and in the inability of the Sri Lankan army to sustain itself in a protracted guerrilla war. The Thirteenth Amendment was rejected by the LTTE for the same reason. The Premadasa Administration wrongly believed that the LTTE could be persuaded to accept a political solution which did not at the same time guarantee to it the maintenance of its military capability as well as a monopoly of political power. Even when it was realised that the LTTE would not acquiesce in this and a military confrontation became inevitable its ineptitude and dilatoriness in addressing itself to the task was a grave dereliction of duty resulting in the loss of innocent lives and material resources.

While the political task of effecting a reconciliation with an aggrieved section of the Sri Lankan nation is an essential obligation, its necessary precondition is the maintenance of law and order to ensure the orderly conduct of civil administration. Failure to undertake this essential obligation on the part of the established Government leads to an abdication of its paramount duty and the concomitant consequence of anarchy when the life of the citizen lapses into a Hobbesian state of nature. The danger, however, is that in the accomplishment of this task of restoring law and order and the elimination of the LTTE, the resulting collateral damage to civilians may reach unacceptably high levels, which makes national reconciliation very difficult and national unity almost unachievable. This is an inescapable dilemma which every Government has to face. Yet the peremptory duty of maintaining law and order has to be undertaken with a due sense of responsibility and in good faith explaining the moral issues involved.

Once this is achieved, the grant of substantial autonomy is still the most favoured political solution. The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe held in Copenhagen in 1990 recognised the establishment of "appropriate local or autonomous administration" for minority groups as one of the modalities for their protection. The normative standards of protection of minority rights by which compliance is to be judged are formulated in terms of a democratic political framework based on the rule of law and an independent judiciary. Such a framework is intended to guarantee essential respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and equal rights and status for all citizens including national minorities. Such mechanisms do exist in Sri Lanka, and are functioning under the scrutiny of numerous non-governmental organisations and the media. It is against this backdrop that the legitimacy of separatism in Sri Lanka has to be judged.

Does self-determination as a political principle entitle the "self" to claim even independent statehood in all cases regardless of its nature as a group? Unfettered by the constraints of a tabulated legalism, claims to statehood have been asserted on the grounds that certain ethnic groups constitute separate "nations," which circumstance alone entitles an ethnic group to be an independent state. Although such claims are invariably sought to

be validated by showing the existence of conditions of oppression or gross discrimination against the claimant group as a moral justification for the demand, this would appear to be strictly unnecessary if the right flows from the very fact of being a "nation." It is then predicated as an incident of nationhood and as an inalienable right. But the weakness of this theory is the practical reality of the existence of nearly 5,000 ethnic groups within existing sovereign states, which would lead to endless fragmentation and the atomisation of the community of states with internal and international conflicts increasing in geometric progression.

Even on the assumption that there exists such a right, when does an ethnic group cease to be a mere minority and acquire the status of a nation? The question as to what persons would properly constitute the Tamil nation in Sri Lanka so as to ground a claim for independent statehood does not admit of a clear answer. Conscious of the disparity in numbers in relation to the majority Sinhala, Tamil identity was at first not expressed in purely ethnic terms. It was formulated as a linguistic category in the phrase "the Tamil speaking people," when the Federal Party first made its demand for a federal constitution for Ceylon in 1949, with the Northern and Eastern Provinces being claimed as one territorial unit of the proposed federation. The people that would be encompassed within this description were the indigenous Tamils of the Island, the Muslims (the vast majority of whom were Tamil speakers) and the immigrant Tamils of recent Indian origin who were resident outside the territorial unit claimed. According to the 1981 census all Tamil speakers in the aggregate numbered 3,753,740 while indigenous Tamils were only 1,871,535, being respectively 25.2% and 12.6% of the total population of 14,850,000.

The concept of "the Tamil speaking people" was plainly a contrivance which ignored the subjective element of a single national consciousness. The employment of this concept also had the tactical advantage that it embraced nearly a quarter of the total population. In fact, however, the ethnic origins of the three groups were perceived by each of them to be different. As far as the Muslims were concerned, their religion, cultural traditions, and the social mores were different, especially considering the salience of caste distinctions among the Tamils. The group so designated was also multi-religious in character being composed of Hindus, Muslims and Christians. Neither the Muslims nor the Indian Tamils openly associated themselves with any separatist demand. A group composed of such diverse elements cannot therefore be described as "the Tamil nation" in any meaningful sense and merely serves as a convenient political slogan.

Even as far as the core group, viz. The indigenous Tamils which conceivably empathises with the separatist demand is concerned, there are significant differences[10] between the Tamils of the North (Jaffna Tamils) and the Eastern Province Tamils (Batticaloa Tamils) as to customs and personal laws applicable. Their attitudes are also affected by regional rivalries. Even among the Jaffna Tamils no less significant are the gradations of status founded on caste,[11] not to speak of the Byzantine nuances of hierarchical status within the largest caste group[12] – the *Vellalas*. In addition the concepts of ritual pollution

and untouchability have placed nearly a third of them as outcastes beyond the pale of civilised social intercourse.[13] Surprisingly, they were not until the turn of the century, even considered to be Tamils.[14] Not only are the objective elements of nationhood, such as a common culture and a shared history, absent among such disparate elements, the requisite subjective element constituting it "the imagined community"[15] does not exist in any realistic sense amidst such deep cleavages within.

An important consideration in evaluating a separatist movement is the territorial dimension which is required to have an integral connection with those seeking secession. If the territory that is sought to be severed has been the subject of annexation by the State from which secession is sought, it would be an appropriate case of de-colonisation and falls squarely within the right of self-determination. If this be not the case, there are no certain criteria for settling the question of just entitlement. Difficult questions arise, if the initial settlement or occupation of land which was then *res nullius*, is lost in the dim mists of history. What is more, many States in the Americas for instance, would have to yield to the claims of indigenous peoples and its resolution becomes a matter of difficulty and controversy. Where a conflict is considered to assume a threat to world peace and international security, there is a likelihood of external intervention and the possibility of partition, which may thus seek to legitimise acts of "ethnic cleansing."

There is no credible or convincing claim of title to the territory comprising the present Northern and Eastern Provinces which are claimed as "the traditional homelands of the Tamils." The fact of habitation in particular areas in the North and the East by Tamils for centuries along with other ethnic groups is not disputed but a prior claim on the basis that they were the first settlers in these parts of the country or that these lands were at all times exclusively possessed by Tamils is unacceptable as there is evidence of Sinhala place names[16] now Tamilised, which along with archaeological evidence, point to earlier Sinhala settlements later abandoned. It appears that from time immemorial these areas have been inhabited by diverse ethnic groups – indigenous groups as well as invaders and peaceful immigrants who have together contributed to the formation of the people who inhabit this Island and constitute the Sri Lankan Nation which is the result of considerable miscegenation through the centuries. It is not possible to establish priority of title to land with any degree of certainty.

If, as is sometimes speculated,[17] the very physical proximity of South India populated by millions of Tamils makes it likely that the Tamils arrived in the island earlier,[18] which is not impossible, it is hard to explain the numerical preponderance of the Sinhala population. This makes it equally likely that the Sinhala people had settled as communities earlier in areas subsequently occupied by Tamils, as well as in the North Central parts in larger numbers, and that their presence initially constituted a barrier to the movement of Tamils further inland. The position is further confused because certain Tamil nationalists dispute the North Indian origins of the Sinhala people, despite their language being one of the Indo-Aryan group, which makes the Tamil claim to being a distinct community even

more tenuous, if ethnically the Sinhala people are also of Dravidian origin.  On the theory of physical proximity to the mainland, considering their numerical preponderance, the Sinhalese, if also Dravidians, are likely to have arrived earlier.

Its fragile historical foundation is seen from the fact that the claim of the Tamils to be a separate nation occupying these areas, said to have originated several centuries ago, is sought to be substantiated by the comparatively recent opinion of a British colonial official, Hugh Cleghorn, who lived for a brief period in the island in the early days of British rule. Professor Kingsley de Silva, whom we felicitate on this occasion, has made a significant contribution[19] to this debate in subjecting the Tamil homelands claim to rigorous historical analysis and shown it to be without any solid basis.  While the subjective value of the homelands claim as myth in the development of Tamil nationalism remains undiminished, its refutation as a sound historical claim has not been seriously challenged, which is relevant when evaluating a politico-legal claim.  Lea Brillmayer has convincingly argued[20] that "without a normatively sound claim to territory, self-determination arguments do not form a plausible basis for secession."  Yet these impediments and objections are glossed over and the territorial demand is asserted as a "non-negotiable" right and thereby all argument is sought to be foreclosed as though its historicity, legality and justice were self-evident.

It is also necessary that there should be a present nexus between the national group aspiring to secession and the claimed territory.  The numerical size of the claimant group in relation to the rest of the population is relevant to the determination of its legitimacy.  From the aggregate of Tamil speaking people (3,753,740) on whose behalf the Federal Party claim was originally made, has to be excluded the plantation Tamils who number 825,233, and the Muslims numbering 1,056,972.  So also must the Tamils who live outside the North and East and evince no interest in living permanently in these areas. Although no precise estimate is possible according to the last official census 621,055 indigenous Tamils lived outside the Northern and Eastern Provinces.  It is possible that of indigenous Tamils in the North and East this number is now considerably less having regard to large scale emigration to Western Europe, Canada and Australia, even allowing for normal increase, and refugees from the North and East.

In the result, the indigenous Tamils who actually reside in non-contiguous areas in the North and East number 1,250,480 and would constitute around eight and a half (8.5%) percent of the total population of 14,850,000 of the island according to the 1981 figures. The Muslims in the Mannar District and in the Eastern Province would be forced to leave if the LTTE were to resume their genocidal attacks.  It is for this relatively small minority or according to present estimates even a smaller number that the LTTE has for over twelve years waged an armed struggle claiming not only the entirety of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, but even certain coastal areas situated in the North Western and Western Provinces extending as far as Puttalam, Chilaw and Negombo.  It is plain that a claim over this vast area of territory, which comprises over a third of the country and nearly two-thirds of the coast line of the whole island for a mere 8.5% of the population, is not

sustainable on any ground of rationality, justice or equity and that it would be an unjust denial of the rights of other ethnic groups, both Sinhala and Muslim, who together constitute nearly 80% of the population. Though not expressly declared to be part of their policy, the LTTE has systematically carried out attacks on Sinhala and Muslim villages within the Northern and Eastern Provinces and began "ethnic cleansing" even before that odious phrase gained currency in the Bosnian conflict.

There is an apparent distinction between the strategies of the Tamil political parties functioning through the normal political process and militant groups which openly advocate and resort to violent means of achieving Tamil Eelam.[21] Among the former there is a certain ambivalence in regard to the ultimate objective, the establishment of Eelam or what is sometimes described as a "viable alternative" to it. There is some vagueness as to how this "viability" is to be measured. Is it with a view to finally achieving the goal of a separate State? There is unconscious irony in the use of the word "viable" since it also means[22] "able to maintain a separate existence" which of course is the whole point of a separate state! In the case of the LTTE there is an unequivocal commitment to a separate State and nothing is excluded as to the means of achievement – even through terrorism, which is now universally condemned as an "international crime."

The former has made no open disavowal of a separate state in their political stance, despite having to submit to the oath prescribed by the Sixth Amendment as MPs. Along with certain intellectuals, for many Tamil groups, the LTTE still represent an icon in the so-called struggle for national liberation and is viewed with unfeigned admiration, despite the innumerable horrifying atrocities committed against innocent people and other depravities in the cause of separatism. Hence their continuing insistence that no settlement is possible without the LTTE, which is in effect a covert plea both for the continuing survival of the LTTE and their unconditional and absolute right to represent the Tamils – a claim steadfastly denied by all Governments of Sri Lanka. It demonstrates a kind of moral ambiguity that is indeed surprising and out of character for a people who uphold humane values and are heirs to a great culture and civilisation. The entire history of the LTTE, which has proved to be an effective guerrilla movement, even against such large scale operations as that of the IPKF (1987-90), does not evince any indication that the proposed new state will be run according to rules of democratic governance, having regard to its systematic elimination of all other groups competing for power, quite apart from the ruthless manner in which it has purged all intra-group dissent. If the justification for self-determination for an ethnic group is the denial of access to government through the democratic political process and the free enjoyment of its cultural values and the development of its social mores, the conduct of the LTTE hitherto is clear evidence that these values will be negated under a form of totalitarian rule, while claiming to be in the vanguard of the movement of "national liberation."

It may be wondered whether it is the likely re-emergence and continuance of the age-old cleavages of caste which are part of traditional Jaffna society under conditions of

normalcy that deters the LTTE leadership, drawn essentially from the minority castes, from entering the mainstream democratic process under which they will be swamped by the majority *Vellalas*, as the entire course of Tamil parliamentary representation in Sri Lanka has shown. No settlement of the present armed conflict is likely to be agreed to by the Sri Lanka government except upon the basis of principles of democratic governance. Hence, such a peaceful settlement, which does not assure the LTTE continuing hegemony, would to them remain an anathema. Unfortunately many Tamil groups are unwilling to face up to this dilemma and seem to engage in bewildering equivocations when confronted with this question. In effect it is merely advocating a policy of appeasement of the rebels who make an unconscionable claim. The recent dislodgement of the LTTE from Jaffna, the fulcrum of its *de facto* control, is indicative of the Government's resolute refusal to accede to this claim.

Yet, it is well to be aware of certain concealed dangers. If the ethnic problem is merely the consequence of specific unrelieved grievances, the obvious course of action is to remedy them if substantiated and ensure safeguards against their recurrence. A recognised mode is commonly thought to be the conferment of a substantial measure of autonomy to those areas in which the ethnic group is concentrated. The rational choice of the unit of devolution for this purpose is the district and not the province, in Sri Lanka. If on the other hand, an effective solution is to be sought to what is seen as the central problem that has given rise to the armed insurrection in Sri Lanka, viz. separatism, though articulated in terms of discrimination, then it is axiomatic that utmost care should be taken to ensure that the proposed solution would not exacerbate the prevalent tendencies to secession, but at the lowest seek to contain them if their eradication is not possible.

Whether it be fully coherent or not, the ideological basis of Eelam in Sri Lanka is Tamil nationalism. Its driving force is the psychological motivation of the actors who conceive of the new State as one in which they will not suffer threats to physical security, but enjoy complete equality and opportunities for a better life in every sphere. Its very ethno-nationalist character, however, makes it inherently prone to chauvinism and xenophobia and makes coexistence in a multi-ethnic society problematic. This is true of Sinhala nationalism as well – the excesses of which have undoubtedly contributed to the emergence of Tamil separatism. If the demand for a separate state, is to continue to be resisted, it is necessary to ensure that the political solution that is suggested for its abandonment is not used as a means of securing a temporary respite, yet paving the way for later secession. No purpose will be served if the solution does not neutralise divisive tendencies that will cause a new secessionist outbreak in all its malignancy.

Since separatism is largely the result of a state of mind that is widely pervasive in any community, then the solution adopted to be effective must ensure that it does not further promote this mindset and lead to the same end result. There is a body of opinion which is sceptical about the efficacy of federalism as a panacea for separatism, while others tend to be optimistic about its healing potential and give little consideration to its dangers.

It is unwise to generalise from particular instances of success or failure for its successful operation depends upon the prevalent political ethos and political culture. It would be incautious to hazard the obvious risks of this constitutional system when there is ample scope at present to test the efficacy of devolution on the ground. This is feasible through the operation of the Provincial Council System introduced by the Thirteenth Amendment in the crucial areas – the Northern and Eastern Provinces, under which sufficient controls exist if the experiment appears to be going awry i.e. sliding into secession.

The decrease of state power at the Centre and its enhancement at the periphery under a scheme of undiluted federalism may lead to the enfeeblement of the Central Government. This will make the regional units less reliant on the Centre and therefore inclined to be more independent and aspire to a separate statehood. If the peripheral units have in addition the capacity to enter into international relations in economic development and trade, it will tend to weaken the integrative forces that bind the periphery to the Centre and may strengthen ties with neighbouring Tamil Nadu. Considering the extent of support for Tamil aspirations in South India, it may with time even lead to an irredentist movement or a revival of the old Federal Party proposal to federate with the Union of India under a political climate that is favourable to such developments.

It is the view of certain scholars such as Nordlinger[23] that federalism may actually contribute to a conflict exacerbation because in some deeply divided societies it is impossible to draw state boundaries without including a large number of individuals belonging to segments whose territorial base is elsewhere. He says: "Federalism thus allows or encourages the dominant segment in any one State to ignore or negate the demands of the minority segment." This could happen if the Northern and Eastern Provinces are merged according to existing boundaries, leaving the Sinhala and Muslim minorities with the Tamil majority in the amalgamated region. On the other hand, if Sinhala and Muslim areas are excised from the merged Province so as to create a homogenous unit, the sense of separateness and exclusiveness from the rest of the country is likely to escalate within the new territorial unit and the sense of isolation and alienation of the Tamil minority in the rest of the country is likely to increase militating against national unity.

A territorial demarcation of this kind is also likely to engender in the majority community, unless adequate safeguards are provided, a sense of loss and deprivation of important natural resources, principally land and the adjacent sea coast and territorial waters, which have been regarded for centuries as *res communes* and as the common heritage of the People of Sri Lanka and could cause further communal friction. The question is whether these risks are worth taking without sober consideration of the consequences for the future of the island.

The very genesis of the Federal Party attests a secessionary outlook for, as Wilson[24] states, "party activists ...advocated federation with a future Dravidian State of South India," but adds that, "later opinion stabilised in favour of a Tamil homeland federated

to a Sinhalese Ceylon (Sri Lanka)." This appears to have been equally evanescent for the Vaddukoddai Resolution (1976) was a reversal of this position wherein there was an unequivocal affirmation of the right to establish a separate state. It was further confirmed by the declaration by all the Tamil parties in 1985 made in Thimpu, which asserted the right of self-determination and a distinct nationality.

In the light of this historical background it would be unwise to lightly dismiss these apprehensions as being wholly unwarranted or unreasonable. Federalism to be successful requires a relationship of trust and wholehearted co-operation, the achievement of which would be nothing short of miraculous after the long and bitter armed conflict that has ensued. Until there is reconciliation and a measure of goodwill that only emerges over time, federalism is a perilous undertaking. There would be a strong likelihood of old and new differences leading to recrimination and the revival of what would then be an unbridgeable gulf and set the stage for a final parting. Even if one were to reject the instances of the former Soviet Union and the former Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia as not being examples of true federalism which failed, the example of Quebec teetering on the edge of secession is hardly likely to inspire confidence in federalism.[25]

It is now accepted that the suppression of a separatist movement by armed force or forced assimilation is not a solution. Nor can it be solved solely through the medium of constitutional change. Even the grant of substantial autonomy will have limited value if unaccompanied by radical changes in the attitudes of all ethnic groups to strengthen the forces of integration for the whole of Sri Lanka. The real safeguards against separatism are not to be found in constitutional provisions and legal safeguards. It needs the much more difficult task of creating an environment of trust, tolerance and goodwill that will generate a sense of solidarity and togetherness among all the communities in the Island. Undoubtedly, this can only be achieved over time and it is folly to imagine that a "quick fix" is possible.

For any discontented minority to be dissuaded from following the path of secession, it must be convinced that there is a greater advantage in living as citizens of an undivided Sri Lanka than in a separate state. The majority has to be convinced that what is being granted is not a settlement of permanent alimony on the eve of a divorce but a just measure of power sharing. The strength of the bonds and links with the rest of the country must be seen to outweigh the seductive appeal of dissolving existing ties, even if it were possible to effect what has been described as a "velvet divorce" as in the former Czechoslovakia. If the present conflict is to end, the majority has to recognise the futility of refusing reasonable requests and the minorities must in turn cease persisting with unreasonable demands. A *modus vivendi* between ethnic groups that makes secession unattractive, like attaining one's individual salvation, has to be worked out with patience and diligence.

Notes

1.  M J Newbegin, *Aftermath: A Geographical Study of the Peace Terms, 1920*, cited in *National Self-Determination*, Derek Heater, 1994, p 109.

2.  *Report of the International Committee of Jurists - Aaland Island Question*, October 1920.

3.  *Official Journal of the League of Nations* - Special Supplement No. 3.

4.  Vide also Article 55 of the UN Charter for use of identical language.

5.  UNGA Resolution 1514(XV).

6.  UNGA Resolution 2625(XXV).

7.  Antonio Cassese, *Self-Determination of Peoples*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp 112-21.

8.  The Helsinki Declaration (1975) omits reference to race, creed or colour.

9.  Antonio Cassese, *ibid.*, pp 122-124.

10. K Sivatamby, "Some Aspects of the Social Composition of the Tamils of Sri Lanka" in *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, Social Scientists Association, 1984, pp 130-132.

11. H W Tambiah, *The Laws and Customs of the Tamils of Ceylon*, Colombo, Tamil Cultural Society, 1954, pp 94-100.

12. Michael Banks, "Caste in Jaffna" in *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North West Pakistan*, E R Leach (ed.), Cambridge University Press, 1960, pp 61-77; Bryan Pfaffenberger, *Caste in Tamil Culture*, Syracuse, Syracuse University, 1982.

13. See Rasanayagam according to which the depressed caste of the Nalavars were originally Sinhalese-Ancient Jaffna, Reprint, 1984, p 383.

14. C Manogaran and B Pfaffenberger (eds), *The Sri Lankan Tamils: Ethnicity and Identity*, Boulder, Co., Westview Press, 1994, Introduction, p 19; Dagmar Hellman Rajanayagam, "Tamils and the Meaning of History" in Manogaran and B Pfaffenberger, *op.cit.*, 1994, p 29.

15. Benedict Anderson, *The Imagined Communities*, Verso, London, 1983.

16. B Horsburgh, "Singhalese Place Names in the Jaffna Peninsula," *The Ceylon Antiquary*, Vol. II, Part I, 1916, p 54; Rev. S Gnana Prakasar, "Sinhalese Place Names in the Jaffna Peninsula," *Ceylon Antiquary*, Vol. II, Part II, 1917, p 67; J P Lewis, "Sinhalese Place Names in the Jaffna Peninsula," *Ceylon Antiquary*, Vol. III, Part I, 1917, p 94. Vide generally "Historical Topography of Ancient and Medieval Ceylon," C W Nicholas, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Colombo Branch JRAS (CB)*, n.s. VI, pp 1-232.

17. Paul E Pieris, "Nagadipa and Buddhist Remains in Jaffna," *JRAS (CB)*, XXVIII, No. 72, pp 40-66.

18. According to P Ramanathan, the earliest migration of Tamils to the Island was from the West (Coromandel) and not from the East (Malabar) cited in Tambiah, *ibid.*, p 12.

19. K M de Silva, *Separatist Ideology in Sri Lanka: A Historical Appraisal*, Revised Ed., Kandy, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 1994.

20. Lea Brillmayer, "Secession and Self-Determination. A Territorial Interpretation," *Yale Journal of International Law*, Vol. 16, 1991, pp 77-92.

21. The etymology of Eelam and its equivalence with Sihala signifies the land of the Sinhalese. Hence the necessity for the qualificatory neologism "Tamil Eelam" signifying a part of the undivided country.

22. *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, 3rd Edition, p 2352.

23. Eric A Nordlinger, *Conflict Regulation in Divided Societies*, Harvard, Harvard University Centre for International Affairs, 1972, p 31.

24. A J Wilson, *Politics in Sri Lanka: 1947- 1979*, London, Macmillan, 1975, p 195.

25. David J Bercuson, "Why Quebec and Canada Must Part," *Current History*, 1995, p 123.

# Civil Society and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka

Neelan Tiruchelvam

## Causes and Consequences of Ethnic Conflict: South Asian Context

In the recent history of the Indian subcontinent, ethnic violence has become an increasingly common phenomenon. From the Mohajir-Sindhi clashes in Karachi to the anti-Sikh riots in New Delhi, the anti-reservation stir in Gujarat and the Sinhala-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka, inter-group violence has left a trail of destruction of property and human life. The emotional and psychological scars that remain after such outbreaks are in fact even more destructive than the physical damage. The sense of community within a plural society is often shattered by the cruelty, terror and suffering unleashed by the forces of mob violence. Moreover, ethnic conflict has contributed to some of the most serious and persistent violations of human rights in many parts of South Asia. These relate to disappearances, torture and extra-judicial killings and arbitrary and indiscriminate arrests.

The competition for scarce resources and economic opportunities has fuelled antagonisms arising out of the sharp cleavages of race, caste, tribe, religion, and language. Fragile political institutions have failed to accommodate adequately the demands for power and resource-sharing by marginalised ethnic and religious groups. Policies to advance national cohesion have been pursued at the expense of the linguistic and cultural traditions of minority groups. Ethnic discontent began manifesting itself in secessionist movements resulting in repressive responses by the State posing serious social justice and human rights concerns. These problems have been further compounded by the internal displacement of millions of persons, and the flight of tens of thousands from their countries as refugees.

But more recently there has been a growing awareness of the universality and complexities of ethnic problems and the need for concerted action to devise strategies, programmes and structures for the management of ethnic conflicts. Several multi-ethnic polities have incorporated federal forms of devolution into constitutional and political orders. In the evolution of these constitutional models there has been continuing conflict between unitary and federal efforts, and centralised and decentralised forms. In India, the federal polity is based largely on a division into linguistic states, while in Malaysia there is a Federation of States headed by local rulers and new territories which have been given special concessions. The former Nigerian model provides an interesting contrast, with the overlap of certain regional and tribal groupings in the demarcation of states. The diverse ethnic, tribal and regional groupings have varying perceptions of federalism, and these

perceptions have tended to shape the conflicts and tensions in the operation of federalism in each of these societies. There is a growing debate within each of these societies on the need for structural rearrangements to strengthen the federal character of these polities. These efforts have been directed towards the need to redefine centre-state relations in educational and cultural policy, police powers, resource mobilisation and redistribution, emergency and residual powers. Such efforts and problems evoke basic issues relating to equitable power sharing between ethnic groups, and the failure to address these issues boldly has accentuated secessionist demands by disaffected ethnic and other sub-national groups. Federal and quasi-federal models of devolution also have a relevance to strife-ridden societies such as the Philippines, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, which have recently enacted new constitutions or are on the threshold of redesigning their present constitutional framework.

The question of self-determination which has been often asserted by ethnic minorities in the course of armed struggle or non-violent political agitation has been most problematic. Nation states become extremely defensive in the context of such assertions and have often resorted to extreme measures of repression to contain such demands which they perceive would result in secession or disintegration.

Another focal point of ethnic conflict has been preference policies directed towards disparities in access to education and employment and in economic opportunities. These policies are often founded on competing perceptions of deprivation which in turn give rise to rival notions of social justice. India, one of the most complex and hierarchically structured societies, has a constitutionally mandated policy of preference towards weak and vulnerable minorities and tribal groups. Policy makers and judges have had to grapple with issues of bewildering complexity in defining the constitutional limits of such policies, balancing the interest of historically depressed caste and tribal groups with those of economically backward classes. Preference policies directed in favour of a politically assertive and dominant majority such as those of the New Economic Policy in Malaysia pose qualitatively different socio-political issues relating to the legitimate limits of preference policies based on proportionality.

The international community must accord highest priority to evolving principles and concepts with regard to minority protection which will gain universal acceptance and contribute towards the peaceful resolution of conflicts. It must be emphasised that given the evolving and changing nature of ethnic identity and the content of ethnic demands, and to the shifting balance of power between ethnic groups, most structural arrangements would remain fluid and transistent. There is therefore the need to continuously renew and reconstruct these arrangements in response to new challenges and demands.

Ethnic conflicts pose fundamental issues relating to human rights and social justice which need to be addressed within the framework of the community's policy on human rights and development co-operation.

## Collective Violence in Sri Lanka

Sixteen years have lapsed since one of the cruellest weeks in the troubled history of modern Sri Lanka. Tamils of Sri Lanka have been exposed to collective violence in 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983. There was however a qualitative difference in the intensity, brutality and organised nature of the violence of July '83. There is no other event which is so deeply etched in the collective memories of the victims and survivors. Neither time nor space has helped ease the pain, the trauma and the bitter memories.

According to certain estimates, about 2,000-3,000 defenceless people were brutally murdered, although official figures maintain that the death toll was about 400. Many were beaten or hacked to death, while several were torched to death. Thousands of homes and buildings were torched or destroyed. Within the city of Colombo almost a hundred thousand persons, more than half the city's Tamil population, were displaced from their homes, many never returned to their neighbourhoods or to their work places. Outside the city, it was estimated that there were about 175,000 refugees and displaced persons. Hardly a family escaped the death of a relative, or the destruction of their houses or their livelihood and the dislocation of their families. One woman who had been victimised by the repeated cycles of violence, reconstructed her Tamil identity, 'to be a Tamil is to live in fear,' she exclaimed in despair.

Many observers were disturbed by the organised and systematic nature of the violence. The rampaging mobs were fed with precise information on the location of Tamil houses and businesses. Their leaders were often armed with voters' lists, and with detailed addresses of every Tamil-owned shop, house or factory. The business, entrepreneurial and professional classes were especially targeted, as part of the objective appeared to be to break the economic backbone of the Tamils. It was estimated that almost 100 industrial plants, including 20 garment factories were severely damaged or destroyed. The cost of industrial reconstruction was estimated at Rs. 2 billion. This did not include the hundreds of shops and small trading establishments.

Equally disturbing was the apparent government complicity in the violence. The state not only mishandled the funeral of 13 soldiers who had been ambushed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on 23 July 1983 but also allowed the inflammatory news to be projected in banner headlines in the newspapers on the 24th. On the other hand, the retaliatory violence of the security forces in Tirunelveli and Kantharmadu which resulted in an estimated 50 to 70 persons being killed was suppressed from the media. Army personnel appeared to have encouraged arson and looting and in some instances participated in the looting. Neither the army nor the police took any meaningful action to prevent the violence or to apprehend the culprits. No curfew was declared for almost two days. Neither the President nor any senior minister made a public appeal for calm and restraint. It was also widely believed that elements within the state or the ruling party had either orchestrated the violence or encouraged the bloodletting. No Commission of

Inquiry was ever appointed to clear the state of these allegations or to investigate the causes of violence.

When, however, political leaders did speak four days later, there was a total identification of the state with the majority community. President Jayewardene is believed to have said that the riots were not a product of urban mobs but a mass movement of the generality of the Sinhalese people. He spoke of the need to politically "appease" the natural desires and requests of the Sinhalese people. Similarly, none of the senior cabinet ministers who spoke on television including Lalith Athulathmudali, had a word of sympathy for the victims of this terrible outrage, nor did any of them visit the refugee camps to commiserate even briefly with those who had suffered. This conduct of the President was in sharp contrast with his more conciliatory behaviour in the aftermath of the 1981 violence. He was quoted on 11 September – "I regret that some members of my party have spoken in Parliament and outside words that encourage violence and murders, rapes and arson that have been committed." The President further stated that he would resign as the Head of his party if its members continued to encourage ethnic violence and racial bigotry.

Clearly the most disturbing episode took place on 25 July 1983 at Welikada prison, when 35 Tamil political detainees were battered and hacked to death with clubs, pipes and iron rods by fellow prisoners with the complicity of prison guards. The government conducted a perfunctory magisterial inquiry but no attempt has yet been made to take legal action against those responsible. This incident was repeated on Wednesday 27 July and it is shameful that the government has yet to pay compensation to the bereaved families and has pleaded immunity to the legal proceedings instituted by them.

Several scholars have written extensively on the causes and consequences of July 1983, which the British anthropologist, Jonathan Spencer, has described as "the dark night of the collective soul." How is it possible that an island renowned for its scenic beauty and the warmth and hospitality of its inhabitants is capable of such collective evil and inhumanity? Some have referred to the crisis of competing nationalism of the Sinhalese and the Tamils as being a contributory factor. Both forms of nationalism were antagonistic and incompatible. The assertion of one was perceived to be a denial of the other. Others have referred to the historical myths as embodied in the ancient chronicle that demonised the Tamils. Jonathan Spencer points out that in the popular imagination, the Tigers were believed to be 'superhumanly cruel and cunning and like demons ubiquitous' and that ordinary Tamil work-mates and neighbours also became vested with these attributes. They remind us, that as Voltaire said: 'if you believe in absurdities you will commit atrocities.' Others have pointed to the propensity for violence in authoritarian political structures which enthrone the majoritarian principle and provide for the bizarre entrenchment of the unitary state. The Referendum of December 1982 which extended the life of Parliament, further exacerbated the climate of political animosity and of intolerance.

July '83 also contributed towards convulsive changes in the politics of the Tamil community and their methods of struggle. As the political leaders committed to

constitutional means of agitation became marginalised, Tamil militancy assumed ascendancy. It was even asserted by some that violence of the victims was on a different moral plane from that of the oppressor. This was a dangerous doctrine, for the violence of the victim soon consumed the victim, and the victims also became possessed by the demons of racial bigotry and intolerance which had characterised the oppressor. These are seen in the violence perpetrated by Tamils on the Sinhalese and Muslims – the massacres at the Kathankudy mosque, at Anuradhapura, in Welikanda and Medirigiya, and the forcible expulsion of Muslims from the Mannar and Jaffna districts.

A decade later the basic problems remained unresolved, and to some extent are more intractable. On 18 June 1993, the then Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe told the Sri Lanka Aid Consortium, "History has shown us, that there are numerous lessons to be drawn from other countries of the world that problems of a minority cannot be resolved by suppressing the minority or by riding roughshod over the heads of the majority. An honourable solution needs a recognisable consensus. We are therefore not relaxing our efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in the north and east based on such a consensus." The peace efforts initiated by the 'People's Alliance' soon after it took over the reins of government in 1994 also failed to make headway, and were abandoned within a few months. Thus, it appears that the Sri Lankan political leadership has not shown the political imagination, the resolve or the sense of urgency to forge the type of consensus which could pave the way to ethnic harmony and peace.

## Early Warning Signals

Although on the transfer of political power in 1948, the ethnic minorities in Sri Lanka were unreconciled to constitutional arrangements which have singularly failed to establish the foundation of a multi-ethnic polity, few expected that the majority rule would be quickly followed by discriminatory legislative measures. The first of such legislation related to the Citizenship Laws which effectively disenfranchised the estate Tamils of recent Indian origin. This legislation resulted in ethnic political formation with the objective of resisting discriminatory citizenship laws and of advocating parity in the status of national languages and the creation of a federal constitution. It was clear from these developments that ethnic communities were getting increasingly polarised and the political discourses have become politically strident and potentially volatile. The political and ethnic polarisation became further compounded during the 1956 general election when the Sri Lanka Freedom Party was swept into power in all parts of the country except in the north and east. The party's success symbolised the resurgence of the forces of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism while the Federal Party's success in the north and east represented the emergence of a new form of Tamil linguistic nationalism. Unfortunately the events of the mid-1950s ensured that the assertion of one form of nationalism was viewed as a denial of the other.

There were two important warnings of the escalating conflict and of likely violence. The first was a monograph by B H Farmer titled *Ceylon: A Divided Nation* issued under the auspices of the Institute of Race Relations in London in 1963. This monograph signalled the

growing complexities of the conflict and the need for early resolution. Another early warning was provided by Colvin R de Silva, the leading left politician during the legislative debates on the Official Languages Act. He warned that the policy of trying to impose the language of the majority community on the linguistic minority would have dangerous political consequences. He added "two languages – one nation; one language – two nations" thus indicating that the failure to resolve the language question in a manner satisfactory to the minority would eventually lead to a separatist movement.

These early warnings were however not heeded. Sri Lanka did not have at that time a strong non-governmental organisation (NGO) which could have heeded this warning and responded to it in a meaningful way. The professional organisations and religious groups were also dormant and were reluctant to take a position against the tide of majoritarian sentiment. The Federal Party however continued its non-violent agitation against the discriminatory language legislation including a *Satyagraha* campaign outside parliament. These non-violent protests led to an ugly incident of mob violence directed against peaceful protestors which progressively escalated into collective violence directed against the Tamil community in different parts of the island. A state of emergency in effect meant that there was newspaper censorship and little information on the scale and intensity of the violence that was directed against the Tamils. There was also no Commission of Inquiry appointed into the violence particularly as a failure of the police in some areas to contain the incidence of violence. In this regard, an important intervention was the publication of a book by renowned Sri Lankan journalist Tarzie Vittachi called *Emergency 58: The Story of the Ceylon Race Riots*. This book was informative not only on the immediate events but also with regard to the overall context of the deteriorating ethnic relations between the communities.

## Local Responses

The initial response of civil society institution to the escalating conflict and the outbreak of violence was to mobilise humanitarian relief operations to those affected by the conflict. Several local relief organisations, sometimes in collaboration with religious groups, arranged for the supply of food and other essential items to the refugee camps, which have been established for internally displaced persons. These cycles of violence in 1958 and 1977 also inevitably led to the migration of population from the south of Sri Lanka to the north and east and the consequential problems of resettlement. The relief groups were required to also follow up on these issues and provide assistance to displaced families, facilitate the education of children and re-employment of wage earners. The Sri Lanka Red Cross Society was one of the agencies which was active in following up in the outbreak of violence in 1958 and 1977 but limited its intervention to immediate humanitarian issues. The Red Cross Society was also able to mobilise during this period considerable amount of external assistance for internally displaced persons.

In the early seventies in Sri Lanka, there were several important NGOs which were founded and which progressively acquired a capacity to respond to some of the human

rights, political and humanitarian issues linked to the escalation of the ethnic conflict and the consequent violence. The Civil Rights Movement (CRM) was one of the significant civil society initiatives of this period. It was founded in 1971 with the objective of protecting and promoting civil rights and liberties of the people at all times. The organisation jealously guarded its independence and impartiality and focussed primarily on the exercise of governmental power and the misuse of such power.

The CRM has also been an important non-governmental organisation in conflict intervention in Sri Lanka. Its interventions were often responsive to the different phases of the crisis. They may be categorised as follows:

(1)  In relation to the conflict in the north and east, protesting against security legislation on the grounds that such legislations tended to be too wide and too restrictive on individual rights.

(2)  Protecting the freedom of speech of those who articulate minority grievances including the advocacy of separatism. The CRM on 4 July 1979 referring to a proposal on the advocacy of separatism drew attention to "grave dangers inherent in using the power of the State to curb the democratic freedom of political debate, for this forces political opponents to resort to other means. A ban on the democratic expression of the demand for Eelam will, far from achieving the stated purpose of curbing violence, in fact, create a situation where lawlessness and violence may increase."

(3)  By documenting abuses of the human rights of political dissidents and minorities including ill treatment, torture and death in custody, arbitrary and prolonged detention and in protesting against emergency regulations which create the possibility of such human rights abuses including the admissibility of confession.

(4)  Documenting incidents of violence against minorities, their political representatives and political parties allegedly by armed forces or police and urging effective actions to maintain law and order.

(5)  Recording incidents of communal violence against estate Tamils and urging effective action to punish the perpetrators and to compensate the victims. The related memorandum recommended the grant of citizenship and electoral rights to estate Tamils and the strengthening of their educational facilities.

(6)  Encouraging the government to adopt international instruments relating to the protection of minorities such as the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Optional Protocol. The CRM has also urged the signing of 23 other international human rights instruments in the expectation that a more effective protection of individual rights would facilitate better ethnic relations.

(7)  The CRM protested against the collective violence in July 1983, and the complicity of the state in such violence including the massacre of 53 Tamil

prisoners and detainees in the Welikada prison. The CRM further instituted legal action on behalf of the families of the victims of the prison's massacre.

(8) The CRM has intervened in the process of constitutional reforms in 1977, 1993 and 1994 with a view to giving more effective protection to individual and minority rights.

(9) It has also encouraged political negotiations for the resolution of the conflict and urged the cessation of hostilities between both parties to the conflict. It has urged both parties to respond favourably to the good offices of the United Nations in facilitating the resolution of the conflict.

The CRM is therefore an organisation that has been effective in Early Warning and Early Action with regard to ethnic conflicts in view of its capacity to monitor and document human rights abuses and to retain its moral authority in an increasingly polarised and acrimonious environment. It has also been effective in maintaining a central focus on the questions of rights and democratic values and in linking these concerns to questions of constitutional and legal reforms. The CRM has however been frustrated by the continuing cycles of violence, the impunity and the lack of accountability of the state to human rights abuses and the attacks on the defenders of human rights particularly at the grass root level. The CRM has been most effective in projecting international standards and comparative experience to the resolution of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflicts. The Civil Rights Movement received the Carter-Menil award for human rights.

The Movement for Inter Racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE) is another non-governmental organisation which was established in the aftermath of the 1977 ethnic violence. The objective of the Movement was to promote harmony between the ethnic groups. It has a mixed membership and branches in different parts of the country. Until 1988, it had even an active branch in Jaffna. The MIRJE has been effective in continuing to caution on the deteriorating nature of ethnic relations and on the need to take effective measures to secure the individual and collective rights of the Tamils. It also documented the incidence of ethnic violence in 1981 and 1983, and sponsored several fact-finding missions, thereby ensuring that objective and impartial information is available on such incidents of violence. It also propagated the concept of multi-ethnic Sri Lankan society grounded on the bedrock of equality and equal opportunity. It has called for constitutional and political structures that recognises this reality and gives room to the full expression to the social, cultural and political aspirations of all ethnic groups. With these objectives in view, MIRJE has engaged in the following activities. Firstly, it publishes two newspapers, one in Tamil and the other in Sinhala to ensure that there is balanced reporting on events relating to ethnic conflict and its resolution. Second, it is engaged in a programme of public education through cultural activity including organisation of a peace march to Jaffna. Third, it has been providing legal assistance to detenues and has filed more than 3,000 applications in this regard. Fourth, it has framed a model constitution based on the federal form of devolution of power and effective protection of minority rights. It has lobbied for the acceptance of some of the concepts and ideas embodied in this draft.

The International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) is a non-governmental organisation with an international mandate and international board of directors but is included in this section in view of its importance in addressing issues relating to internal conflict in Sri Lanka. The Centre was established in 1982 and has two offices, one in Colombo and the other in Kandy. Each branch independently develops its own projects and secures its own funding. The Centre emphases the need to fashion a plural society and to put into place structural arrangements and policies designed to minimise ethic conflict. The Centre has been active in contributing towards the development of two main policy areas which are critical to the ethnic conflict, i.e. devolution and bilingualism. The Centre has encouraged the establishment of provincial councils throughout Sri Lanka partly in response to ethnic grievances and the need to strengthen democratic participation.

Sri Lanka as a multi-lingual society has Sinhala and Tamil as official languages of government, and English as a link language. The ICES was effective in drafting legislation to establish an Official Languages Commission to implement the government's language policy. It has also worked on the victims and survivors of ethnic violence in July 1983 and made recommendations with regard to the role of education as an instrument of national integration. The Centre has an active media programme which focuses on processes of value formation in Sri Lanka and in emphasising respect for diversity, ethnic tolerance and religious harmony. The ICES has been regarded as an important civil society resource in the on-going peace process and the process of constitutional reform.

## International Responses

Internationalisation of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has been greater than other similar ethnic conflicts in South Asia. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been providing special humanitarian assistance to war affected areas; the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has been implementing a programme of emergency assistance to internally displaced persons; the UN Working Group on Disappearances has visited Sri Lanka twice and submitted reports; and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General visited the country from 10 to 17 November 1993 to report on the conditions of the internally displaced persons. International non-governmental organisations have also been active in documenting human rights abuses, in investigating minority grievances in conflict resolution and in providing humanitarian relief. The work of the Amnesty International has been particularly significant in the comprehensive review of emergency laws and security legislations, and in the reporting of incidents of torture, disappearances, extra-judicial killings and arbitrary arrests. Similarly the International Commission of Jurists, Lawasia and Asiawatch have investigated different aspects of the ethnic conflict and published reports which receive considerable attention. These documentations were also helpful to the UN Human Rights Commission and the Sub Commission on Minorities in reviewing the status of human rights and minority protection in Sri Lanka and also to the donor consortium in its annual meetings in Paris. Medicins Sans Frontier has provided medical relief to the north and the east and thereby ensured that minimal medical services were made available to the war affected areas. Without the intervention of these

organisations over a period of almost two decades, humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka and gross and persistent violation of human rights would have been much more serious.

In the present study, it would be appropriate to discuss in detail the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross and that of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Domestic human rights organisations in Sri Lanka have for many years been pressing the Government of Sri Lanka to seek the assistance of the ICRC in monitoring the conditions of the detenues and providing humanitarian relief to war affected areas. The Sri Lanka Government for years resisted this proposal on the somewhat legalistic grounds that the presence of the ICRC in Sri Lanka will signify that Sri Lanka was in a state of civil war. However, in March 1987, the UN Human Rights Commission passed a consensus resolution which invited the "Government of Sri Lanka to consider favourably the offer of the services of the ICRC to fulfil its functions of protection of humanitarian standards including the provision of assistance and protection to victims of all affected parties."

It was, however, only after 1989 that the ICRC was invited to establish its office in Colombo. It now has sub delegations in Batticaloa and Jaffna and offices in Ampara, Anuradhapura, Kandy, Mannar, Trincomalee and Vavuniya. The delegation has focussed on the following activities. First, visitation of detainees in places of detention across the country including prisons, detention camps, police stations and military camps. For example, in 1993, the ICRC visited 483 places of detention and focussed attention on the way the detainees were physically and psychologically treated. Where necessary they accompanied released detainees back to their homes. The ICRC has sought access to persons in the custody of the LTTE. However in view of the ICRC mandate the delegation could only submit confidential reports to the government and these reports were not otherwise available to the local human rights community. Secondly, the ICRC is engaged in the tracing of missing persons particularly in connection with the situation in the north-east of the country and in Colombo, and in maintaining a register of detainees. Thirdly, the ICRC delegates provide security to the civilian population in the conflict zone by keeping civilian populations and displaced persons under observation and bringing any problems concerning their safety and living conditions to the attention of the authorities. Fourthly, the ICRC ensures protection of vessels and road convoys transporting essential items to the north. In 1993, the ICRC assisted in the transportation of a monthly average of 9,500 tons of goods supplied by the government to the north of Sri Lanka as well as medical supplies to the Jaffna hospital by ship and road convoys. Fifthly, at the time Jaffna was under the control of the LTTE the ICRC continued to protect the Jaffna teaching hospital and monitored a safety zone around it to ensure that in the event of fighting, the sick and the war wounded would have access to medical care, and to ensure that the fight would not spread to the hospital area. It also ensured that the hospital was provided with adequate medical supply and medical and surgical care. Finally, the ICRC has been an important intermediary between the government and the LTTE in communicating confidential messages between two sides. Its intermediary role was important in establishing the initial contacts and in

working out the modalities for the conduct of peace talks between the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka in 1994-95. The ICRC played a very cautious role in this regard to avoid any implication that it is moving outside its traditional humanitarian mandate.

The role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict has been slightly more complex and controversial. The traditional mandate of the UNHCR has been limited to refugees who are outside their countries of origin but in Sri Lanka the UNHCR has been able to develop a programme which also relates to internally displaced persons. This programme initially commenced modestly in 1990 to provide emergency relief for refugees, displaced and other conflict affected persons in the Mannar district. According to Bill Clarence who was Resident Representative of the UNHCR in Sri Lanka at that time: "the situation on the ground in northern Sri Lanka at that time was extremely complicated, and the raw humanitarian imperative which it imposed required that broad common sense should prevail. The resulting programme helped clear some of the institutional inhibitions against the UNHCR involvement with internally displaced persons and paved the way for a significantly protective role in areas of conflict."

The UNHCR programme initiatives included establishing an open relief centre in Pesalai on Mannar island which provided basic necessities such as shelter, food, medical care for displaced persons who are free to move into and out of the centre at will. Secondly, it implemented a programme of rehabilitation for refugees repatriated from South India. This programme raised questions as to the voluntariness of the repatriation process since the UNHCR was not able to always verify whether the consent of the repatriates had been freely obtained. Thirdly, it administered reception centres, transit centres and transit camps for repatriates returning to Sri Lanka and for their accommodation until their resettlement in uncleared areas. In addition, the UNHCR has also endeavoured to use its good offices to negotiate with the LTTE to open up safe passage from Jaffna to the south of Sri Lanka. These efforts have however been unsuccessful. The UNHCR provides an interesting case study of intergovernmental humanitarian organisation being compelled by humanitarian imperative to undertake relief functions and responsibilities which other humanitarian organisations were unwilling or incapable of doing. The work in Sri Lanka often posed contradictions between the protective and operational functions of the UNHCR and exposed it to the criticism that its activities were compromising the agency's obligations to protect fundamental rights to asylum. It also exposed the agency to the criticism that it was taking on extra mandatory functions when its existing programmes were under funded. There were several other non-governmental organisations such as Medicins Sans Frontiers, Save the Children Fund, CARE, OXFAM, and the Quakers which have been performing essential relief functions. But they have not been institutionally capable of performing the UNHCR functions nor maintaining the complex relationships with the military, the government and the LTTE which a UN agency is able to sustain.

## Partnership or Collaborative Working Arrangement

Sri Lanka provides an interesting case study of effective partnership and collaborative working arrangements between intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental organisations. Such collaboration was possible in the performance of the following functions:

*Collecting and Disseminating Information*

The documentation of the human rights abuses was an important task of both human rights and non-governmental organisations in responding to the consequences of the ethnic conflict. The quality of human rights documentation in Sri Lanka particularly in the areas affected by the conflict has been extraordinarily high. Domestic non-governmental organisations such as the Civil Rights Movement, the Movement for Inter Racial Justice and Equality and the Law and Society Trust have endeavoured to ensure the accuracy and objectivity of their human rights reports. Since 1993 these organisations have also co-operated to produce an Annual Status of Human Rights Reports which covers both civil political rights, socio-economic rights, minorities and internally displaced persons. The reports of the local non-governmental organisations have also assisted the fact-finding missions undertaken from time to time by international NGOs such as Amnesty International, International Commission of Jurists, and Asiawatch. Similarly, the UN Working Group on Disappearances has also made frequent references to the documentation of local human rights organisations.

Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict continues to pose serious questions of human rights and of humanitarian assistance. The active involvement of both domestic and international non-governmental organisations in Sri Lanka has been a significant factor in monitoring human rights abuses and in facilitating humanitarian relief. Non-governmental organisations have provided intellectual leadership through the peace constituency and helped conceptualise policies and political arrangements necessary to sustain a plural society in Sri Lanka. The political environment within which non-governmental organisations are required to function has not been an easy one. Human rights organisations in particular have had to take a lonely position often against the tide of public opinion. During periods of intense fighting and heightened ethnic animosity, non-governmental organisations have often been targeted by the media and the extremist groups and being wrongfully accused of partisanship. Even international non-governmental organisations with impeccable humanitarian credentials have had to face hostility not only from intolerant political groups but sometimes from the state and the security forces. There have been moments when both the international and domestic NGOs had to face threats and intimidations of mobs and other unruly elements. They were nonetheless able to continue working under difficult conditions at least partly due to the strong linkages that international NGOs forged with their local counterparts. The state's attitude to NGOs has been an ambivalent one. On the one hand, the Sri Lankan state has permitted international NGOs to be involved in the humanitarian and human rights aspects of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict to a much larger extent than what has been

possible in other parts of South Asia. There has however been a resistance to the international community directly or indirectly being involved in the political aspects of the conflict. On the other hand, both the previous government and some elements of the present government have threatened to restrict and control the work of non-governmental organisations by introducing new legislation. NGOs in Sri Lanka continue to face new challenges and demands arising out of mass displacement and evacuation which followed the 1995-96 government offensive in Jaffna. They remain an important component of Sri Lanka's civil society without which prospects for peace and reconciliation would seem more remote than what they would otherwise be.

# The Limits of Nationalist Separatism:
# A Study of Leroi Jones's *Dutchman*

Tissa Jayatilaka

The relationship between literature and politics, a close one in the modern era, was particularly close in American society in the 1960s. The social and political turmoil arising out of the Vietnam War and the Black Nationalist Movement spurred some artists to express in their creative work their views on the issues of political, social, and racial justice. Of the Afro-American artists who during the middle-to-late sixties advocated Nationalist Separatism as a means of attaining racial justice, LeRoi Jones is by far the most prominent. His play *Dutchman* (1964) marks an interesting phase in the career of this important Black artist, for although essays of his written at about the same time reveal evidence of powerful Black nationalist hostility, the play itself is a finely balanced study of the racial situation in the 1960s. Regrettably, the response of certain leading critics of the day to *Dutchman* was extremely hostile. Piqued apparently by the provocative nature of Jones's other writings, these critics seemed unable to give the play its proper due.

The present study attempts to establish the serious shortcomings of the critical response referred to above. It also attempts to expose the flaw inherent in Jones's choice of "Nationalist Separatism" rather than "Cultural Nationalism" as a means of resolving what W E B DuBois spoke of as the conflict of "two warring ideals" in the Afro-American experience.

LeRoi Jones is an important figure in contemporary letters.[1] His literary output is enormous. In addition to some twenty-four plays and four drama anthologies, he has published seven volumes of poetry, a novel and a collection of short stories, five books of essays, and an autobiography. Jones is one of the finest and most influential Black playwrights in America. Of them he is arguably the most widely known outside of the United States.

Although Jones had written a few plays by the end of the 1950s, he first came into literary prominence as a poet; it is to his poetry that he owes his initial literary reputation. His first major success as a playwright occurred in 1964 when *Dutchman*[2] appeared. It won the *Village Voice's* Obie Award for the best Off-Broadway play of the year. Of all of his dramatic works, this has been Jones's most successful and powerful and also his most controversial. The production of the play appears to have coincided with the beginning of a period of crucial change in Jones's outlook on art and life – the period when Jones assumed

the leadership of the Black Arts Movement which was the cultural arm of the Black Nationalist Movement of the 1960s.

There is a great deal of confusion regarding Jones's achievement in *Dutchman* and as a playwright in general. When the play was first performed, and for some time after, critical opinion was highly divided. Some critics hailed the play as a masterpiece while others dismissed it as a nasty piece of racial propaganda. Jones himself has contributed rather lavishly to this critical confusion by his dual role as artist in and politician of the Black Power Movement. This fact, however, does not totally absolve the critics since we are justified in demanding of them a sense of objectivity in their literary appraisals.

It is my view that the critics have not assessed the Jonesian achievement fairly. Notwithstanding our desire for dispassionate assessment of works of art, human fallibility may not enable literary critics to achieve total objectivity at all times. What concerns me in this instance is what I perceive to be the almost complete absence of any sense of objectivity whatever. It appears that the critics have allowed their own political and literary critical views to colour their judgement of Jones the artist. They have failed to take into adequate consideration the crucial criterion by which Jones ought to be judged – his peculiar frame of reference. To judge Jones's plays on the basis of traditional Western models, as most of his critics have done, is to ignore totally his deliberate attempts to write a different kind of drama. That he consciously sought to deviate from these models is made clear in his essays in general and, in particular, in "The Revolutionary Theatre."

A look at Jones's biography will also help us to understand his art in its proper perspective. We see in him the plight of a sensitive and educated Black person trying to resolve the contradictions that arise, both in himself and in the society in which he lives, as a consequence of the prevalence of racism in American society. Jones was concerned, as were most Black creative writers of the 1960s, with creating a distinctive and authentic Afro-American sensibility in order to forge a sense of identity for the Afro-American. He employed and intended to employ his literary efforts towards such an end. He was, therefore, obviously enough, not subscribing to "art for art's sake." Nor was he attempting to pander to those who wish to treat as sacrosanct the received notions and conventions of dramatic literature. To ignore these considerations and to call Jones names, as some critics have done, is about as fair as blaming a tiger for not being a lion.

My study aims to highlight the failure of the critics of Jones to appreciate the peculiar strengths of his literary effort, a failure which has not only vitiated their view of the Jonesian dramatic achievement, but, what is more important, has prevented them from focussing on the true limitation of that achievement, namely, its flawed worldview. By choosing "Nationalist Separatism" instead of "Cultural Nationalism" Jones has failed to seek the more desirable resolution of the conflict of the Afro-American. Here I refer to the conflict of the "two warring ideals" in the Afro-American that W E B DuBois spoke of. The primary objective of this study, then, is twofold:

(a) to show the limitations of the critical response to Jones the dramatist by focussing on *Dutchman* and its critics;

(b) to show the limitations of Jones's worldview, a worldview that has kept him from fashioning a desirable, distinctive and authentic Afro-American sensibility.

## *Dutchman*: A Reading

An attractive female and a good-looking male happen to meet and get acquainted during a subway ride in New York City. They indulge in small talk heavily spiced with sexual undertones largely because the woman deliberately channels the conversation in that direction. At the beginning their dialogue is little more than playful (if mischievous) banter or clever repartee, but gradually it develops into acrimonious harangue. The "conversation" becomes so provocative that it ends up, shockingly enough, with the woman stabbing the man to death. Although the incident (a commonplace occurrence, perhaps, by the city's standards especially in the 1960s) takes place in a New York subway, it captures our attention more forcefully when we realise that the participants in this gory spectacle are a thirty-year-old White woman and a twenty-year-old Black man. Not surprisingly, David Littlejohn has described the play "as the most important and imaginative literary document of the American race war since *Native Son.*"[8]

The dramatic action referred to above revolves around the crucial theme of the Black person's identity in a racially divided American society. It brutally tears apart the comforting myth of America as a "melting pot," as a pluralistic society where immigrants from various parts of the world live together in harmony. Jones's thesis is that Afro-Americans are not given their rightful democratic place in American society on account of the racist attitude and the oppressive nature of White America. Afro-Americans are therefore not able to realise their selfhood and are compelled to live behind a false front. Like Eliot's Prufrock, they have to prepare a face to meet the faces that they meet. Jones suggests, given this reality of American society, that the Afro-Americans have only one of two options. They can conform to the stereotypical view that White society has of them and play the role of mindless and soulless (therefore "inferior") persons (that is, "slaves" who no longer live on plantations but in hovels). Or they can, if they are intelligent and smart enough as Clay in *Dutchman* is, diligently work their way "up" the social ladder and become imitation White. They can, in other words, by acquiring the qualities that White America approves of (neat dress, knowledge of western culture and manners) become socially acceptable. In either case they are not allowed to assert their humanity. They cannot be what they really are, a blend of two worlds. They are not allowed to reconcile their African heritage with their American present. They are condemned by the society in which they function to bury their true selves under a pose.

In *Dutchman*, Jones successfully dramatises this burden and the dilemma of the Afro-American. How may the Afro-American survive in a predominantly White society that is culturally and socially hostile as well as oppressive? Jones casts aside any traces of inhibition and the result is a powerful indictment of American society as it is. Jones's unrestrained approach in *Dutchman* has, regrettably, evoked the wrong response from most of his critics. An analysis of the play shows us how debilitating racial prejudice is and indeed how (quite literally) deadly it can be.

The drama opens with a brief preamble, a pantomime which gives us some useful and necessary clues to an understanding of the main characters, Lula and Clay. We see a man (we later realise he is Clay) sitting in a subway seat holding a magazine and "looking vacantly just above its wilting pages" (p 3). Clay is thus holding the magazine, not reading it. To my mind, this is suggestive of his attempt to ape White middle-class manners. Clay is only holding the magazine, using it as it were as a status symbol to demonstrate that he is a middle-class person. He then notices a woman's face "staring" at him. The woman in question is Lula. Her stare is symbolic of the hostility of White America to the Black person. Further on in the sentence her face is referred to as "it."

> The man looks idly up, until he sees a woman's face *staring* at him through the window; when it realises that the man has noticed the face, it begins very premeditatedly to smile (p 4; emphasis added).

Such a reference may reflect the impersonality of White America, its indifference to the plight of the Blacks. We are also told that her smile is not spontaneous but "premeditated"; it is put on, artificial and insincere. In contrast, "The man smiles too, for a moment, without a trace of self-consciousness" (p 4). However, Jones goes on to describe it as "an almost instinctive though undesirable response" (p 4).

This description seems to me to be Jones's way of saying that Clay is over-anxious to please. His desire to be a part of middle-class society impels him, as it were, to smile eagerly. It is not an instinctive response but "almost instinctive." This distinction, I believe, is crucial especially since Jones proceeds to qualify the phrase with "undesirable." The idea the playwright wishes to plant in our minds at the very outset of the play is ominous. Lula, the White woman, is a crafty and calculating type. Clay, the Black man, is only pretending to act naturally. In other words, neither Clay nor Lula is really what he or she seems to be. There is a wide gap between their reality and their appearance. Such a presentation of his main characters is indicative of Jones's larger theme – the difficulty of forging a reconciliation between the oppressive White America and the oppressed Black America. On the surface there may seem to be a satisfactory relationship (the equivalent of the appearances of Lula and Clay), but if one explores beneath the surface one realises that, in reality, the relationship is a flawed one. The fact that the man becomes awkward and embarrassed and "makes to look away" (p 4) reinforces the point. Jones suggests that Whites and Blacks can never be perfectly at ease with one another, that there can never be possible between them an easy and natural commerce.

This preamble provides an apt backdrop for the play. For what we discover in *Dutchman* through the development of Lula and Clay is the ugly reality of the racial tension they conceal beneath their surface cordiality. They are victims of the society they live in and of circumstances beyond their immediate control. Beneath the friendly and outgoing exterior, Lula hides the contempt she has for Black people. She is able to show friendship only so long as Clay conforms to her concept of what a Black man ought to be. Clay is able to retain his middle-class veneer only up to a point. He takes Lula's taunts good naturedly at the beginning. But, eventually, his true self, the Clay of "the pure heart, the pumping black heart" (p 34) bursts through the facade to reveal the tensions that lie within.

As the action begins we see Lula entering the subway car in which Clay is seated. She is presented as a physically attractive person who attempts deliberately to attract attention to herself. She "is a tall, slender, beautiful woman with long red hair..." (p 5). Her bright clothes and her nervous gesture of pushing her sunglasses up on her forehead from time to time mark her as a person attempting to attract attention to herself. The lipstick she wears is "loud" and "in somebody's good taste" (p 5). She has neither the refined appearance nor the polite reserve of a proper middle-class lady. She initiates the conversation with Clay, forcing herself on him as it were. She fishes for compliments while alluringly pushing her legs out (again drawing attention to herself) and complaining of "too much weight" (p 6). She soon draws specific attention to herself by accusing Clay of staring at her (it was she who kept staring at him) "down in the vicinity of my ass and legs" (p 7). Soon enough, she admits what her intentions are:

> I even got into this train, going some other way than mine. Walked down the aisle... searching you out (p 7).

Clay comes across as the typical "neo-Ivy League" (I owe this phrase to Kimberly W Benston[4]) middle-class Black gentleman. He is dressed in a three-button suit, is mild-mannered, and in the beginning manages to remain unruffled by Lula's awkward behaviour and intemperate manner. Very particular about his appearance, Clay is anxious to appear proper. This comes out clearly at the point where Lula first attempts to read Clay's mind.

> LULA. You think I want to pick you up, get you to take me somewhere and screw me, huh?
> CLAY. Is that the way I look? (p 8)

Lula embarks on an elaborate process of seduction. She begins to give Clay information about himself, his background and even his inner self. She seems omniscient. She tells him things about his intimate personal life ("You tried to make it with your sister when you were ten" [p 9]). Clay is surprised. Lula begins to get more intimate, offers Clay an apple which the latter accepts. Interestingly he "falls" at this point. He tries to be as flippant as Lula from now on. His neat facade seems to give way. She puts her hand on his knee and draws it from the knee up to the "thigh's hinge" (p 10) and takes him by the wrist. The initial process of seduction is over by the end of the first scene of the play, by

which time we have been afforded a very clear picture of both Lula and Clay and what each of them stands for in the context of the play. We realise that Lula (her mother, we are told, was a communist p 19) is a liberal-minded[5] White woman who leads a Bohemian existence (she likes going to parties escorted by a "coloured" man). We learn that Clay is a middle-class Black man who lives in a fashionable ("they don't have lady wrestlers in that part of Jersey" [p 12]) area of New Jersey, wears a three-button suit and striped tie and writes poetry. We also learn through Lula that Clay is really ignorant of his true background. She is able to identify the surface reality of Clay's appearance. Clay is surprised by Lula's knowledge of him. He fails to realise the significance of her statement that she actually does not know him as an individual but as an example of a "well-known type."

> LULA. I told you I didn't know anything about you... you're a well-known type (p 12).

> LULA. My hair is turning grey. A grey hair for each year and type I've come through (p 13).

He is taken utterly unawares when she calls him a "murderer." "You're a murderer, Clay, and you know it. You know goddamn well what I mean" (p 21). Actually, Clay does not know what Lula means. He, in his safe middle-class cocoon, seems blissfully unaware that he has turned his back on ("murdered") his true heritage (the Afro-American). He seems similarly ignorant that he belongs to that type of Afro-American who has, in Jones's view, sold out by becoming an assimilationist. It is no surprise, therefore, that the full significance of Lula's angry outburst escapes him.

> LULA. Everything you say is wrong. [mock smile] That's what makes you so attractive. Ha. In that funny-book jacket with all the buttons. [More animate, taking hold of his jacket].
>
> What've you got that jacket and tie on in all this heat for? And why're you wearing a jacket and tie like that? Did your people ever burn witches or start revolutions over the price of tea? Boy, those narrow-shoulder clothes come from a tradition you ought to feel oppressed by. A three-button suit. What right do you have to be wearing a three-button suit and striped tie? Your grandfather was a slave, he didn't go to Harvard (p 18).

If Clay at this stage is ignorant of his true self, he is just as unaware of Lula's real nature; at least such seems to be the case if we are to judge by his reaction to Lula despite the many warnings she throws out. On more than one occasion she admits that she lies:

> LULA. I lie a lot. [smiling]
> It helps me control the world (p 9).

> LULA. I told you I lie. I don't know your sister. I don't know Warren Enright (p 10).

LULA. Well, you're wrong. I'm no actress. I told you I always lie. I'm nothing, honey, and don't you ever forget it (p 19).

LULA. Well, I told you I wasn't an actress... but I also told you I lie all the time. Draw your own conclusions (p 27).

Lula herself is a "type." She belongs to the supposedly liberal wing of White society which, Jones seems to suggest, thinks that going out with a Black man to a party (superficial friendship) ensures – harmonious race relations; to that type which accepts Black America so long as the latter conforms to the norms set by it. Black Americans like Clay in Scene I of *Dutchman* are representative of the kind found acceptable by Lula's type. Lula taunts Clay for being what he is, knowing full well that he will accept such taunting good-naturedly. So long as Blacks conform to this norm, then, Lula's "type," White liberal America, offers them the hand of friendship. No sooner do the Blacks shed this mask of conformity and act true to their real nature (as Clay does in Scene II) than Lula's type seeks to destroy them.

By the end of Scene I, then, we have the two "types" well delineated. Lula the symbol of White liberal America and Clay (up to now) the "dirty White man" (p 31), the symbol of the Black man who, under the guise of integration, actually becomes an assimilationist, an off-white. Fittingly enough Lula invites Clay to play "let's pretend";

LULA. And we'll pretend the people cannot see you. That is, the citizens. And that you are free of your own history. And I am free of my history. We'll pretend that we are both anonymous beauties smashing along through the city's entrails (p 21).

Lula and Clay thus attempt to take their minds off the ugly reality of racism that exists in society. They try to pretend that they are both "anonymous beauties smashing along through the city's entrails." Here, the symbolism of the subway becomes clear and apt. Two people (representative of two ethnic groups) blind to reality, ignorant of the truth – the underground, the darkness is symbolic of this ignorance - are "smashing along" – travelling at a furious speed to destruction. The action is underground, suggesting that beneath the surface of conventional social and racial relations lies the hidden truth, the canker of racial animosity.

In the flying underbelly of the city. Steaming hot and summer on top, outside. Underground. The subway heaped in modern myth (p 3).

That Scene II is going to present a vastly changed Clay is noticeable at the very outset. We see him very cozy now in Lula's company. The prim and proper behaviour that characterised Clay of Scene I seems a thing of the past. He is no longer on the defensive, no more distant, as he was earlier on, in his present approach to Lula. His tie is open and Lula is hugging his arm. They appear quite relaxed together and seem to be oblivious of those around them. The dramatic atmosphere reminds one of the proverbial

calm before a storm, the storm that is to hit us with furious intensity towards the end of the scene when Clay launches into his impassioned denunciation of everything that Lula stands. for. Clay begins to notice a newcomer to the subway car and then, almost by chance as it were, discovers that there are quite a number of other people around as well. Clay not being fully aware of those immediately around him is suggestive of his lack of a proper knowledge of the outside world; of his confusion as regards the real (as distinct from his safe, imaginary) world. The discussion about what they intend to do at the party and after it becomes the topic of conversation. Lula talks of going to her apartment and having sexual intercourse. She gradually turns nastier in both word and deed. Her jibes become pointedly vicious and her behaviour hysterical. She calls Clay an "escaped nigger" (p 29), steps on the other people in her excitement, letting out profanities as she does so. She asks Clay to dance with her:

> Yes, come on, Clay. Let's do the nasty. Rub bellies. Rub bellies (p 30).

Clay is embarrassed and refuses to dance with her. She then becomes annoyed and this annoyance leads her to make her second[6] major provocative statement:

> Come on, Clay... let's do the thing. Uhh! Uhh! Clay! Clay! You middle-class black bastard. Forget your social-working mother for a few seconds and let's knock stomachs. Clay, you liver-lipped white man. You would-be Christian. You ain't no nigger, you're just a dirty white man. Get up, Clay. Dance with me, Clay (p 31).

Clay's rather dubious status is well and truly exposed here. He is neither one nor the other. He is "no nigger" but a "middle-class black bastard." Nor is he a White man; he is only imitation White, "a dirty white man." Lula's coarse outburst upsets Clay's equanimity. In true middle-class fashion the latter is acutely embarrassed. He asks Lula to "Sit down, now. Be cool" (p 31). She does not heed his wishes. Rather, she continues to scream and mock him while dancing wildly. Referring once more to his middle-class veneer, she insults him again for trying to look "White."

> Be cool. Be cool. That's all you know... shaking that wildroot cream-oil on your knotty head, jackets buttoning up to your chin, so full of white man's words Don't sit there dying the way they want you to die. Get up (p 31).

Clay's calm exterior is now irrevocably disturbed. Lula's outburst proves the last straw. He now turns aggressive, shedding the placid, polite manner he maintained hitherto even in the face of Lula's manifold indiscretions. He resorts to profanities, inelegant, unfastidious non-middle-class language so uncharacteristic of the Clay we have known so far. Lula continues to hurl insults. She refers to him as "Uncle Tom" (a term, as we know, used to describe servile Blacks who accept without protest anything dished out by Whites and who are willing to play a subordinate role in society). Clay now asserts himself with a vengeance. He stumbles in his efforts as he grabs hold of Lula to drag her to her seat, clubbing, in the process, a drunk who attempts to interfere. He grabs Lula's shoulders,

throws her into her seat, and "slaps her hard as he can across the mouth" (p 33) before he asks her to shut up and let him talk. He then launches into the long speech which is the theatrical as well as the thematic climax of the play. He says he could kill Lula and all the other Whites on the train without much effort. He admits to the futility of such an exercise. He asks Lula not to tell him how to live, indeed not to tell him anything but simply to let him be the way he is.

> You telling me what I ought to do. Well, don't! Don't you tell me anything! If I'm a middle-class fake white man... let me be. And let me be in the way I want (p 34).

Clay exposes, Lula. Earlier on we noticed her accuse him of trying to ape the Whites. She sought to advise him against doing so, urging him to remain true to his Black traditions without knowing anything concrete about these traditions or the nature of Clay's real predicament. Through exposing Lula's shallow outlook on racial tensions, Clay exposes the shallowness of White liberal America in general. Those who belong to this section of society, like Lula, presume they know what is best for Blacks without knowing from the inside, in the first instance, what it is to be a Black in this racist society. We are made to see the superficiality of Lula who thinks, as we have noted, that by seducing a Black man or by going to a party with one, she could become an expert on Blacks. Clay similarly denounces those White liberals who claim to understand the music of Bessie Smith and Charlie Parker. According to Clay, they produce art in order to sublimate their anger and frustration provoked by racism. Their music is a substitute for murder. Likewise, Clay, by writing poetry and attempting to join the middle-class is sublimating his murderous instincts. Hence, the significance of his earlier statement "if I'm a middle class fake white man... let me be." This neurosis is forced on the Blacks by the Whites, says Clay. If they were to act sanely the only logical thing to do would be to kill the White oppressors:

> If Bessie Smith had killed some white people she wouldn't have needed that music. She could have talked very straight and plain about the World. No metaphors. No grunts. No wiggles in the dark of her soul. Just straight two and two are four. Money. Power. Luxury. Like that. All of them. Crazy niggers turning their back on sanity. When all it needs is that simple act. Murder. Just murder! Would make us all sane (p 35).

We notice the pun on "Just" in "Just Murder!" All one needs is simply to murder the Whites in order to seek justice or a just solution to the racial problem that exists. But Clay rejects this solution.

> Ahhh. Shit. But who needs it? (p 35)

Sensitive, educated Black man that he is, he cannot force himself to be that violent in his deeds. He would rather be like the Bessie Smiths and the Charlie Parkers of this world; he would rather sublimate the hostile feelings. He is happy to find an outlet for these tormented feelings through writing poetry, being the "black Baudelaire."

Safe with my words, and no deaths, and clean, hard thoughts, urging me to new conquests (p 35).

Sanity to the Black person means recognising the failures of the "advantages of western rationalism, or the great legacy of the white man" (p 36). It means recognising the established world order as one which makes the Negro his own worst enemy. It means lashing out to kill the White monster of technology and manipulated civilisation. It means having a "very rational explanation" (p 36) for murdering Lula – though Clay does so only verbally.

Lula then stabs Clay to death. Jones implies the futility of blatant confrontation with White society by allowing Lula to kill Clay. It is no mere coincidence that she does so at the point when Clay is reaching for his books, symbols of Clay's world, his refuge from the ugly reality of racism. It is significant that the other passengers aid and abet Lula in the murder of Clay. None of them protests against or attempts to prevent it and, at Lula's command, they throw Clay's body out and leave the compartment. We could interpret the behaviour of the passengers of the subway as being synonymous with that of society in general. Black men like Clay who attempt to defy the norm (in thought if not in deed) are a threat to a society which wishes to maintain the *status quo*. Hence they must be got rid of. The ending of the play suggests to us that this process will be repeated. Lula straightens her things and gets everything in order. Another twenty-year-old Black youth comes into the coach and the stage is thereby set for more of the same.

Jones's view seems clear. A revolutionary upheaval is called for if there is going to be any meaningful change in the troubled area of Black and White relations in American society. The old stereotypical images have to be cast aside and a new Black nation has to arise, phoenix-like, from the ashes of that past. In *Dutchman,* Jones does not define the nature of this change he envisions for America. Nor does he give us an idea of the process that has to be gone through to usher in that change. We are made aware of these themes by implication. He states them explicitly in *The Slave,* written nine months later, when he makes Walker Vessels, the Black protagonist, say that it is now the turn of Blacks to take over from Whites through revolutionary means the business of ruling America. As drama, moreover, *Dutchman* is highly successful. It is well structured, it has thematic coherence, and its texture is richly symbolic.

## The Critics

To say that *Dutchman* raised a critical hornets' nest is to understate the reception the play received. Given the socio-political climate of the 1960s (the civil rights struggle, the Black Power movement, the emerging Black aesthetic) such a response to the play was, perhaps, to be expected. Jones was not only a new voice but a potentially dangerous one – dangerous to that segment of society which views any effort on the part of the Afro-American to better his lot as subversion. The *Newsweek* theatre critic put it aptly:

There are two ways to domesticate an original and dangerous new playwright. The first is to praise his obvious virtues while letting his subtly radical ones go unseen; and the second is to disarm his personal vision by enlisting it in some general social or cultural cause. If, like LeRoi Jones, the playwright is a Negro, the temptation to play lion tamer becomes irresistible. Predictably, the first professionally produced play of Jones's, *Dutchman*, has been hailed for its "raw power" and "explosive violence," and at the same time interpreted as simply one more document on the inter-racial crisis we are undergoing.[7]

The *New York Times* theatre critic Howard Taubman felt there was nothing of value in *Dutchman*. In fact he did not even consider Jones's piece a play. In his view, *Dutchman* was "an explosion of hatred rather than a play" and everything about it was "designed to shock."

> Mr Jones writes with a kind of sustained frenzy. His little work is a melange of sardonic images and undisciplined filth. The impact of his ferocity would be stronger if he did not work so hard and persistently to be shocking.[8]

The patronising tone, the arrogant confidence in the breathtaking pronouncement of this critic, do not conceal his fundamental confusion. If the theme of the play were not the crucial one it is – at least for those interested in working towards minimising Man's inhumanity to Man – one would dismiss these injudicious and unfortunate comments by Taubman as mere critical misadventure.

But this is not all. In similar vein, if articulated slightly more intelligently, is Stanley Kaufman's essay in *Dissent* (Spring, 1965). Kaufman expresses the opinion that the playwright has received more attention than he deserves and then promptly denounces him as a fake.

> LeRoi Jones has already had more attention, more production of plays, more publication, more criticism and news comment than – at any less opportune moment – he could conceivably merit. But one aspect of his work and persona seems worth further analysis, hopefully as counteraction. This is his place in the Tradition of the Fake.[9]

Kaufman's thesis seems to be that because Jones has a White wife and teaches modern American poetry at the New School and Columbia University, he has no right to say such things as "America is the source of Western Culture... a culture whose time has come and which is rotting at the roots..."[10]

Several critics (Kaufman and Taubman are excellent representatives of the type) complain that Jones's play contains too much violence. However, these same critics overlook the violence in all of Greek drama, which they extol. Almost identical acts of violence can be noticed in *The Oresteia*, in *Oedipus Rex*, and in *Medea* as in Jones's play.

One significant difference is motivation: the Greeks seek familial and personal revenge; Blacks seek liberation. Perhaps it is the motivation that troubles these critics.

The reaction of Allan Lewis in his survey of the then contemporary theatre is generally characteristic of critical attitudes referred to above:

> LeRoi Jones writes with powerful imagery and savage intensity, but the play [*Dutchman*] is weakened by faulty structure.... The play is an apostrophe to hate, reviling those who pretend friendship only to serve as executioner, and castigating the white for dragging the Negro down to the animal level, but LeRoi Jones's personal catharsis lacks dramatic form.[11]

The curious fact is that in the same study Lewis praises Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*, a play which smacks as much, if not more, of "personal catharsis" and is as seemingly episodic as *Dutchman* in structure.

One notices therefore a double standard being applied to Jones's *Dutchman*. One perceives a lack of objectivity on the part of the critics who have evaluated LeRoi Jones the playwright. On the whole, the "establishment" critics have tended to dismiss Jones as a mere racial propagandist with little or no sense of the dramatic, while the "non-establishment" critics have seen in him a new messiah. Theodore R Hudson, who has written one of the two major critical works on Jones, discusses this ambivalent attitude very well:

> For so controversial a man as LeRoi Jones, objectivity is important, for it is easy to like or dislike his work on ethnic, ideological or political grounds.
>
> It is almost a truism that one can tell the ethnic and cultural (and sometimes, political) orientation of a reviewer or critic of a given work by Jones. Too often the non-black, culturally traditional, or artistically conventional critic will find Jones lacking in technique and offensive in content. Too often the black (as different, in current connotation, from Negro), culturally non-traditional, or artistically unconventional critic will find Jones, especially as Baraka, progressive in technique and a well of truth in content. So to various critics, Jones is artist, eyegouger, illuminator, racist, moral conscience, demagogue, or prophet.[12]

It seems to me that the uncompromising reality with which he has exposed the racial myths of American society has brought on the critics' hostility towards Jones. They have permitted their own political convictions to cloud their judgement. They seem unable to face up to the truth. *Dutchman* is good theatre even if we judge it by the touchstones of received literary criticism – that is, by Western literary models. In the context of the present study, however, such a consideration is a non-issue. We know that Jones repudiated such literary models and wished to create his own in his search for a distinctive Afro-American sensibility. He wanted to develop a "Black Consciousness," and for him a necessary prerequisite for such a consciousness was a turning away from conventional Western models:

> Clay in *Dutchman*, Ray in *The Toilet*, Walker in *The Slave*, are all victims. In
> the Western sense they could be heroes. But the Revolutionary Theatre, even
> if it is Western, must be anti-Western.[13]

Larry Neal, one of Jones's contemporaries, has also commented on the Jonesian conviction that a Black artist has to shed his predilection for things Western:

> The task, as Jones sees it, is to develop "Black Consciousness," a Black spiritual
> frame of reference based on the humanism of the Bandung (non-white) world.
> The coming into being of such a spirit implies a revolutionary dynamic.[14]

In the light of the above comments, to dismiss Jones on the basis that his plays lack "universality" or that they are "structurally weak" is to judge him by the literary canons of the very, tradition he claims to have abandoned, the Western Christian tradition. To judge him thus is, to my mind, a futile exercise, but it is the predisposition of "establishment" critics to do precisely this. And in this predisposition we notice the double standard spoken of earlier.

This double standard has been consistently applied. European dramatists such as Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud wrote plays that deviated profoundly from received dramatic standards, but neither Brecht's "Epic Theatre" nor Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty" has been dismissed on the grounds of weak structure or a lack of universality. Arthur Miller's notion of tragedy (in relation to *Death of a Salesman* in particular) differed significantly from that of Aristotle. Except, however, for a handful of critics who voiced protest, nobody dismissed Miller as a writer of structurally weak plays lacking in universally valid themes. What is needed, then, is to seek a definition of "universality" that is not ethnocentrically based. Lloyd H Brown has noted that those who support a Black aesthetic, question the scholarly critic's traditional tendency to insist on the universality of art. They see this insistence as a kind of evasion because, in their view, the critic's insistence that "serious" art transcends racial, regional, and cultural considerations simply allows the critic an erudite rationale for shirking the responsibility of learning about those considerations in the first place. The "universal" criterion is particularly susceptible to this kind of attack, but not because black aesthetic supporters necessarily deny that black art can have a "universal" appeal. The criterion is suspect in this context because its application to non-white literature often smacks of a racial double standard. Hence the history of western literary criticism is replete with socio-political, religious, regional, and philosophical approaches to Western writers (Shakespeare, Milton, Dostoevski, and Tolstoy, for example); but there has been a tendency to dismiss the social and ethnic themes of black literature as incompatible with serious art since the latter is supposed to transcend mere race and ethnicity.[15]

In order to overcome the confusion of the critics to *Dutchman* and Jones we need, above all, to trace carefully the evolution of Jones's life and career. Such an exercise would help us avoid this confusion and enable us to see the Jonesian achievement in its proper

context. It will lead us to an examination of Jones's role in the Black Power movement of the 1960s. Jones together with Larry Neal, Maulana Karenga and other contemporaries, was bent on evolving a Black aesthetic, that is, on giving shape and form to a distinctive and authentic Afro-American sensibility. The purpose of such an enterprise was to give the Afro-American a sense of identity. Literature, for Jones and his contemporaries, therefore, became a means to an end.

## Life and Career: The Road Taken

Very little in Jones's background is suggestive of the road he subsequently chose to travel on. Everett LeRoi Jones was born in Newark, New Jersey, on October 7, 1934, into a lower middle-class family.[16] His own family was no different from most other lower middle-class families in black America. As government workers, Jones's parents existed on a modest income: the mother, Anna Lois Jones, "was a social welfare worker" and the father, Coyt LeRoy Jones, "was a postal worker."[17] Most Members of his immediate family circle were either preachers or teachers.

Jones was an exceptionally bright child and his parents did everything to encourage the development of his special gifts. For example, at an early age he had shown a fondness for making political speeches and had been coached in doing so by his father.[18] He was a voracious reader, too, and in his high school days a writer of short stories. Upon early graduation from high school, Jones received scholarship offers from several reputable universities. Unfortunately, Jones's choice, Rutgers University, proved to be a disappointment. Because of his sense of alienation from the predominantly White community on campus, Jones soon began to feel uncomfortable and out of place at Rutgers. Consequently, it became virtually impossible for him to participate in the extracurricular activities this particular environment had to offer. Having endured this sense of isolation from his immediate environment for the better part of his freshman year, Jones decided to do something practical to overcome it: he bade farewell to Rutgers and entered Howard University. Here, he was to encounter discomfort of a different sort. Jones's discovery that the Blacks at Howard were being taught how to pretend to be White disturbed him acutely:

> Howard University shocked me into realising how desperately sick the Negro could be, how he could be led into self-destruction and how he would not realise that it was the society that had forced him into a great sickness...[19]

After Howard, Jones entered the Air Force. The experience here gave him an insight into what he felt to be the oppressive nature of Whites. Returning to Newark, New Jersey, upon completion of his tour of duty in the Air Force, Jones found employment commensurate with his academic credentials hard to come by. The situation was exacerbated, it appears, by discrimination on racial grounds.[20] So Jones left for the big city, for Greenwich Village, to seek his fortune.

In the city he met Hettie Cohen, a White Jewish woman, who had written some poetry and worked in an editorial capacity for *Partisan Review*. Being an independent-minded person with a keen interest in the arts, she was temperamentally very similar to the young Jones. Their relationship matured into marriage in the autumn of 1958, during a period when the non-violent Civil Rights Movement, led by Martin Luther King, Jr. was in full swing; a period in which a conscious effort was being made by both Blacks and Whites to facilitate the achievement of inter-racial harmony within American society. Marriages between Blacks and Whites, if not actually encouraged, were not being looked down upon as was the tendency hitherto.

We are told that Jones's home was the scene of parties and get-togethers for young artists and intellectuals, both Black and White, who lived in the area at that time. These included, among others, Allen Ginsberg, Frank O'Hara, Franz Kline, Charles Olson, Theolonius Monk, and Ornette Coleman.[21] Jones and his wife edited and published a literary magazine titled *Yugen* from 1958 to 1963. In 1960 and 1965 respectively Jones was the recipient of John Hay Whitney and Guggenheim Fellowships. During the period 1962-1965 he taught courses in post-1945 American Poetry at the New School for Social Research and at the University of Buffalo.[22] Jones also did editorial work at the Totem Press and Corinth Books. Theodore R Hudson considers *The Moderns: An Anthology of Modern Writing in America* to be Jones's major achievement as an editor during his stay in the Village.[23] In the late 1950s Jones began writing drama. As has been noted in the introduction to this study, his best-known play, *Dutchman,* appeared in 1964. *Preface,* his first volume of poetry, was published in 1961 while his second collection of poetry, *The Dead Lecturer,* appeared in 1964. These volumes contained some of his poetry that had already been published in non-mainstream periodicals as well as in *Evergreen Review* and *Massachusetts Review.*

Jones's career up to 1964 has been referred to as his "Village period,"[24] a period when Jones was the toast of the New York cultural scene. It was also, however, at about this time that Jones, becoming restless and listless, felt a pull towards producing work that would satisfy a deeper yearning. Despite the encomiums he received from the admiring literati of the day, he came to realise there were new and different feelings within him, feelings which he has explicated in "Home":

> I have been a lot of places in my time and done a lot of things. And there is a sense of the Prodigal about my life that begs to be resolved. But one truth anyone reading these pieces ought to get is *the sense of movement – the struggle in myself, to understand where and who I am,* and move with that understanding... [emphasis added]. And these moves, most times unconscious... seem to me to have been always toward the thing I had coming into the world, with no sweat: my blackness.... By the time this book appears, I will be even blacker.[25]

Thus Jones had continued to nurse feelings of alienation from White America even while he was leading a racially integrated existence in Greenwich Village.

During this period when Jones was engaged in intense soul-searching, certain crucial changes were occurring in the American body politic, changes which will be discussed later. We are still too close to the period involved to give it a permanent name, or even to assess it with authority. Nevertheless, we could with some justification refer to the post-1960 era as The New Black Renaissance.[26] The period has much in common with the New Negro (Harlem) Renaissance of the 1920s. Both experienced an unusual and startling literary and artistic upsurge; both emphasised the folk background and the African roots of the Negro heritage; both stressed the importance of strong pride in race; and both insisted that militancy of one kind or the other, not gradualism, was the way to first-class citizenship.[27]

Several important influences helped to give shape to post-1960 Afro-American writing. The first was the spirit of the times. The period heralded by the youthful idealism of the "New Frontier," one of the most turbulent in history, was also one of the most turbulent periods in the Negro's history. The mid-1950s and the 1960s witnessed sit-ins, kneel-ins, pray-ins, and other defiant practices on the part of Negroes; the dangerous and effective voter-crusade marches in the South; the rise to prominence of two martyr leaders Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X; the bitter reaction to the Vietnam War; the appearance of the Black Panthers; the riots, burnings, and lootings in the inner cities of America. These were acts which told America in strong terms that Afro-Americans were fed up with promises, that they wanted equality without further delay.[28] Much of the turbulence of the 1960s is reflected in the tone and in the subject matter of the era's literature.

It was his involvement in the Black Power Movement of the 1960s that became the catalyst for the radical change in LeRoi Jones. It was this involvement that moved him to deal with his cultural anguish, with the discontent that had arisen, as has already been pointed out, out of his growing alienation from White America. Prior to his intimate association with this political movement, Jones's writing was, on the whole, apolitical and introspective. Because he then felt that direct involvement in politics was outside of his responsibility as a writer, he had no intention of entering the fray. In his essay "Cuba Libre" (1961), he wrote, "I'm a poet ...... what can I do? I write, that's all, I am not even interested in politics."[29] Four years later, by contrast, he could write:

> The Black Artist's role in America is to aid in the destruction of America as he knows it. His role is to report and reflect so precisely the nature of the society, and of himself in that society, that other men will be moved by the exactness of his rendering and, if they are black men, grow strong through this moving, having seen their own strength, and weakness; and if they are white men, tremble, curse and go mad, because they will be drenched with the filth of their evil.

> The Black Artist must draw out of his soul the correct image of the world. He must use this image to band his brothers and sisters together in common

understanding of the nature of the world (and the nature of America) and the nature of the human soul.

> The Black Artist must demonstrate sweet life, how it differs from the deathly grip of the White Eyes. The Black Artist must teach the White Eyes their deaths, and teach the black man how to bring these deaths about.[30]

An essay he wrote in 1963 helps us understand further the violent change in Jones. A bitter and impassioned condemnation of James Baldwin and Peter Abrahams, the South African writer, it captures the mood of the developing nationalistic trend in Black political thought. It is one of the first well-articulated statements of the aesthetic principles that were to guide the arts of the new movement generally. Jones berates Baldwin and Abrahams for not being "committed to what is real." He believes they are concerned only with their individual feelings:

> Intelligence is only valuable when it is contained naturally in the matter we present as a result of the act (of writing... of feeling). A writer is committed to what is real and not to the sanctity of his feelings. So that Abrahams and Baldwin want the hopeless filth of enforced ignorance to be stopped only because they are sometimes confused with the sufferers. They are too hip to be *real* black men, for instance this is only, let us say, a covering to register their feelings, a gay exotic plumage as they dissemble in the world of ideas, and always come home with the shaky ones.[31]

Jones is of the view that art, like the artist, is of and in the world. To ignore this assertion which Jones considers a basic truth is, in a world of political conflict, to be ineffectual as an artist and to emasculate art itself. As surprising as it may appear, Jones seems to suggest that Baldwin and Abrahams are ignorant of this fact. For him, then, engagement is necessary not only for social, political, and moral reasons; it is the lifeblood of artistic endeavour.

> If Abrahams and Baldwin were turned white, for example, there would be no more noise from them. Not because they consciously desire that, but because then they could be sensitive in peace. Their colour is the only obstruction I can see to this state they seek, and I see no reason they should be denied it for so paltry a thing as heavy pigmentation. Somebody turn them! And then perhaps the rest of us can get down to the work at hand. Cutting throats.[32]

By 1964 Jones had reached the point of near-total break from mainstream American culture. "I write now," states Jones in an essay titled "LeRoi Jones Talking,"

> full of trepidation because I know the death this society intends for me... But let them understand that this is a fight without quarter, and I am very fast.[33]

This artistic odyssey is paralleled by his physical odyssey in 1965 to Harlem from Greenwich Village.

From this time forward, Jones devoted all his energy and intelligence to interpreting the history and culture of Black people through an unrestrained use of strong language, violent imagery and harsh polemics against White American society. Jones's attitude is reminiscent of the attitude implied in Sartre's proposal for the abolition of racial prejudice. "The black man," he wrote in his essay "Black Orpheus,"

> is a victim of [oppression] because he is a black man.... Thus he has his back up against the wall of his authenticity: having been insulted and formerly enslaved, he picks up the word "nigger" which was thrown at him like a stone, he draws himself erect and proudly proclaims himself a black man, face to face with white men. The unity which will come eventually, bringing all oppressed people together in the same struggle, must be preceded in the colonies by what I shall call the moment of separation or negativity: the anti-racist racism is the only road that will lead to the abolition of racial differences. How could it be otherwise? Can black men count on a distant white proletariat – involved in its own struggles – before they are united and organised on their own soil?[34]

It was anger, reinforced by a devotion to Black people, that was obviously the major, almost religious, force affecting Jones's shaping of the concept of Black aesthetics, the artistic component of the Black nationalist power movement.

The Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School, founded in Harlem in the spring of 1965, brought together all those young artists who shared Jones's concept of life, art, politics and existence in America.[35] The founding father of this theatre was Jones, and the main inspiration for its formation was provided by the Black nationalist movement, which was by then gathering momentum. That summer the Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School took to the streets, presenting plays, poetry, readings, jazz sessions, exhibits and lectures by Jones and other Black writers that "shattered the illusions of the American body politic, and awakened Black people to the meaning of their lives."[36]

By this time Jones had moved into an even more extreme position on Black separatism. According to Harold Cruse, one of the prime reasons for the collapse of Harlem's Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School was Jones's acceptance of the attitudes of what Cruse has called "the terrorist fringe of the nationalist wing," which militates, for example, against Black participation in any television, radio or discussion programme involving Whites.[37]

After the Harlem Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School was closed, Jones founded another Black repertory theatre and school in Newark, New Jersey, on the same principles by which he had directed the Harlem venture except that it received its support wholly from the Black community.[38] From its inception, Spirit House came to be regarded as "the spiritual centre of the Black Arts Movement in America,"[39] and it has presented many of its founder's explicitly experimental "Black Art" plays as well as plays by other young Black writers.

The Black Arts Movement saw as its task a profound revaluation of the Black man's presence in America. It represented, it is claimed, the flowering of a cultural nationalism that failed in the 1920s because "it did not address itself to the mythology [i.e., distinctive cultural background] and life-styles of the Black community."[40] One of the interesting plays of Jones (Neal calls it his most important play) is his dramatisation of the Muslim myth about the origin of the species titled *A Black Mass*. Neal, who was closely associated with Jones in the Black Arts Movement, observes that Jones in this play pioneers in addressing himself to a cultural context wholly in keeping with the Afro-American sensibility. Jones has since become an orthodox Muslim of the Kawaida faith and has changed his name to Imamu Amiri Baraka.[41]

It ought to be clear by now that Jones's transformation from a mainstream artist to a Black revolutionary artist was a gradual process. Jones's latent sense of alienation from White society, nourished and sustained by his experiences at Rutgers and Howard Universities and in the Air Force, led him to become a Black revolutionary artist via his involvement in the Black nationalist movement of the 1960s. Jones found the abandonment of and dissociation from mainstream culture, that is, the Western literary tradition, a necessary major prerequisite for the establishment of a Black aesthetic. The comments and observations contained in the essays Jones wrote in the process of attempting to articulate this Black aesthetic are, indisputably, tendentious, polemical, and vitriolic. My submission is that the critics of *Dutchman* were reacting more to these provocative hostile statements than to the play itself. Bemused by Jones's polemics, these critics were not able to evaluate *Dutchman* against the background of Jones's dual role, namely, that of Black artist and Black politician. Hence their confusion and consequently their failure to do justice to the play.

## Life and Career: The Road not Taken

To what extreme Jones's dissociation from the Western literary tradition carried him will be apparent to those familiar with his later career. After leaving Greenwich Village, he sought consciously to abandon his White audience at the same time that he began to establish a continuing dialogue with Black people. The aim was to inculcate a sense of racial pride in and among Blacks. Jones has expressed this aim very clearly in his preface to *Black Magic Poetry:*

> The whole race [is] connected in its darkness, in its sweetness. We must study each other. And for the aliens we say I ain't studying you.[42]

In *The Slave*,[43] produced only eight months after *Dutchman*, we encounter in the Black protagonist Walker Vessels, the poet-revolutionary. Unlike Clay, who sought refuge behind his mask of respectability, Walker is violently aggressive. The background of *The Slave* is a revolutionary race war and its action revolves around Walker, the leader of the Blacks in this war. The interplay between Walker, his former wife Grace, and her husband Bradford Easley (both White) in the home of the Easleys constitutes the drama. A

university professor, Bradford Easley is a former teacher of Walker. The Easleys, who have known Walker as an intellectual and poet, are aghast at the change in him and seem unable to comprehend this drastic transformation in his personality.

The ostensible purpose of Walker's return is to take away his two daughters, by his marriage to Grace, before his conquering troops take control of the city where the Easleys live. The real purpose, however, seems to be Walker's desire – perhaps Jones's as well – to make an extremely wordy analysis of the racial (Black/White) conflict. The Easleys take Walker on, and the resulting verbal battle is as violent as the revolutionary battle raging outside. To Grace, Walker is now a "nigger murderer!" (p 54), and to Easley he is "...just filth. Pure filth" (p 56). Walker, not to be outdone, himself resorts to name-calling. He calls Grace "[a]... whore of the middle class" (p 62) and Easley "Professor No-Dick" (p 57). Through Walker, Jones gives us his resolution to the racial problem that the Blacks and Whites are faced with. It is now the turn of the Blacks to take over America and rule it in any manner they see fit. "What does it matter," says Walker,

> if there's more love or beauty. Who the fuck cares? Is that what the Western ofay thought while he was ruling... that his rule somehow brought more love and beauty into the world? Oh, he might have thought that concomitantly, while sipping a gin rickey and scratching his ass... but that was not ever the point. Not even in the Crusades. The point is that you [Whites] bad your chance, darling, now these other folks [Blacks] have theirs.
> [Quietly]

Now they have theirs (p 73).

Jones continues along these extreme lines, in the *Four Black Revolutionary Plays*,[44] "A Black Mass," "Great Goodness of Life," "Madheart," and "Experimental Death Unit," which are simply attacks on White society and on those Blacks whom Jones sees as reflecting White attitudes. The extremity of Jones's position becomes clear to anyone reading his introductory comments to these four plays:

> Unless you killing white people, killing the shit they've built, don't read this shit, you won't like it, and it sure won't like you.[45]

All of the above is consistent with the stance of "Nationalist Separatism" that Jones came to embrace, a stance that unfortunately has served only to deflect him from a resolution of the true dilemma of the Afro-American, namely, the duality of his/her nature. There is in Afro-Americans an inherent conflict between their African heritage and their American present, a conflict explicated by W E B DuBois in 1903:

> ...the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his

twoness – an American, a Negro; his two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.[46]

Because of this duality, the Negro finds himself in a difficult predicament, a predicament which has been spelt out by DuBois:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife – this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. He would not Africanize American, for American has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of White Americanism, for he knows Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face.[47]

As is evident, what DuBois has aimed at is the achievement of a "Cultural Nationalism" which would harmonise the "two warring ideals" that constitute this duality within the Afro-American. Most moderate scholars and observers – John Hope Franklin, Martin Luther King, Jr., to name two notables among them – have agreed with DuBois and advocated a true integration of the races – a process by which Afro-Americans become a vital part of mainstream American society without losing their distinctive racial or cultural identity.

America seeks to view the world through the European tradition, that is, through the eyes of Western Christian civilisation. It thereby places heavy emphasis on the rational, on the individual, on the physical. This state of affairs, it is argued, implies an experience of life that is radically different from that which comprises the African experience which emphasises the intuitive, the communal and the spiritual. This radical difference creates for the Afro-American, who is part African and part American, a dilemma: he is irreconcilably torn between the two strands of his heritage. The solution to the dilemma, as suggested by DuBois (cited above) is a reconciliation of these two strands, a seeking after, to use an apt cliché, unity in diversity. The moderate approach to a satisfactory resolution of the racial problem of the Blacks (that is, the achievement of a cultural nationalism) does not, as Jones's approach does, advocate a parting of the ways from White society:

We Americans have a chance to become someday a nation in which all racial stocks and classes can exist in their own self-hoods, but meet on a basis of respect and equality and live together, socially, economically, and politically. We can become a dynamic equilibrium, a harmony of many different elements, in which the whole will be greater than all its parts and greater than any society the world has seen before. It can still happen.[48]

In the moderate approach, therefore, the door is wide open for a humanistic resolution of the crisis in Black and White relations. The flaw in the Jonesian concept of nationalist separatism is that it leaves out the possibility of reconciliation. It fosters, regrettably,

according to the moderate view, a mood of recrimination rather than a mood of renewal. It causes men and women to look back in anger rather than to look forward in hope and confidence. The nationalist-separatist path, the road taken by Jones, has been and will surely prove to be a barrier to a humane resolution of the racial conflict. As even Walker admits in *The Slave,* a nationalist-separatist approach "will only change... the complexion of tyranny..." (p 66).

## Conclusion

Nationalism, despite claims to the contrary, is no satisfactory solution to conflicts racial, ethnic or religious. In Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) Sinhalese and Tamils, two distinct groups living on the island nation, go at each other head to head. Armenian nationalists regularly remind Turks of the genocide perpetrated in World War I. Extremists among Protestants and Catholics war daily in Ulster. The NIS countries continue to see domestic programmes suffer serious setbacks as they try to absorb their ethnic Russian minorities. The French have the Algerians and the West Germans the Turks. Humanity has dreamed of different major families and races living side by side in peace, only to have its dream frustrated. In this context the nationalist separatism advocated by Jones as a means of attaining racial equality falls tragically short. Mahatma Gandhi observed that any philosophy based on the logic of an eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind.

One can certainly understand Jones's anger, frustration, and moral outrage. The injustice that has formerly characterised the White American attitude to Blacks is admittedly repugnant. To the extent it exists today it is equally repugnant, and Jones's denunciation of it is perfectly justified. What can one understand but not justify, however, is the note of vengeful retaliation that underlies his proposed panacea for the evils engendered by racism. Unlike Jones, Black Americans have on the whole set a splendid moral example for America and the rest of the world by rising above the depravity of extreme White racism. Jones was not able to do this.

Jones's deviation from the norms discussed above has weakened his aesthetic sensibility. Like most "agit-prop" artists, he has difficulty in weaving the many strands of his art – protest, frustration, anger and the like – into an organic whole. As he "progresses" in his career, one notices a deterioration in the quality of his art. What one hears in the later stages is more the shrillness of Baraka than the powerfully articulated criticism of Jones. Sadly, the sureness of artistic touch one senses in *Dutchman* gradually deserts Jones in his later drama. *Dutchman* marks a watershed in the career of Jones the dramatist. From this moment onward he abandons one half of his dual nature – the Americanness of the Afro-American – and relentlessly moves towards the cultural cul-de-sac he ended up in the late 1960s. Imamu Amiri Baraka the Black Nationalist gets the better of LeRoi Jones the artist. As Harold Cruse so aptly points out, the "crisis in culture is not solved when the creative artist turns politician; it only intensifies."[49]

## Notes

1.  In this study I have referred to this playwright by his original name because he was known as LeRoi Jones when *Dutchman* first appeared in 1964. He took the name Imamu (Spiritual Leader) Amiri Baraka (Blessed Prince) in the mid-1960s when he became a Kawaida minister. The alteration between Jones and Baraka throughout this study would have proved confusing.

2.  LeRoi Jones, *Dutchman and the Slave*, New York, William Morrow & Company, 1964. All textual references are to this edition.

3.  David Littlejohn, *Black on White: A Critical Survey of Writing by American Negroes*, New York, Grossman, 1966, p 75.

4.  Kimberly W Benston, *Baraka: The Renegade and the Mask*, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 1976, p 165.

5.  This is not to suggest that Lula is a liberal because her mother was a communist. To Clay, Lula is a White liberal, a bohemian type. In the context of the play, therefore, Lula becomes a symbol of White liberal America.

6.  The first is in Scene I when Lula taunts Clay for imitating the White middle-class appearance by dressing the way middle-class Whites do.

7.  "Underground Fury," *Newsweek*, April 13, 1964, p 60.

8.  Howard Taubman, "The Theatre: *Dutchman*," *New York Times*, March 25, 1964, p 46.

9.  Stanley Kaufman, "LeRoi Jones and the Tradition of the Fake," *Dissent* 12, Spring, 1965, p 64.

10. LeRoi Jones, *Village Voice*, December, 1964, p 10.

11. Allan Lewis, *American Plays and Plays of the Contemporary Theatre*, New York, Crown Publishers Inc., 1965, pp 253-254.

12. Theodore R Hudson, *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka*, Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press, 1973, p 178.

13. LeRoi Jones, "The Revolutionary Theatre," *Home: Social Essays*, New York, William Morrow & Co., 1966, p 211.

14. Larry Neal, "The Development of LeRoi Jones," *Imamu Amiri Baraka: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Kimberly W Benston (ed.), New Jersey, Prentice-Hall Inc., 1978, p 25.

15. Lloyd W Brown, *Amiri Baraka*, Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1980, p 48.

16. In writing this article I have relied heavily on Hudson (see above, n. 12) and on Brown (see above, n. 15), the two foremost authorities on Jones's life. I have relied also for certain additional information on Professor Johnella E Butler of the Department of Afro-American Studies at Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, and on my classmates in the Graduate Seminar, "20th Century American Society and Culture," at Smith College, Spring, 1983. Hereafter I shall refer to the latter source as "Seminar, Spring, 1983."

17. Brown, *op.cit.*, p 17.

18. Hudson, *op.cit.*, p 8.

19. LeRoi Jones, "Philistinism and the Negro Writer" in *Anger and Beyond*, Herbert Hill (ed.), New York, Harper and Row, 1966, pp 51-52.

20. Hudson, *op.cit.*, p 12.

21. Brown, *op.cit.*, p 20.

22. Brown, *op.cit.*, p 21.

23. Hudson, *op.cit.*, p 16.

24. Hudson, *op.cit.*, p 16.

25. LeRoi Jones, "Home" in *Home: Social Essays*, pp 9-10.

26. Seminar, Spring, 1983.

27. Seminar, Spring, 1983. See also Maulana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies*, Inglewood, California, Kawaida Publications, 1982, pp 294-320 and Johnella E Butler, *Black Studies: Pedagogy and Revolution*, Washington, D.C., University Press of America, Inc., 1981, pp 45-58.

28. Seminar, Spring, 1983.

29. LeRoi Jones, "Cuba Libre" in *Home: Social Essays*, p 42.

30. LeRoi Jones, "State Meant" in *Home: Social Essays*, pp 251-252

31. LeRoi Jones, "Brief Reflections on Two Hot Shots" in *Home: Social Essays*, p 117.

32. *ibid.*, p 120.

33. LeRoi Jones, "LeRoi Jones Talking" in *Home: Social Essays*, pp 179-180.

34. Jean Paul Sartre, "Black Orpheus" in *The Black American Writer, Volume II: Poetry and Drama*, C W E Bigsby (ed.), Florida, Everett Edwards, Inc., 1969, p 9.

35. Hudson, *op.cit.*, p 21.

36. Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement," *Tulane Drama Review*, 12 Summer, 1968, p 59.

37. Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, New York, William Morrow & Co., 1967, p 541.

38. Hudson, *op.cit.*, p 25.

39. Neal, *op.cit.*, p 39.

40. "Black Theatre Group: A Directory," *Tulane Drama Review*, 12 Summer, 1968, p 175.

41. Hudson, p 34. See *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* for details. It will surely be an important source of information to scholars interested in Jones's life and career.

42. LeRoi Jones, *Black Magic Poetry*, New York, Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969, p (ii). Jones's punctuation and syntax on occasion deliberately deviate from the norms of Standard English. Throughout this study I have reproduced his texts without alteration.

43. Jones, *Dutchman and The Slave*, pp 43-88.

44. LeRoi Jones, *Four Black Revolutionary Plays*, New York, Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969.

45. Jones, *Four Black Revolutionary Plays*, p vii.

46. W E B DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk, Three Negro Classics,* New York, Signet, 1903, pp 214-215.

47. DuBois, *op.cit.*, p 215.

48. Shirley Chisholm, 1973, quoted in the *Christian Science Monitor,* 18 February 1984, p 23.

49. Harold Cruse, "The Creative and Performing Arts and the Struggle for Identity and Credibility" in *Negotiating the Mainstream: A Survey of the Afro-American Experience,* Harry A Johnson (ed.), Chicago, American Library Association, 1978, p 72.

# The Human Rights Movement Confronts Its Critics

Radhika Coomaraswamy

At the height of the momentum toward an acceptance of the universality of human rights, the international human rights movement faces its most important challenge. The current critique of human rights, emanating primarily from the countries of Asia and the Middle East, attempts to characterise human rights discourse as an instrument of the globalisation strategy dominated by the countries of the North Atlantic. This challenge poses a fundamental dilemma for human rights activists, whose claim to the universality and the indivisibility of human rights has created the space for democratic, non-violent revolutions all over the globe.[1] The challenge to the universalisation of Human Rights is led by Asian and Middle Eastern states which feel that human rights may be a threatening discourse which challenges the legitimacy of their exercise of power. It is important that those interested in human rights confront the arguments put forward by these states and some other members of civil society. It is necessary to begin to articulate human rights in context specific terms so that it will have resonance with actual grass root movements that have allowed for the empowerment of international civil society.

There is a belief that "globalisation," as it is called, manifests itself in the Northern control of political, economic and social power through various strategies and instrumentalities. There is a belief that the countries of the North Atlantic determine the agenda of the United Nations Security Council and human rights discourse thereby asserting political dominance over the rest of the world. Words such as governance, multiparty elections, political and civil rights are seen to be the language of the political form of globalisation. This thrust toward the creation of formal democratic organisations and the inviolability of the electoral process is seen as the political project of the globalisation mandate.

In addition to political control, it is argued that the North Atlantic countries control economic power and international economic policy through the Bretton Woods institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The demise of UNCTAD which allowed for the articulation of developing country perspectives and its replacement by the World Trade Organisation which overseas international economic integration is seen as a reflection of the lack of bargaining power at the disposal of developing societies. The creation of free market structural adjustment programmes, the unrestricted entry of transnational capital, debt burdens and the presence of neo-liberal

macro economic policy which lead to the further polarisation of incomes, are seen as markers of the economic control asserted by the developed Northern economies.

Besides economic and political hegemony, there is the belief that Northern power over developing country societies is also manifested in the control of information. The major news agencies such as Reuters and AFP and the rapid development of information technology has led to the dominance of western constructions of knowledge and information. That dominance determines what is right and wrong in international affairs and how we analyse important struggles and conflicts as they take place throughout the world. It is also argued that western control of the media and satellite technology has led to the globalisation of culture, based on the reality and attitudes of western societies. This global culture, from soap operas to musical programmes, is constructed on the experience of the values of the North Atlantic countries and appears to highlight the hopes and contradictions which animate social and political life in those societies. The structure of ownership of international media and the dominance of media moguls drawn from a particular culture has led to apprehension and fear that third world societies are being "invaded" by alien form of cultural life. This alienation is then seen to lead to perversions and distortions within third world societies leading to unrest and social disturbance. This critique of globalisation, primarily articulated by Asian and Middle Eastern states, challenges the doctrine of human rights as it is articulated today as being part of this strategy of globalisation. In some sense it is primarily a response of nation states which, fear the accountability and transparency that the human rights doctrine envisions. There are a very few civil society actors that question the fundamental values inherent in the human rights ideal. Nevertheless it is important to confront this critique of human rights as it is increasingly manifested in international fora and in the internal debates within nation-states.

The Asian State challenge to human rights is articulated in specific terms. It questions the universality of human rights claiming that political and civil rights as articulated by human rights documents are a product of the western enlightenment and that the cultural reality of many societies requires a different approach. Cultural relativism is put forward as an alternative to the universal paradigm of human rights. It is stated that the uniqueness of each cultural heritage denies a universal reality about the rights of men and women and that this uniqueness should be respected over the imposition of universal human rights values. Diversity, cultural pluralism, and the right to self-determination are some of the concepts used to further this debate which challenge the moral basis of the formulation of human rights.

In addition, the human rights doctrine is challenged by those who argue for the sanctity of the nation-state. State sovereignty is seen as the basis of the international system. Human rights discourse and structures challenge the inviability of the nation-state. The right to self-determination of nations and people is seen as an important principle which is a foundational value of the international political order. Those aspects of

international law which impinge on intervention within the nation-state must be discarded in favour of notions of sovereignty.

The other argument also put forward by State critics of human rights is that globalisation strategy emphasises political and civil rights over economic and social development. It is stated that for developing countries, economic and social rights are more important, and if political and civil rights have to be curtailed so that economic and social advancement can take place, then that is the right of individual nations to determine their course of action. The emphasis on economic and social development is seen as a precursor to the enjoyment of all other forms of rights and any action which furthers the development process, even at the expense of other rights, is seen as justifiable.

Finally, critics of human rights argue that human rights as articulated by international documents highlight the individual. This emphasis on the individual is seen to be at loggerheads with communitarian notions which are said to be the basis of Asian societies. These critics argue that the emphasis in society should be on the community and the individual's duty toward the community.

The importance of community life and values are said to be more important than the articulation of individual rights. Duties of citizenship should be seen to be more valid than the assertion of a rights discourse. In these arguments, the word "equity" is seen as the necessary concept which implies justice and fairness within communitarian values.

## Towards a Transformative Movement of Human Rights

If the human rights movement is to survive and grow in Asia the so-called Asian State critique must be confronted with honesty and circumspection without compromising the basic standards of human rights – standards which have been fought for by people living all over the world, confronting injustice and fighting for equality, freedom and peace. The first point of departure is to deconstruct the categories of Northern and Southern or Western and Eastern countries which is posed as an essential dichotomy in the argument of Asian values. The argument posits a commonality of experience and a homogenous response from third world countries as well as the Northern states. The North, as it is called, is diverse in composition. It includes countries like the United States with its unabashed commitment to electoral politics and neo-liberal economic policy. But the North also includes the countries of Scandinavia with their legacy of social democracy, and an economy which is cushioned by a strong welfare safety net with an extraordinary amount of social services provided by the state. The South is also not a homogenous category. Within the Southern block you have military dictatorships, theocratic states, vibrant democracies, authoritarian socialism and guided capitalism. Human rights are varied in theory and application in these societies. While the Indian Supreme Court intervenes constantly in political society, urging accountability and human rights, the Chinese state speaks of "spiritual values" and the Malaysian of "Asian values" as a defense to the charge that human

rights are universal and indivisible. The differences in political and economic reality then do not call for a homogenous application of human rights. Human rights mobilisation will depend on the particular needs and articulations of local communities which are fighting for social justice. The type of human strategy used to overcome dictatorship may be different to the strategies used to overcome corruption or economic and environmental exploitation. The contextual notion of human rights must be emphasised with regard to specific issues. No one can justify the genocide in Rwanda in terms of African values or the corruption in India as an aspect of spiritual distinctiveness. Such problems pose questions of universal conceptions of compassion and justice which cut across all nations and diverse societies. The issues force an articulation of human rights to meet the reality of power and suffering. It is important to move away from using categories such as North and South to obfuscate diversity within each block, a diversity which has a definite bearing on the relevance and importance of human rights. Human rights activists have to insist on context and local articulation of actual, and real grievances couched within the broad categories of North and South or East-West.

Despite this deconstruction, it is important that human rights activists acknowledge that there is a phenomenon known as globalisation and that the imperatives of political power and economic authority have led to a certain concentration of international wealth and political power among the North Atlantic states. Richard Falk argues that there are two types of globalisation – globalisation from above and globalisation from below.[2] Though human rights may be used as an instrument of foreign policy by some of the Northern states, it is also true that another type of globalisation has also taken place, creating an international civil society wedded to the notion of human rights. Transnational social movements with regard to political and civil rights, minority rights, the rights of women, the rights of children, protection of the environment, the right to sustainable development, the rights of indigenous people etc... have developed all over the world. They do not have access to state power but over the last decade have formed international linkages on an issue by issue basis to put pressure on the international community and individual nation-states to ensure the protection of fundamental human rights. These new social movements are therefore the basis for globalisation from below and the foundation for the creation for a transformative human rights movement.

As human rights activists, it is important to resist human rights policy, which is part of the strategy of globalisation from above, imposed by partisan political actors. For example, the violation of human rights by Saddam Hussein cannot justify the economic and social hardship imposed on Iraqi society by a partisan super power. Israeli attitudes toward the peace package cannot be dismissed as another point of view merely because of the patronage of the United States. These strategies must be confronted. At the same time, it is important to ensure that anti-globalisation rhetoric is not put forward by Asian nation-states to justify authoritarian and repressive state activity. Attempts by countries such as the People's Republic of China to justify authoritarian policies towards its citizens by raising the globalisation bogey must also be resisted. It is important to make a case by case

determination of the facts so as to highlight the issue of contested human rights as distinct from partisan strategies of globalisation from above. The human rights movements which have emerged in countries as a response to particular injustices must be seen as the cutting edge of international human rights. The use of human rights as an instrument of foreign policy by certain countries, and the enforced globalisation from above must not be used to obscure the vibrancy and dynamism of the human rights movement emerging spontaneously within and across nation-states to fight injustice in their societies. Globalisation from below and the growth of international civil society have been some of the most healthy developments of the past decade. This development must be recognised, encouraged and strengthened by the human rights community. The distinction between globalisation from above and globalisation from below is an extremely important difference which will eventually condition the legitimacy of human rights in the context of third world societies.

In addition to being distinguished from the strategy of globalisation from above, human rights may in fact emerge as the discourse which can best challenge the injustices emerging from the globalisation process as a whole. Human rights discourse with regard to economic, and social rights may be used to combat efforts to cut back on the welfare state, to challenge developmental projects which displace the lifestyle of indigenous people, to assert the right to work and the right to strike, to insist on minimum standards of education and health, and to fight against inequality of income distribution and class. Programmes and policies which sacrifice the economic and social rights of large segments of the population in pursuit of economic growth and neo-liberal macro-economic policies can be questioned and challenged by human rights discourse. It is therefore important to assert that, far from being an instrument of iniquitous globalisation, human rights language creates the mechanism by which many of these injustices can be confronted and exposed.

In some countries this has already begun. In India for example social action litigation through the right to life clause of the Indian Constitution has challenged many aspects of Indian social and economic life. The eradication of bonded labour, the spelling out of minimum wage, the conditions of labour practices etc... have all been challenged within a human rights framework. The need to develop this aspect of human rights in response to the inequality arising from the globalisation process has already been articulated by what is now termed the "new social movements" of Asia. Whether with regard to the Narmada Dam movement in India, the consumer organisations of Penang, social movements with regard to Dalits, and women, human rights is emerging not only as a political critique based on civil liberties but as the mechanism whereby social and economic inequality may also be challenged. Asian states speak of economic and social development in a managerial sense as an aspect of the post-colonial developmental state. Human rights organisations, on the other hand speak a rights discourse, thus concentrating on entitlement and benefits actually gained by the citizen.

Human rights is not only a discourse of power, it is also a discourse of values – what is often asserted as universal values. The positing of the dichotomy of North and South or East and West with regard to human rights values is an exercise in deception. The values contained in human rights are present in all societies in different types of discourse and language. Human rights scholars have been able to argue quite convincingly that all the religions of the world have articulated concepts of human rights in some form in various texts, stories, and in heterodox movements, Human rights scholarship abounds with literature spelling out how human rights values are close to the spirit of all the world's religions. The question is not whether human rights discourse exists in a particular society but whether the values involved in such discourse are privileged over others. All societies have articulated humane values, as well as values associated with authoritarian statecraft. The struggle for human rights is therefore a struggle for power between the values within society which accentuate a framework of political values which privilege the discourse of rights, equality and dignity and those values associated with Kautilyan or Machiavellian statecraft. The struggle is not between external oppressor and internal victim but between schools of thought within a given society which exist in popular and legal texts which promote one set of values over the other.

The growth of the modern nation-state especially in the last two centuries has created a concentration of power and wealth which fundamentally determines the quality of life in our societies. This state with its enormous resources and personnel has the ability to wield, arbitrary power and exercise discretionary authority almost at will. In international law state actors have been able to clothe themselves under the cloak of "sovereignty," and "immunity," to evade accountability at the international level. The human rights movement was initially born out of resistance to the arbitrary and unreasonable exercise of power by the state. The creation of rules, regulations and standards for the use of power has been one of the major concerns of human rights movements throughout the world. The experience of World War II and the developments in Nazi Germany were the catalysts which galvanised the growth of international human rights in the twentieth century. History is no longer a parochial development and world history is a collective domain which influences all societies. The developments within Nazi Germany may be seen as part of a collective memory which will not be forgotten. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a response to the horrors of World War II. In that sense it was a collective response to a world experience of war and atrocity. Refusing to accept political and civil human rights as a universal value is to try and extricate a nation state from the domain or world history, to isolate it within parochial confines and to deny it the validity of historical experience. The need to make states accountable in the exercise of power and privilege is a universal value of human rights which is a direct product of world history and developments within the twentieth century. To deliberately ignore that history in the pursuit of Asian or spiritual values is an act of deception aimed at glossing over the arbitrary exercise of state power.

The communitarian challenge to the framework of human rights as being individual and self-centred is another construct which must be openly challenged. Human rights standards recognise group rights. The right to self-determination is the first article in both International Covenants of human rights. But at the same time human rights discourse provides us with a mechanism to combat inequity that exists within communities, the issues of gender discrimination within religious and ethnic communities, child abuse and domestic violence within families, the problem of caste discrimination, the question of class inequalities or racial and ethnic discrimination – these are all concerns that challenge the hierarchy within self ascribed communities. The term "community" is often used to gloss over internal contradictions and tensions within society. By privileging certain notions of the community one is reinforcing the status quo at the expense of marginalised and vulnerable groups within that community. Human rights provides us with the discourse with which these inequalities may be challenged, exposed and rectified.

This leads us to my final point. Human Rights discourse is essentially about change and transformation. Asian values and spiritual values are often the discourse of those in power who want to strengthen the status quo, to insulate and isolate society from transformation and positive development. In many ways the experience of globalisation and world history has "cracked open" our societies.[3] This disjuncture has created many obstacles but it has also created an important opportunity. For the first time in many societies there are fundamental choices to be made and multiple alternatives being discussed about how we want to govern our lives, Human rights is a lively part of that internal debate. As we attempt to structure our societies in an era of change and flux, human rights attempts to anchor the debate on certain universal principles which have been articulated after experiences derived from all parts of the globe. The struggle to make these values an essential foundation of our state and civil structure has only begun. Human rights are both a goal and Instrument in the social transformation of our societies, it is the discourse which provides us with the most comprehensive formulation for dramatic change in our societies, change that will be animated by non-violent, democratic concepts while fostering the image of a humane and equitable society.

## Notes

1. For a full discussion of this challenge see C Muzaffer, "From Human Rights to Human Dignity," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Volume 27, No. 4, 1995, p 6.

2. For a full discussion see Nikhil Aziz, "The Human Rights Debate in an Era of Globalisation-Hegemony of Discourse," *ibid.*, p 9.

3. For a fuller discussion see R Unger, *Politics*, Harvard, 1995.

# The Challenge of Patriarchy:
# Female Indian Tamil Tea Plantation
# Workers of Sri Lanka

Vidyamali Samarasinghe

"They have gained only what men have been willing to grant: they have taken nothing, they have only received."

Simone de Beauvoir,[1] *The Second Sex*, p xxiii

## Introduction

The literature on Women in Development (WID) identifies patriarchy, defined as male dominance of females in society, as a major impediment to the empowerment of women. As scholars like Gerda Lerner and Marilyn French have shown patriarchy is a powerful historical construct.[2] Its norms have been woven tightly into the fabric of societies over a span of millenniums. In an effort to counteract the stultifying effects of patriarchy and ensure female empowerment in Third World societies, feminist scholars, approaching from different ideological standpoints, have laid particular emphasis on the importance of creating avenues of wage employment for women.[3]

Based on the same line of thinking, numerous efforts have been made since the early 1970s by concerned policy makers, women activists, and world bodies to implement strategies to bring women in Third World societies into the public sphere of remunerated productive employment. However, it has become evident that access to wage work alone does not ensure an increase in women's decision-making powers or a breakdown of patriarchal controls.

The imprint of patriarchy is so deeply embedded in society that it could not be erased easily by merely giving women an access to monetary remuneration in return for their productivity. Resilience of patriarchy is such, that in many Third World societies, patriarchal controls are continuously reinvented and re-established, on the basis of a plethora of socio-economic, cultural and political factors. It is just such a society that we analyse in this case study of female tea pluckers in Sri Lanka.

The plantation economy of Sri Lanka has frequently been referred to as an 'enclave' separated from the traditional subsistence peasant sector of the economy. Its 'separateness' is manifested clearly in terms of two mutually complementary factors.

Firstly, it encompasses a distinct geographical location, largely due to the type of crop grown and the scale of operation. Secondly, its operational structure was dependent on imported capital and imported labour, and the product was for the export market. Snodgrass observes[4] that, this 'foreign enclave,' which was based on the newly structured export economy introduced to the island by the British colonial power, operated side by side with the traditional subsistence economy of the country, without having any significant interaction with each other. Some scholars[5] have challenged the validity of such a strict dichotomy between the two sectors and have shown how the export economy and subsistence economy did indeed impact one sector on the other. However, there is little doubt that the main crop of the export economy, i.e., tea, forms a distinct 'enclave,' in terms of its geographical location as well as in its operational structure.

The focus of this article is on the Indian Tamil ethnic group,[6] which forms the major segment of the tea plantation labour community of Sri Lanka. We first step back into nineteenth century British colonial history in order to understand the genesis of the socio-economic system of labour and its affect on women workers in Sri Lanka. Then we move to present times and show how patriarchal norms once established, are being constantly reinvented and re-established. A century and half of women's involvement in formal wage labour in the tea industry in Sri Lanka, has certainly not guaranteed women's empowerment leading to gender equity in society. We examine how historical, socio-economic, geographical and political factors intersect in keeping the Indian Tamil females in the tea sector in a gender subordinate position; while they continue to maintain an equal share with men in labour force participation in the tea industry in Sri Lanka.

## Colonial Plantations and Women Workers

The context of British colonial policy on recruitment of plantation labour is crucial to an understanding of attitudes towards female labour within the British plantation system. After the abolition of slavery in 1838, recruitment of labour by British colonial powers to work in plantations located in their far-flung colonies took a different turn. For instance, in the Caribbean island of Jamaica, with the 'freeing' of slave labour, there was a widespread concern on the part of the plantation owners and the British colonial administration at the reduction in the supply of labour. This was attributed to the former slaves having found better non-plantation occupations, especially in urban areas.[7] Plantation economy being highly labour-intensive, a continuous, stable supply of labour had to be ensured. This was achieved by recruiting and transporting new labour from other parts of the colonial empire, notably from India. Even among colonies where there was no history of slavery, as in Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon) and in Malaya, the colonial plantocracy found it difficult to recruit natives to work in the newly created plantations. Natives were described as 'conservative,' and 'lazy' and therefore 'unwilling' to become labourers in plantations.[8]

The solution was to recruit labour from overseas and bind them to a rigidly enforced contractual system.

The new overseas labour recruitment was done in two ways. Indentured labour recruitment and free movement of labour. The former was more widespread than the latter. Indian labour recruitment to Sri Lanka corresponded to a 'free movement of labour,' where the labour had had a contractual agreement, it had many characteristics that were found in the indentured system. Also, although female labour recruitment under the free movement of labour was different from that of the indentured system, they were both couched within patriarchal norms. And, indeed, some of the more pervasive attitudes towards women that were developed under the indentured system were carried over to women recruited under the free movement of labour as well. Describing the more pervasive system of 'indentured' or 'bonded' labour as a 'new form of slavery,' Hugh Tinker[9] notes that one of the hallmarks of indentured labour recruitment was its male bias. Furthermore he adds, "…a shortage of women is a feature of all pioneer immigrant societies: but this feature was artificially prolonged in the plantations by the perpetuation of mainly male migration throughout the whole period of indenture."[10]

The recruitment of more women was urged, not so much because of the need for more labour, but to keep the Indian indentured labour 'happy' and 'out of mischief.' But recruitment of women which was as low as 25 per 100 men never increased beyond 40 per 100 men. Emmer[11] notes that Indian women immigrated to the Caribbean under the indenture system in order to increase their social status and to emancipate themselves from an illiberal, inhibiting social system prevalent in India. However, the patriarchal nature of the colonial system was not willing to accommodate such aspirations fully. Firstly, the colonial administration was more interested in keeping the men happy, and women's recruitment played a key role in supplying them with partners. Since the sex ratio was overwhelmingly biased in favour of males; the fewer female recruits were expected to cater to the sexual needs of the male indentured labour. This led to the unjust perception that female labour consisted of prostitutes. As commented upon by J McNeil and Lal Chimmam, only a small percentage of female recruits were prostitutes. The great majority were not, as they are frequently represented to be, shamelessly immoral.[12]

Tinker points out that when all Indian women on the estates were regarded as immoral; all were liable to become victims in a system, which regarded them so casually.[13]

Secondly, from the very inception of the indentured system female indentured labour was paid less relative to male labour.[14] Although it has been reported that women did the same type of work as men, the official perception was that their productivity was lower than that of men. What is more telling is the insistence on the part of the plantation management that prostitution was a source of income for female labour. As reported from the plantations of Sumatra, employers rejected the idea of wage increases for women workers on the ground that the great majority of women workers found an easy source of income in prostitution.[15] Thus, the stereotypical image of an indentured female plantation worker was one of an immoral person of low economic productivity and deserving lower wages.

As noted earlier, emigration to Sri Lanka developed under conditions corresponding to a 'free' movement of labour than under the indentured system.[16] Although many of the features of bondage to the plantations were also present in the free movements of labour to Sri Lanka, female recruitment was not on a sexual quota system, but more as part of a family recruitment system. Hence sex ratio was more equal, and the assumption of prostitution of female labour was less pervasive. However, patriarchy was manifested in several forms, ranging from recruitment practices, lower wages than males for equal work, in the structure of wage payments to an explicit acceptance of female labour as an appendage of male labour.

## Female Labour Recruitment in Tea Plantations in Sri Lanka

As in most other British colonies at the time, the export-import economy that the British colonial rulers developed in Sri Lanka was based on plantation crops that required a large supply of resident labour. An edifice of a physical enclave was soon established, particularly in relation to tea, which by the end of the 19th century had become the main plantation crop. The central highlands of Sri Lanka was ideal for the cultivation of tea, and vast extents of land in this area notably in the districts of Nuwara Eliya, Kandy, Badulla and Matale, were soon converted into a veritable tea garden.[17]

South India became the source of large-scale migrant labour to Sri Lanka. Labour was recruited from the economically depressed classes, mostly from the Adi-Dravida or the fifth caste, a group considered socially inferior. Also among the recruits were agricultural workers of castes such as Vellala, who had higher ritual status than the Adi-Dravidas. The Vellalas played the leadership role of *kanganys* or supervisors of labour gangs, and plantation management contracted them to bring labour gangs to work in the plantations. These labour gangs remained under the *kangany's* management and depended on him for work and sustenance.[18]

Wesumperuma's study notes that Sri Lanka had the distinct feature among the Indian migrant-receiving countries of having a system of family migration, and the sex ratio of migrant labour recruits was much higher than in any other British colony.[19] There were several factors that contributed to family recruitment of Indian labour for Sri Lankan plantations. Firstly, although it was a hazardous overland route for most of the distance, it was a relatively shorter distance, compared to any other colony under the British rule. Secondly, the type of crops, especially tea required continuos year long labour. The phenomenal increase in tea acreage during the latter part of the nineteenth century stimulated a large flow of Indian labour to the island. Female labour, from the very beginning was employed in large numbers in the highly labour intensive activity as tea pluckers. Thirdly, colonial plantation owners in Sri Lanka used a labour recruitment system, whereby the labour recruiter, or *kangany*, travelled with the recruited gang to the plantations and acted as a foreman or a headman of the plantation as well. The gangs that *kanganys* recruited were usually from the same village and came as families.[20] Hence, the

larger influx of female Indian labour migrants to Sri Lankan plantations demonstrated a somewhat deviant pattern from what was observed under indentured labour recruitment, or even under free movements of labour as seen in Malaya and in Burma. This meant that the near universal charge of prostitution levelled against female labour in plantation communities where female labour was scarce did not arise to the same extent in the case of female labour in Sri Lankan plantations.

However, women's subordinate position in the labour and social hierarchy was strictly maintained. As Bandarage notes, the *kangany* system of recruitment of entire family as a labour unit virtually meant that a female labourer did not have a separate identity as a worker. She was a part of a patriarchal unit under a male head.[21] Goonesekere observes that the Indian Immigrant Labour Ordinance of 1923 refers in its provisions exclusively to the 'male labourer.'[22] This ordinance was introduced to regulate recruitment and living conditions of Indian labour. It refers to 'Indian migrant labourer' as male, and the relatives or women and children as dependents.

It is also noted that an early ordinance required the plantation owners to terminate the employment of Indian Tamil women when her husband's employment was legally terminated. Although this legislation was meant to prevent 'forced labour' of a spouse, it clearly gave the signal that women's employment was secondary and its stability depended on the provision of the husband's employment.[23]

In terms of wages for female workers, the indentured system which operated in most colonies and the free movement of labour as seen in Ceylon demonstrated a common pattern. The Planter's Associations of Sri Lanka, which consisted of plantation owners, using a complex set of manipulations, managed to keep wages for both men and women relatively unchanged for long periods of time.[24] Women were considered secondary earners, and their productivity was perceived to be lower than that of males. Hence, from the very beginning, they were paid lower wages than males.[25] Quoting the Minimum Wages (Indian labour) Ordinance of 1927, Goonesekere shows that while legalising the concept of fixed minimum wage, this ordinance reinforced the practice of gender discrimination in wage payments. Wages Boards established under the ordinance authorised the payment of lower wages to Indian Tamil women workers at a ratio of 5 to 4.[26]

A method used by the plantation owners to keep the wages low and stable was to make part payment of their wages by providing them with a certain quantity of rice, the staple food, at a fixed price. In order to ensure a steady labour turnout, the workers were required to turn up for a specified number of days each week to qualify for their weekly quota of rice. The quota per worker was linked to the weekly wage rate. Consequently, women workers were entitled to only 75% of the male quota. Child workers were entitled to 50% of the male quota. This was an extension of the family wage structure that was prevalent in the plantation economy. The differences demonstrated in the quota system seem to have been based on several assumptions. Firstly that the male worker is the

'breadwinner,' and the female worker is a 'secondary earner.' Secondly, that notwithstanding the fact that as tea pluckers, women's work is important, hard and time consuming, they do not need as much of the staple diet as the male workers. This assumption conveniently ignores the reality that, in fact, female workers who are pregnant or lactating should get extra nourishment. Furthermore Goonesekere argues that even when there was a proviso in the minimum wage legislation passed in the early twentieth century, which required management to issue a meagre free monthly allowance of rice to workers, most women workers were excluded. Only Indian Tamil male labourers over the age of 16 years, and Indian Tamil widows resident on the estate and having at least one dependent child below the age of ten years, were entitled to receive this allowance of free rice.[27]

It is very clear that from the very inception of the plantation economy in Sri Lanka, the structure of entitlements, not only entrenched the ideology of male superiority, but that women's wage work in the public domain had no bearing in enhancing their status in society. Meanwhile they were totally responsible for most, if not all, of reproductive activities in the private sphere. The only form of maternity care provided by the plantation management was based on a law passed in 1883 which required the management to supply food and lodging for the new mother for a period of 14 days. The new mother was relieved of plantation work for one month, unless a medical officer certified that she was fit to resume work. The unfortunate catch in this arrangement was that she was not entitled for the rice ration after 14 days, if she did not return to work. Hence, she was compelled to go back to work 14 days after giving birth. It was not until 1915 that the law was changed so that a new mother could get the rice ration for the entire month of maternity leave.[28]

There was no question that the plantation society viewed infants as the sole responsibility of the mother. Caught between motherhood and the need to work for survival, mothers often took their infants out into the field. Provision of childcare was not known in the tea plantation sector until recent times.[29]

It is not surprising that both maternal mortality rates and infant mortality rates were high among the Indian Tamil plantation labour force, compared to the rest of the population in Sri Lanka.

## From the Past to the Present: Patriarchy Continued

It should be noted however, that during this period of history patriarchal control of females in society was widespread many societies across. Women who worked in the coalmines of England and Wales, and in sweatshops of Europe and North America during the industrial revolution faced similar types of gender subordination. Among the upper classes of society, docility and subservience of women to male heads of households were markers of good breeding. Inheritance laws almost universally viewed women as dependent on fathers,

husbands and sons. However, in the Western World, the women's suffrage movement of the 1920s, and women's involvement in the war effort, particularly during World War II, led the way to a vibrant feminist movement which championed the cause of female emancipation. The Civil Rights movement in the US in the 1960s spurred women to agitate for equal rights on par with men. In South Asia, the independence movement of India brought women out of their homes into the public sphere. Women in South Asia were granted the right to vote even, before the countries were granted independence from its colonial rulers. This was especially important in India and Sri Lanka, where electoral politics continue to operate.

Electoral politics and universal adult suffrage were the determining factors in implementing a comprehensive set of social welfare policies in Sri Lanka. Since 1944, education has been free for girls and boys, identified as Sri Lankan nationals from kindergarten through university. A comprehensive health service was made available to the citizenry without charge. A subsidised food ration scheme was also put into operation. Godfrey Gunatilleke notes that democratisation of educational services were especially beneficial to girls. In a situation in which parents faced no restrictive expenditure on the participation of children, female enrolment increased rapidly at all educational levels.[30] By 1971, literacy rate for females in Sri Lanka at 72.9% was far higher than for any other country in the South Asian region. By 1991 it had reached 83.1%. The corresponding rate for males for 1991 was 90.1%. Between 1962 and 1991 life expectancy for females in Sri Lanka had increased from 61.4 years to 74.2 years. The male life expectancy rates for the corresponding years had increased only marginally, from 61.9 to 69.5. Furthermore, maternal mortality rates for the island had dropped to 0.3 per 1,000 by 1988 and infant mortality rate was 18.2 per 1,000 live births in 1991.[31]

The impressive aggregate social indicators shown above do not reveal the whole story of women's situation in Sri Lanka. Firstly, although women's health and education improved, their access to employment opportunities did not demonstrate similar trends. More importantly from the point of view of the present study, a segment of the population, which lay outside the electoral system did not get the benefit of such social policies at all. The population group that was thus ignored was the Indian Tamil plantation community. The first independent government of Sri Lanka enacted legislation in 1948 that made the Indian Tamil immigrant community non-citizens or aliens and virtually 'stateless.' This situation was partially remedied in the 1960s by the Sirima-Shastri Pact, and finally resolved only in 1988.[32]

From 1948 to 1960, a series of egalitarian social policies were rapidly implemented in Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, such policies neatly by passed the Indian Tamils, who were defined as 'non-citizens,' and were geographically concentrated in an enclave in the central highlands of the island. Although the agreements reached on the citizenship issue in the 1960s and 1970s brought a majority of Indian Tamils into the mainstream of political life, the gap in health and education created earlier between the other ethnic groups and the

Indian Tamil community could not be bridged over in a hurry. This gap is reflected in the social indicators of female literacy, maternal mortality and infant mortality. Female literacy among the Indian Tamil plantation ethnic group has been consistently lower than any other ethnic group in Sri Lanka. In 1990/91 female literacy among the Indian Tamils were only 52.8%. Corresponding male literacy among the Indian Tamils was 79.0%. Indeed, the widest gender gap in literacy among all ethnic groups in Sri Lanka is also seen within this ethnic group. The tea plantation district of Nuwara Eliya, which has a very high concentration of Indian Tamil Plantation workers, has consistently recorded the highest rate of maternal deaths as well as infant deaths and the lowest life expectancy rates among all ethnic groups in Sri Lanka.[33]

At the same time, that very same population group continues to have the highest percentage of female labour force participation rates among all ethnic groups in the country. According to current labour force estimates, female labour force participation rate for Sri Lanka is 31.8%, while the corresponding rate for males is 64.4%.[34] Although the Indian Tamil population in Sri Lanka accounts for less than 6% of the total population, female labour force participation within the group is more than 50%, most of whom are employed as tea pluckers. On a geographical basis, Nuwara Eliya district, with its high concentration of tea plantations and Indian Tamil population, claims the highest percentage of female employment among all 22 districts of Sri Lanka.[35]

Since Sri Lanka gained independence from the British rule, the socio-economic position of females among the Indian Tamil population, and that of the rest of the population, particularly, among the majority Sinhalese and minority Sri Lanka Tamils[36] seems to be moving in opposing directions. While the Indian Tamil group has high labour force participation, their health and educational levels are the lowest for the island. Among the Sinhalese and the Sri Lanka Tamil women, labour force participation is very low, while their status as manifested in social indicators is high. One plausible explanation is that while egalitarian social policies did bring about better health and educational levels for all its citizens, interventionist policies of successive Sri Lanka governments did not extend far enough to create employment opportunities for women citizens. On the other hand, the plantation population, which accounted for a high female labour force participation rate due to the structure of the colonial economy, was poorly served in terms of social welfare benefits by the state. What is perhaps rather ironical is the fact that the state was dependent on the revenue generated in the very same plantation sector to provide social welfare benefits to its citizens, while it ignored, until recently, the plantation workers themselves. Taxation of the plantation sector remains a major source of revenue for the state.

During the early years of the tea industry in Sri Lanka, the labouring class had no recourse to better wages or facilities because they were denied the right to any type of collective organisational structure. This situation changed with legislation introduced in the 1930s, which gave the right to plantation labour to form labour unions. Trade unions in the

plantation sector were created in 1935. From their inception to present times the labour union structure of the plantations has undergone numerous changes. By 1960s, it was so well organised that it was considered one of the most powerful labour union structures in the country. One would expect that such an organisation would look after the interests of the major component of its labour force, i.e. female tea pluckers. However, the reality was very different. As plantation labour unions became more powerful, male control of female labour became even more entrenched, due to the way that plantation labour unions operated. As we will see in the following discussion, this is not to say that women workers were completely ignored by the labour unions. Indian Tamil female plantation workers, were caught between the political motives and overall wage increase demands of their unions and the profit maximisation and cost minimisation motives of the management.

The Plantation Tamils formed the Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC), which was keen on organising trade unions to look after the interests of Tamils in the hill country and in the plantations. In 1950, the CIC changed its name to the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), and became the largest trade union in the country. A second, rival trade union to the CWC, the Democratic Workers Union (DWC) was formed in 1956. All leftist parties in Sri Lanka, who had the experience of trade union organisations from pre-independence times, also started to woo plantation workers into their trade union structures. Very Soon, the two main stream parties, the United National party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), also followed suit. Indeed, much of the interest of the two main political parties in the Indian Tamil plantation population, began in the 1960s, when the Indian Tamil population were getting absorbed as citizens of the country with voting power.

How did the Indian Tamil female plantation workers fare; caught between the changing management structures and male dominated politicised trade union structure of the plantations? To be affiliated to political parties or to have a separate political agenda of its own is nothing new to trade union movement the world over. Political participation, either through patronage or through direct involvement in the political process, is a time-tested strategy in competitive political systems of winning concessions for oneself or for a group. However, the main thrust of a trade union movement is in bargaining and negotiating for better conditions for its membership.

There is no question that the plantation trade union leadership in Sri Lanka has positioned itself as a significant force in successive governments of Sri Lanka since 1977.[37] It has won major concessions ranging from citizenship rights to work schedules and wage levels. The trade union movement of the Indian Tamil plantation workers has been instrumental in creating a cohesive political group, with a distinct geographical base. As Peiris notes, "...it was evident that the 'Indian Tamil' segment of the plantation workforce, active as a cohesive group, could have a perceptible impact on the outcome of the elections. Thus, the general trend during the recent past has been one of increasing responsiveness of the government to the needs and demands of the plantation workforce."[38]

The question is whether the articulated demands by the male dominant trade unions represented the needs of its female workforce. Or were the women workers manipulated like "puppets on a string" by the male dominant trade unions and the plantation management?[39]

The right of citizenship that the trade unions had won for their membership benefited both male and female Indian Tamil tea plantation workers. While the periodic wage increases were a boon to plantation households, the equalisation of wages, made effective in 1984, for male and female labour was seen as a long overdue recognition of women's work in the tea plantations. As stipulated in the Employees Provident Act (1958), female workers in tea plantations have been entitled to provident fund benefits from the inception of the scheme. However, in all these issues women had no voice. They were looked at as passive workers. Males represented them, from the household level to the trade union level. As Oddvar Hollup[40] notes, women workers, who constitute more than 50% of the plantation unskilled workforce, were excluded from trade union activity and leadership positions at all levels of the trade union organisation. Indeed, women workers did have a female as a *talaivar* to represent their interests in the trade union. But they did not enjoy any leadership positions and it was the male leadership who took decisions with regard to female labour. The situation being such, it is interesting to note that, in 1979, S Selliah, a plantation trade union leader in Sri Lanka, and the Asian representative of the International Federation of Plantation, Agricultural and Allied Workers remarked that,

> "…the wide range of inequality imposed on the woman workers in the name of social customs and practice continue to exist. This could only be changed if the women workers are able to bring the required pressure through trade union."[41]

It begs the question as to how this pressure could be exerted without adequate female representation since, even female workers' membership in a trade union is decided by her husband, usually the head of the household. Hollup speculates that this may be partly due to the fact that they have two jobs, one in the productive sector and one in the reproductive sector: hence they have no spare time to attend to union work.[42]

A key feature of most patriarchal societies is that women's work in the domestic sphere is taken for granted as a 'natural' responsibility of women. Such work is looked down upon by men as 'unmanly,' and internalised by women as their burden and passed on to daughters in the course of time. If women are engaged in productive work outside the home, then society expects its women, and not women and men together to adjust to share reproductive responsibilities in the domestic sphere. 'Time' women spend on domestic reproductive activities is not counted and therefore not valued, since such tasks are performed by women, hidden from public methods of counting.[43]

In the following discussion, we will demonstrate how wages and work schedules, won as concessions by, powerful trade unions in the plantations further entrenched

patriarchal control of women and how women have multiple tasks to perform, straddling the public and private spheres and little time to spare.

## Work Schedules, Wages and Control of Incomes

Trade union agitation for better wages and more workdays had a differential impact on women over men. Firstly, wage increases for women did not necessarily mean that women had control over their incomes. Secondly, there was a difference in 'time' spent on 'work' by men and women. Thirdly, notwithstanding the fact that, women spent more time, both in terms of days of work and hours of work, women's role as the primary care provider in the reproductive sphere, remained unchanged. As noted earlier wage rates for plantation labour has been steadily rising over the year. Wages for unskilled labour categories in the plantation sector are calculated on a daily wage rate and paid on a biweekly basis. Women tea pluckers often earn more than the male unskilled workers do, because they are entitled to work extra hours to bring in green tea, especially during the 'flush' seasons. Although all workers are given time off from work to collect their wages, women's wages were usually collected by male heads of households. This was a practice that was started in the British colonial period. The wages for the entire family were collected by the husband or the father. As noted earlier, that was a time when female employment was dependent on male employment. But an amendment to the Estate Indian Labour Ordinance introduced in 1978 stipulated that an employer is no longer obliged to terminate a married woman's services when her husband's employment is terminated.[44] This effectively meant that they were no longer considered as appendages of male labour. Furthermore, Goonesekere notes that management has no legal right to pay wages to a male member of a family.[45]

Nevertheless, as late as the mid-1990s, management continued with the old practice of giving the woman's wage to her husband or father. As far as management is concerned, women are not denied the opportunity to collect their wages. Management was reluctant to change the practice of giving the women's wages to men, since the trade unions were silent about it. In the course of a field-based research[46] on female Indian tea plantation workers, the author was told by several senior managers that they would not change the present practice unless the request came from the trade unions. This was not surprising since the management did not want to initiate any new practice and run the risk of antagonising the highly organised trade union leadership. Female workers had no access to the management, independent of the trade unions. At the same time, trade unions obviously showed no interest in starting a practice that would lead the males to lose control of family wages. Among the 22 large plantations that were studied, only two plantations paid each individual worker separately.[47]

However, it is heartening to note, that recently the government has noted with concern this anomaly in wage payment pattern in the plantations and is keen on implementing the existing law where each worker is paid individually. However, the law still allows for nomination of another person to collect one's wages. It is yet to be seen

whether tea plantations with Indian Tamil labour would honour the existing law or would continue to circumvent it by using the legal provision of nomination.

Trade union negotiation on the payment of maternity benefits also resulted in male members collecting the payments within 48 hours of the delivery of the baby. Obviously, the new mother was not in a condition to collect the payment. This lump-sum payment, intended for subsistence over the entire twelve weeks of maternity leave, we learnt was spent within a few days. Tea plantation workers were entitled to buy basic food provisions and kerosene on credit from the store run by each individual plantation. In our study we found that the deduction for such purchases were made from the woman's wages and hardly ever from the man's wages. During the period of maternity leave, a woman could still draw the food provisions for the household on credit from the plantation store. These expenses are deducted from her wages, once she got back to work.

Trade unions have also successfully negotiated for mandatory 26 days of work per month  for all unskilled labour, for both men and women. While, this would obviously enhance the household incomes, as noted earlier, women have, at best, only minimal control over their income. As observed in field-based studies,[48] women often complained that the men wasted the household income on gambling and alcohol consumption. Plantation management has commented on the phenomenal increase of licensed taverns in the vicinity of tea plantations. It was observed that more females in the tea plantation sector consumed alcohol compared to non-plantation females in Sri Lanka. However, it was the men folk who frequented the taverns more often and consumed more alcohol, often using the income earned by women as well.[49]

While wages for male and female unskilled workers were equalised and increased, female workers, 90% of whom were tea pluckers, spent longer hours at work for the same daily wage as male workers. A female tea plucker's work usually starts at 7.30 in the morning, when she has to show up at 'muster' before setting out to the fields. Tea pluckers work in gangs of 15-20 women per group, supervised by a male *kangany* (field supervisor). They work until noon, with a short break for tea around 10 in the morning. The lunch break is an hour at noon when women return to their homes, often to prepare a hurried meal or heat leftover food from the previous day's dinner. Back at work at 1 or 1.30 in the afternoon, they pluck until 4.30 in the afternoon. Then they carry their laden tea baskets to the weighing shed located in the valley. They spend up to an hour at the weighing shed before they set off for home. Male workers on the other hand, are assigned 'task work.' They are given a particular task, such as weeding, pruning, fertilising or cutting drains. Most often, they have, through their trade unions, negotiated the extent of land they could cover per day, for any particular task. As a result, most male workers complete their tasks before noon and are free for the rest of the day. For women it is mandatory that they work from 7-7.30 in the morning to 4-4.30 in the afternoon. With the successful negotiation for a full month of work for all unskilled plantation workers, women work on Saturdays as well. In the course of our interviews, female tea pluckers often told the author

and the rest of the research team, that they would be as productive,[50] if they could continue plucking until 1.30-2.00 in the afternoon and finish the day's work after weighing the leaves at the weighing shed. This concern has not been articulated by the trade unions as a legitimate demand for better working conditions for female workers. The management was reluctant to consider this option for women tea pluckers, since they believed that this would lead to a reduction in productivity. The attitude of the management was that, unless it came from the trade unions or the government as a policy measure, management would just "let sleeping dogs lie." Although in two tea plantations, of high altitude in the Nuwara Eliya district, tea pluckers did finish at 2.00 in the afternoon, we learnt that it was a concession granted due to the onset of thick mist in the plantation and made work impossible anyway.[51] Our discussion with the management of the two plantations revealed that there was no reduction of productivity due to the early release of the tea pluckers.

Tea pluckers engage in hard manual labour. They work on steep mountain slopes, carrying a basket which, when full of tea leaves, could weigh up to 25kg. Both management and male workers openly acknowledge that tea plucking is indeed gruelling work. When male and female wages for unskilled plantation labour were equalised, there was a fear that more men will be tempted to become tea pluckers and women would lose an avenue of employment. But the males we interviewed openly said that while tea plucking is culturally considered 'women's work' and therefore men would be reluctant to become tea pluckers, it was also hard work, and was more time consuming than the 'tasks' that males were accustomed to doing in the tea plantations.[52]

That plantation trade unions do not look after the interests of the women workers is poignantly articulated by a Colombo-based female staff member of the CWC, who said: "...Women workers in the plantations hardly enjoy any extra concessions than men, except in the case of maternity leave and the computation of annual holidays. Other than that they are discriminated in every sphere of activity."[53]

Another very significant factor that highlights the difference between female labour situation, compared to that of male labour, is the differential access to upward mobility in the occupational hierarchy. During colonial times, apart from the higher caste *kangany*, male and female migrant recruits were categorised as unskilled 'coolie' labour. However, in course of time, male plantation labour recruits have gained the right to move up in the hierarchy of the plantation structure. This is partly due to better access to education for males. However, even where education is not a deciding factor, Indian Tamil females in the tea plantations do not have the opportunity to move up in the plantation hierarchy. For example, supervisors of tea pluckers, do not require high education levels. Often male unskilled labour is promoted to these positions. In the field-based study of the 22 large tea plantations in the Nuwara Eliya district, there was not a single instance where a female tea plucker had been promoted to a supervisory grade. Indian Tamil women residing in the plantations, seem unable to even aspire to move up in the plantation hierarchy, even when they have a mid-level education. In one tea plantation, in the Nuwara Eliya district, 13

young women from the plantations applied for one vacancy as a crèche attendant. The young women did not want to work as low level tea pluckers, as their mothers were, although the payment for the crèche attendant was less than half of the average income of a female tea plucker.[54] In short, the only readily available occupation for females in the tea plantations, was as tea pluckers. It continues to be the lowest rung in the plantation occupational hierarchy, and has shown no change since the British colonial period.

To complete the picture of male /female time allocation among the tea plantation workers one needs to look at work in the reproductive sphere. This remained the responsibility of women. They were assisted mainly by other females, i.e. older retired female relatives and young daughters in the household. A female tea plucker's day begins at dawn and ends around 10 p.m. Before reporting for work, she has to prepare the morning meal, look after the needs of children and attend to her husband's needs as well. When she comes home at lunch break, she has to prepare a meal. After work in the evening she is expected to cook the evening meal, feed and clean the children and attend to other household chores before finally going to bed. She is the first to get up in the morning and the last to go to bed at night. Women's time allocation in the tea plantation households illustrates the multiple burdens that a female wage labourer has to shoulder.

Generations of female Indian Tamil tea pluckers seem to be bogged down in the same recurring pattern of work in the field and at home. One element that may contribute towards breaking this vicious cycle is access to education. However, female education has received very low priority in the tea plantation areas. Until the 1970s, providing educational facilities for the children of unskilled labour in the tea plantation areas was the responsibility of the management. The plantations were required to have only primary schools, which were ill-equipped and employed poorly qualified teachers. Since child labour was important in the tea industry, plantation management during colonial times resisted any efforts to make education compulsory.[55]

And the more comprehensive state educational system did not reach the tea plantation areas until the 1970s. As reflected in very low literacy levels, provision of proper schooling seemed to be the least of the concern of the management. Girls in particular were adversely affected by the apathy of the management and the indifference of parents in educating girls. The social system was such that sending girls to school especially after puberty was not a common practice. In any case, the utility of education for girls was considered minimal, since they were absorbed into the plantation labour force when they reached the age of 14. The mix of patriarchal tradition, on the one hand, and demands for female labour, on the other, resulted in a general norm, whereby girls followed their mothers as tea pluckers, from generation to generation. However, since the late 1980s, a concerted effort has been made by the parliamentarians representing the tea plantation districts to improve the educational facilities in their electorates. Given the low status of female literacy and educational attainment among the Indian Tamil plantation population,

'catching up' with the ever increasing educational attainment of the rest of the female population of Sri Lanka may take years if not decades.

Interestingly, most of the welfare benefits that came the way of female workers were initiated by the state through legislation. Some of the legislation had been in the statute books from the time of the British colonial period, but it was only during the last 15 years that many of the benefits were expanded and properly implemented. It was after the semi-government boards, i.e. The Sri Lanka State Plantation Corporation (SLSPC) and The Janatha Estates Development Board (JEDB) took over the management of the larger tea plantations in 1975 that maternity leave provisions covering 12 weeks for the first two children and 6 weeks for the subsequent children were properly implemented. The two management boards also made provision to establish crèche facilities for larger plantations. With the assistance of international donor agencies, all pregnant and lactating tea workers were issued Triposha, a soya-based nutritional supplement. All female workers were tested for iron deficiency and given iron supplements. Family planning, targeted towards female workers, was vigorously pursued. Women did not have the privilege of selecting a particular method through 'informed choice.' Instead, the focus was on fertility control through women. Incentives were offered for both male vasectomies and female sterilisation. However, it was female sterilisation that is the most common form of fertility control among Indian Tamil tea workers. The management actively encouraged this by giving incentive payments to both midwives and plantation medical practitioners for encouraging female plantation workers to get sterilisation after the birth of two children.

It appears that the state, through the two plantation management boards, made an effort to improve the health and nutritional levels of the female workers. But efforts by the state to improve the educational standards were certainly not adequate. Firstly, there were not enough schools that girls could attend. Secondly, the state found it difficult to find trained teachers in the medium of the Tamil language to instruct the students. For security reasons, due to the separatist ethnic conflict between the majority Sinhalese and the Sri Lanka Tamils, successive governments have been reluctant to encourage the more educated Sri Lanka Tamils from the North and the East to come to the main plantation areas in the Central highlands of the island. Moreover, the political leaders of the Indian Tamil community have also expressed opposition to the vacant teaching posts in the plantation areas being filled by Sri Lanka Tamils. Despite these constraints, since the late 1980s, a concerted effort has been made by the parliamentarians representing the tea plantation districts to improve the educational facilities in their electorates. Given the low status of female literacy and educational attainment among the Indian Tamil plantation population, 'catching up' with the ever increasing educational attainment of the rest of the female population of Sri Lanka may take years if not decades.

The female Indian Tamil plantation workers seem to be captured in a separate enclave, within the larger tea plantation enclave. Male control of their lives has been firmly entrenched by the structure of the plantation trade unions. The unique nature of the

plantation structure, where work and home share the same physical space, and men and women from the same households are in the labour force, it is much easier to establish male dominance in both spheres. The management of the plantations, which is exclusively male, seems to be guided in their approach to female workers, by two main considerations. Firstly, they are keen to keep labour costs down while increasing productivity. In response to periodic demands of trade unions they are compelled to raise wages for all unskilled labour categories. However, mindful of rising costs of production, which result from such increases, the management is not willing to take the initiative on cutting back on hours of work of tea pluckers, whom they acknowledge as the most important segment of the plantation labour force. Secondly, the plantation trade union movement is powerful and cohesive. For instance, a call for strike action is accepted by all its members, and cripples the industry, which was the main foreign exchange earner until the late 1980s. Management will not initiate any action that may antagonise the male trade union leadership.[56]

Sri Lanka governments being strongly dependent on the continuous productivity of the tea sector for substantial part of its revenue, would not normally go beyond the call of trade unions, in relation to female workers work schedules or wage payment practices. However, as noted earlier, since the mid-1970s when most of the larger plantations were brought under the control of the government, some of the egalitarian social policies that benefited other segments of women in Sri Lanka, have been extended to Indian Tamil plantation workers as well.

Taking note of the overall status of the Indian Tamil female tea plantation workers, Kumarakulasingham noted in 1979 that, "…Though they (women workers) play an important role in the plantation economy and also contribute a substantial portion to the family income as wage earner, they still continue as semi-slaves, being treated as such not only by their management but also by their own kith and kin, their husbands and sons. They are still denied a voice, even in family affairs, the family composition being mainly patriarchal in nature."[57]

Towards the latter part of 1980s, female tea pickers did demonstrate better decision-making powers, especially in relation to certain household level issues and in terms of fertility control.[58] Overall however, patriarchal controls are very much in force. Women's access to wage work outside the home, in this instance, has certainly not given them control over resources or decision-making powers. Gender equity was certainly not the norm, in the economic sector that has the highest concentration of female wageworkers in Sri Lanka.

## Geographical Isolation and Lack of Leadership

Two contributory factors that seem to affect the situation of Indian Tamil female tea pluckers are, firstly, the geographical isolation of plantation areas and the lack of effective women-specific leadership within the tea plantation areas. As noted earlier, the main tea

plantation districts are located in the central highlands in Sri Lanka. The surrounding districts, are populated mainly by the Sinhalese.[59]

The two population groups belong to two different religions, and speak different languages. There is no affinity between the two groups, and interaction was either minimal or non-existent. To a certain extent, the Sinhalese population resented the Indian Tamil population, for being part of the colonial system that the Sinhalese perceived as depriving them of their land.[60] There are no common issues that linked the tea plantation population with the population outside the perimeter of the plantation. Physical separation of the plantation areas is compounded by a social separation as well. Furthermore, the structure of each large tea plantation had developed as a cohesive entity, with its work place and residence located within the same space. Ignored by the politicians until the 1960s, geographical separation, and the accompanying social distance between the Indian Tamil plantation and the rest of the population entrenched the 'enclave' nature of the Indian Tamil tea plantation population. Given the long work schedules and low educational levels, women in this enclave are placed in an inner enclave, surrounded by dominant males, from the household to the fields and to management.

It is very clear that the female Indian Tamil tea plantation population seriously lacks women-specific leadership, which would give women's concerns top priority. Contemporary social science literature illustrates the far reaching effects such leadership exercises on women's empowerment in many Third World societies.[61] Also, successful women-specific organisations need not be led either by women who emerge from within a particular economic system as exemplified by Ella Bhat, an educated trade union leader, who gave leadership to the SEWA organisation of India. Also, the leadership in successful women-specific organisations may very well be given by men. The leadership of Yunnus Mohammed of the Grameen Bank initiative in Bangladesh, which caters to the needs of poor women, is a case in point. However, the main thrust in initiatives planned by such organisations should be directed at enhancing women's empowerment. In fact, in Sri Lanka within the trade union movement, male leadership of female specific organisations is not new. The nurses trade union in Sri Lanka, where more than ninety percent of the membership consists of females, the leader is a male. While more than sixty percent of school teachers in Sri Lanka are women, their trade unions are led by men. However, in both cases, the membership is educated, articulate and aware of their rights. Their membership is obtained on the basis of the individual, rather than as part of a family or a household. Also, the membership of the nurses union and teachers unions is overwhelmingly female. Hence, women-specific concerns are given priority. Although each tea plantation worker, male and female, has individual membership in trade unions, households join the same union, effectively giving the right of representation to the dominant male members. Consequently, women's concerns tend to get submerged under issues that are perceived to be common to all its membership. This seemingly gender-neutral perspective effectively becomes gender-biased, especially when women's concerns

as workers do not coincide with male worker's interests. Plantation management views with suspicion, any outside group interacting with plantation labour.[62]

## Conclusions

Currently, Sri Lankan women provide the largest segment of labour in foreign currency earning economic activities.[63] Until the late 1980s, it was the tea sector which brought in the largest revenue to the country. Now it comes second to the garment industry. Remittances from overseas migrant workers, especially from females who are in domestic service in the Middle East, is the third highest foreign currency earning activity. In all three economic activities, women occupy the lowest rung, and individual female earnings are lower than wages earned by men. However, both female garment workers and women who migrate to work as maids in Middle Eastern homes perceive their employment as temporary, whereas female Indian Tamil tea plantation workers have been in a continuous relay, spanning generations, taking over the same occupation from their mothers before them.

What are the possibilities for change in the status of Indian Tamil female tea workers? Inspired leadership that brings women's concern to the forefront could effectively stimulate such changes. However, this type of leadership is obviously not forthcoming via the present political leadership structure of the tea plantation community. Indeed, education has the capacity to function as a very effective leveller of socio-economic standing of a population group. If girls' education improves among the Indian Tamil plantation community, attitude towards women workers may undergo radical changes. It may lead to a decrease in the number of women who would want to follow in the footsteps of their mothers as tea pluckers. If female labour becomes scarce, it may compel the management to offer better wages for the hard work they do, and provide better housing and decent work schedules to women.

It may open more opportunities for women to climb the occupational hierarchy of the plantations. And indeed, it would give the women a more representative voice in the plantation trade union movements. Only such changes could challenge effectively the patriarchal controls that are pervasive within the contemporary Indian Tamil tea plantation community in Sri Lanka.

## Notes

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3.  See Geetha Sen and Caren Grown, *Development, Crises and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspective*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1987; Irene Tinker, "The Making of a Field: Advocates, Practitioners, and Scholars" in Irene Tinker (ed.), *Persistent Inequalities: Women and Development*, New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990, pp 27-53; Eva Rathgeber, "Deconstructing the Development 'Expert': Gender, Development and the 'Vulnerable Groups,'" Marianne Marchand and Jane L Parpart (eds), *Feminism, Postmodernism, Development*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1995.

4.  See Donald Snodgrass, *Ceylon: An Export Economy in Transition*, Homewood, III; Richard Irwin, 1966, for a comprehensive analysis of Sri Lanka's dual economy.

5.  See Asoka Bandarage, *Colonialism in Sri Lanka: Political Economy of the Kandyan Highlands, 1833-1886*, Berlin, New York, Amsterdam, Mouton, 1983; Newton Gunasinghe, *Changing Socio-economic Relations in the Kandyan Countryside*, Colombo, Social Scientists Association, 1990; Eric Meyer, "'Enclave' Plantations, 'Hemmed-in' Villages and Dualistic Representations in Colonial Ceylon" in E Valentine Daniel, Henry Bernstein and Tom Brass (eds), *Plantations, Peasants and Proletarians in Colonial Asia*, London, Frank Cass, 1992.

6.  The ethnic composition of the Sri Lankan population is as follows:
    Sinhalese, 74%; Sri Lankan Tamils, 12.7%; Indian Tamils, 5.6%; Moors, 7.0%; Other, 0.7%.

7.  See House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on West Indian Colonies*, London, 1842.

8.  P Ramasamy, "Labour Control and Labour Resistance in the Plantations of Colonial Malaya," E Valentine Daniel *et.al.*, (eds), *op.cit.*, pp 87-105; Dharmapriya Wesumperuma, *Indian Immigrant Plantation Workers in Sri Lanka: A Historical Perspective, 1880-1910*, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, Vidyodaya University Press, 1986.

9.  Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1930*, London, Oxford University Press, 1974, p 64. Tinker explains that the colonial administration laid down conditions for indentured labour recruitment. The length of service was to be five years, renewable for further five-year terms. The emigrant must be returned, at the end of his service, to the port of his departure. However, in practice, although the indentured coolie could be held in legal bondage only for a period of years, the plantations held most of them for life. The only escape was a return to India-worn out and impoverished. (p 179)

10. *ibid.*, p 201.

11. P C Emmer, "The Great Escape: The Migration of Female Indentured Servants from the British Raj to Surinam" in D Richardson (ed.), *Abolition and its Aftermath: The Historical Context. 1870-1916*, London, Frank Cass, 1985, pp 245-266.

12. J McNeil and Lal Chimmam, *Report on the Condition of Indian Immigrants in the Four British Colonies*, London, T Fisher, Unwin, 1915.

13. Tinker, *op.cit.*, p 205.

14. See I M Cumpston, *Indians Overseas in British Territories, 1834-1854*, London, Oxford University Press, 1953, p 99.

15. Jan Beman and E Valentine Daniel, "Conclusion: The Making of a Coolie" in E Valentine Daniel, *et.al.* (eds), *op.cit.*, pp 268-295.

16. See Tinker, *op.cit.*, p 92.

17. For a comprehensive account of plantation agriculture in Sri Lanka from colonial period to contemporary times, see G H Peiris, *Development and Change in Sri Lanka: Geographical Perspectives*, New Delhi, Macmillan, 1996.

18. See Vidyamali Samarasinghe, Sirima Kiribamune and Wijaya Jayatilake, *Maternal Nutrition and Health Status of Indian Tamil Tea Plantation Workers in Sri Lanka*, Monograph No. 8, Washington DC, International Center for Research on Women, 1990.

19. Wesumperuma, *op.cit.*, pp 89-90.

20. See Tinker, *A New Slavery System*, *op.cit.*, p 93; Wesumperuma, *op.cit.*, p 90.

21. Asoka Bandarage, *op.cit.*

22. Savithri Goonesekere, "Maternal Nutrition and Health Status of Women Plantation Workers: Perceptions of the Sri Lanka Legal System," (mimeo) Kandy, Sri Lanka, 1987, p 43.

23. *ibid.*, p 9.

24. For a detailed review of wage rates and gross earnings of Indian Tamil labour recruits brought to Sri Lanka during the British Colonial period see Wesumperuma, *op.cit.*, pp 141-179.

25. Average daily wage rates for male and female plantation labour during the period 1880-1990 ranged from 33-37 cents for males and 25-29 cents for women. See Wesumperuma, *op.cit.*, Table 11, p 144.

26. See Goonesekere, *op.cit.*, p 7.

27. *ibid.*

28. See Wesumperuma, *op.cit.*, p 280.

29. In the course of a field-based research project on female tea pluckers in the Nuwara Eliya district in Sri Lanka (1987-1988), the author was poignantly told by, Muniamma, a woman, who claimed to be 79 years old, that she was compelled to take her babies to the field, whatever the weather conditions. She made a hammock out of a length of cloth, tied the ends to two tea bushes and lay the baby in this improvised hammock, while she worked as a tea plucker. Muniamma had 12 children, only 3 survived into adulthood. This research project was funded by the International Center for Research on Women, Washington DC, and conducted under the auspices of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Kandy, Sri Lanka. See Samarasinghe, Kiribamune and Jayatilake, *op.cit.*

30. Godfrey Gunatilleke, "The Socio-economic Background," *University Education and Graduate Employment in Sri Lanka*, Paris, UNESCO and Colombo, Marga publications, 1983, pp 37-62.

31. Department of Census and Statistics, *Statistical Abstracts of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 1995*, Colombo, Department of Census and Statistics, 1996.

32. The Sirima-Shastri Pact of 1964 stipulated that of an estimated 955,000 'stateless' Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka, 525,000 were to be given citizenship and repatriated to India over a 15 year period, and 300,000 were to be given Sri Lankan citizenship. Negotiations about the remaining number were left for a future date. In 1974 the two governments agreed to give citizenship to these people on a 50/50 basis. Finally, legislation was enacted in 1988, whereby 95,000 Indian Tamils living in the plantations who were found to be neither citizens of Indian or Sri Lanka were given Sri Lankan citizenship.

33. See Samarasinghe, Kiribamune and Jayatilake, *op.cit.*, Tables 1, 2 and 3, p 4. Also Department of Census and Statistics, *op.cit.*, Tables 3.5 and 3.6, p 47.

34. Department of Census and Statistics, *Women and Men in Sri Lanka,* Colombo, Department of Census and Statistics, 1995, pp 55-56.

35. See Vidyamali Samarasinghe, "Women and Geographic Space: A Regional Analysis of Women's Well-being and Productive Work in Sri Lanka" in *The Hidden Face of Development: Women, Work and Equality in Sri Lanka,* Colombo, CENWOR, 1989, pp 17-40.

36. See note 6.

37. Since 1977, S Thondaman, leader of the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), the plantation trade union with the highest membership, has been a cabinet level minister of two successive governments.

38. Peiris, *op.cit.,* p 238.

39. On the issue of contemporary socio-economic empowerment of female Indian Tamil tea plantation workers in Sri Lanka see Vidyamali Samarasinghe, "Puppets on a String: Women's Wage Work and Empowerment among Female Tea Plantation Workers of Sri Lanka," *Journal of Developing Areas,* 23, No. 3, 1993, pp 320-340.

40. See Oddvar Hollup, *Bonded Labour: Caste and Cultural Identity among Tamil Plantation Workers in Sri Lanka,* New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1994, pp 199-200.

41. S Selliah, "Keynote Address" in *Role of Women Workers in the Plantation Economy,* Colombo, Sri Lanka Foundation Institute, 1979, p 14.

42. Oddvar Hollup, *op.cit.,* p 199.

43. Valuing women's work in the reproductive sphere is gaining increasing attention, both from policy makers and scholars. See, UNDP, *Human Development Report,* New York, Oxford University Press, 1995; Lourdes Beneria, "Accounting for Women's Work: The Progress of Two Decades," *World Development,* 20, No.11, 1992, pp 1547-1560; Vidyamali Samarasinghe, "Counting Women's Work: The Intersection of Time and Space" in *Thresholds in Feminist Geography: Difference, Methodology and Representation,* 1997, pp 129-144.

44. Goonesekere, *op.cit.,* p 12.

45. Goonesekere, *op.cit.,* p 27.

46. The field-based research in "Maternal Nutrition and Health Status of Indian Tamil Tea Plantation Workers in Sri Lanka 1987-1988," *op.cit.*

47. Samarasinghe, Kiribamune and Jayatilake, *op.cit.*

48. See Rachel Kurien, *The Position of Women Workers in the Plantation Sector in Sri Lanka,* Geneva, ILO, 1981; Samarasinghe, Kiribamune and Jayatilake, *op.cit.*

49. During a field survey, in response to a question on male alcohol consumption, a male respondee of a control group of male labour in one of the large tea plantations in the Nuwara Eliya district said, "if it is good for the *Periya Dorai* (senior manager) and the *Sinna Dorais* (assistant managers) to go the 'club' and drink after work, why is it bad for us to do the same in taverns?" "Maternal Nutrition and Health Status of Indian Tamil Plantation Workers... (1987-1988), " *op.cit.*

50. The management stipulates the minimum amount of tea, per day, that a plucker should bring in. This is calculated in a monthly basis, taking into consideration the seasonal growth pattern of tealeaves.

51. "Maternal Nutrition and Health of Indian Tamil Tea Plantation Workers... (1987-1988)," *op.cit.*

52. *ibid.*

53. Savitri Kumarakulasingham, "The Role of Women Workers in the Plantation Economy" in *Sri Lanka Foundation Institute, op.cit.*, 1979, p 78.

54. "Maternal Nutrition and Health Status of Indian Tamil Tea Plantation Workers...(1987-1988)," *op.cit.*

55. See Wesumperuma, *op.cit.*, pp 281-293.

56. Currently, tea exports come second to garment exports

57. Savitri Kumarakulasingham, *op.cit.*, p 78.

58. "Maternal Nutrition and Health Status of Female Indian Tamil Tea Plantation Workers... (1987-1988)," *op.cit.*

59. See Vidyamali Samarasinghe, "Ethno-regionalism as a Basis for Geographical Separation in Sri Lanka," *Ethnic Studies Report,* Vol. VI, No. 2, Kandy, Sri Lanka, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 1988, pp 24-51.

60. See Asoka Bandarage, *op.cit.*; Eric Meyer, *op.cit.*.

61. See Kalima Rose, *Where Women are Leaders: The Sewa Movement in India,* London, Zed Books, 1992.

62. Before the research team set out on the field survey on the "Maternal Nutrition and Health Status of the Indian Tamil Tea Plantation Workers... (1987-1988)" project, the research co-ordinator had to obtain written permission from the management of the JEDB and the SLSPC. The research team also had to appraise the local trade union representatives of the nature of the research project.

63. Vidyamali Samarasinghe, "Feminisation of Foreign Exchange Earnings: The Case of Sri Lanka," *Journal of Developing Areas,* Spring 1998; Gul Rukh Selim, "Transforming Women's Economies: Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee" in Marilyn Carr, Martha Chen and Renana Jhabvala (eds), *Speaking Out: Women's Economic Empowerment in South Asia,* London, Intermediate Technology Publications, 1996, pp 45-66.

# Insurrection and Youth Unrest in Sri Lanka

## Gerald Peiris

### Introduction

Over a spell that lasted no more than three months in 1971, and in the late 1980s for approximately three years that extended briefly over the turn of the decade, many parts of Sri Lanka were enmeshed in insurrections led by the *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (JVP), a militant organisation based, according to its leadership, on indigenised Marxist-Leninist ideology. Both periods of insurrection were featured by widespread violence and terror. The principal ingredients of the JVP strategy of revolt were virulent propaganda against the existing political order, incitement to violence, assassination, plunder and robbery along with various other forms of sabotage and mass intimidation intended to have the effect of destabilising civil society. The suppression of the insurrections entailed the promulgation of "emergency" regulations and took the form of operations both open and clandestine undertaken by pro-government forces including the police and the military, often with scant regard for legal and moral norms. These operations also involved, among other things, incarceration, torture and summary execution of several thousands of persons evidently on the grounds of suspected participation in insurrectionary activities.

The re-examination of the two insurrections attempted in this paper is based mainly on the usual array of documentary sources of the type which major political upheavals generate – reports of official inquiries, monographs and articles produced through research, news commentaries, propaganda publications by the groups in conflict, and unpublished administrative records such as those maintained by law enforcement and rehabilitation agencies. It also draws from experiences and impressions as recounted by persons (including active participants in the conflicts) with whom I have had discussions. This latter source, though not based on a systematically conducted survey is important to this study mainly for the amazing diversity of personal interpretations it contains. The documented information on 1971[1] is more detailed in factual content and more varied in theme and purpose than that on the late 1980s. This is due mainly to the fact that, unlike in the second insurrection, almost all key personalities associated with the insurrection of 1971 and many of their known followers survived its suppression and became in its aftermath free to record their own accounts of related events, or furnish information for analytical writings by others. Moreover, the curiosity aroused by the largely unexpected convulsions of 1971 also attracted critical attention particularly in the context of the image which Sri Lanka had retained up to that time as a working democracy. There was, indeed, almost a scramble among foreign scholars having

earlier contact with Sri Lanka to publish their own hastily construed post-mortem pronouncements on the tragedy. Thus, over the first few months after the insurrection alone there was Blackton, 1971; Crump, 1971; Deutscher, 1971; Dumont 1971; Gough, 1972; Halliday, 1971; Lodowyk, 1971; Phadnis, 1971 and Walsh, 1971, among several others whose contributions were too superficial for specific mention.

## Insurrection of 1971

*Towards a Revolutionary Uprising*

Descriptive accounts of the events leading up to the insurrection of 1971 differ from one another only on points of detail. The story of the JVP begins with the emergence of a group of dissidents within the Ceylon Communist Party (Peking Wing) in mid-1965 at the initiative of Patabendi Don Nandasiri Wijeweera (alias, Rohana Wijeweera), a full-time party worker who had been entrusted by the leader of the party with the task of strengthening its 'youth league.' The dissidents were expelled from the party about a year later. In view of the well known propensity of Sri Lanka's Marxist parties to splinter on leadership rivalries and ideological disputes, and since the 'Peking Wing' itself had remained in the fringe of electoral and trade union politics of the country, this breach barely drew any public attention.

Nevertheless, the breakaway of Wijeweera and his followers did have a distinctiveness in the sense that the main cause for dissension was the alleged inadequacy of attention devoted by the 'Peking Wing' to the revolutionary potential of the rapidly expanding rural proletariat, and the party's excessive preoccupation with the interests of the 'Indian Tamils' of the plantation sector. The fact that the leader of the party, N Sanmugathasan, also belonged to an ethnic minority and would hence have little appeal to the Sinhalese who constitute the bulk of the working class in the rural sector was also a consideration of strategy that loomed large among this dissident group.

The idea of building up a political movement intended to appeal mainly to the economically deprived and politically alienated segments of the Sinhalese population began to be converted by Wijeweera and his followers into a programme of action in 1967. Initially, it took the form of prolonged discussions among them on the theoretical framework within which the movement should be built, and the strategies to be pursued for attracting to the movement an ardently committed following. Admission to its inner caucus at this stage appears to have been based largely on personal contact, with the key criteria of selection being adherence to radical ideology, disillusionment with the existing order of left politics in the country, and experience in political activity at the grass-roots. A more general recruitment drive was also launched at the end of 1967 by which time Wijeweera and his close associates had devised a system of political indoctrination through a series of 'lectures' to be conducted secretively for prospective followers wherever suitable sites and promising audiences could be found.

The contents of these lectures make it clear that they were targeted at 'educated' (senior secondary or tertiary level) Sinhalese youth from rural areas whose access to information was entirely through the medium of the Sinhala language. In overall design the lectures appear to have been intended to wean away the listeners from the conventional process of learning towards revolutionary enlightenment. The difference between the substance of the first two lectures – on 'The Economic Crisis' and 'Independence' – and the 'social science' learnt from ordinary life experience and through the educational curriculum by a typical rural youth was almost entirely one of emphasis, if one were to ignore the Marxist jargon and the rustic slang with which the lectures were spiced. The third lecture on the theme of 'Indian Expansionism' was a step removed from what is routinely taught at school or the university, and appears to have been aimed at stimulating Sinhalese national emotions without arousing animosity against the main ethnic minorities of the country. It is of interest that the only minority group specifically attacked in this lecture was the tiny city-based Borah trading community – "Jafferjees, Rustomjees and Lookmanjees" as it was often referred to derisively even by the old Marxist trade union leaders of Colombo. The fourth lecture was very largely a savage attack on the other 'Left Parties of Ceylon.' The available transcripts of this lecture contain only the sedate criticisms levelled at the "old left" and the case for a "new people's left." In actual delivery it had much sneer and venom. Those who completed this preliminary political education as listeners of the four lectures, were selectively admitted for participation in the fifth lecture, evidently on the basis of impressions formed on the individuals concerned by the leaders.

The 'Fifth Lecture' represented a crucial stage in the initiation process. Titled though it was as 'The Path of the Revolution in Ceylon,' its actual content was modified over time. Initially, it was confined to an identification of the lessons that could be drawn from revolutionary movements elsewhere in the world (done with a show of skill at simplifying profound erudition), a suggestion that an armed struggle is unavoidable for achieving revolutionary goals, and a conclusion that the revolutionary modalities in Sri Lanka ought to be devised as appropriate to the specifics of time and space. At later stages, the prescribed path of the revolution was made more explicit, and the lecture came close to revealing how the movement could arm itself and use its armed strength either to defend itself or to launch an offensive towards the capture of state power.

Depending on the individual responses and reactions to this learning process, the participants of the five lectures are said to have been categorised and placed in an 'A List' or a 'B List,' with those in the former accorded the status of fully fledged members of the movement. How much of the substance of these lectures (especially of the later ones) was actually absorbed by the noviciates remains a puzzle, especially when considered in the context of what is known through observation on absorption capacities, and the fact that, as the recruitment drive gathered momentum, the related procedures were accelerated and at times almost took the form of a quick fix. It is possible however that to large numbers of young men and women living in frustration or despair, the initiation process as a whole facilitated the identification of common interests, rationalising elemental resentments, and providing the semblance of hope for a better future. Thus, purely as a means of building up a

dedicated cadre, the process achieved remarkable success. There is uncertainty regarding the related numbers. According to Wijeweera, on the eve of the insurrection of 1971, the 'A List' consisted of about 8,000 names. But Loku Athula (alias Nimalasiri Jayasinghe, one of the four most prominent JVP leaders of that time) placed the membership of the JVP in 1971 at "more than 50,000." The estimate by the scholar-journalist Gunaratna (1990:9) was 100,000.

From late 1968 onwards many among those admitted to the movement were given further education arranged at hideouts located in remote areas of the country. These 'educational camps,' some of which lasted over several days, were intended to recharge revolutionary fervour, plan tactical and organisational strategy, monitor progress, and impart at least the rudimentary skills of combat. It is possible that even at this stage the movement was attempting to work out the logistics of an armed insurrection.

At about this same time the movement began to build up an arsenal, and towards that end, collect funds to purchase and/or manufacture arms and other accoutrements deemed necessary to its efforts. Fund-raising took a variety of forms. Member contributions of savings through personal sacrifice and thrift, and collection of donations from outside were encouraged. Theft, plunder and extortion were also among the acceptable means for accumulating money and arms. There were, in addition, some unsuccessful attempts at obtaining financial and material assistance from outside the country.

*Vanguard of People's Liberation*

The name *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (People's Liberation Front) according to Alles (1990:30), came into use in the period leading up to the parliamentary elections of 1970. By this time the leaders of the JVP had sufficient confidence to appear in the open, and the strength to conduct well attended political rallies, make statements to the national press, and even interact with the leaders of the 'United Left Front' (a coalition of left and left-of-centre parties) to which they had decided to lend qualified support at the forthcoming elections.

In comparison to the leaders of the then existing Marxist parties of Sri Lanka, the JVP leaders had at that time certain special advantages. They were, almost without exception, from the poorer strata of rural society. They, like their followers, were distinctly in Graham Greene's "torturable class." They were accustomed to physical hardships. They had the capacity to live frugally. Only a few among them were impressive in appearance. The quality of oratorical skills they had (though commented upon with admiration by writers unfamiliar with the use of Sinhala) are, in fact, displayed in abundance by others at, say, weddings and funerals in rural homes. One could thus speculate that it was at least partly this "ordinariness" that not only attracted towards them considerable sympathy from the politically uninvolved, but also enabled the followers of the movement to relate closely to their leaders and, despite the occasional squabble among the leaders themselves, make the movement as a whole remarkably cohesive, at least for a time.

In the immediate aftermath of the elections of 1970 (on the results of which the United Left Front assumed office) the JVP enjoyed a brief spell during which it was able to increase the tempo of its efforts and to redirect its campaign of agitation against the ruling political parties on the grounds that the government was hesitant to implement its elections pledge of bringing about a socialist transformation of society, remaining, like earlier regimes, subservient to imperialist and bourgeois interests. The electoral alliance between the JVP and the United Left Front was, of course, intrinsically fragile for the reason that, if the JVP were to succeed in its efforts to emerge as a major political force in the country, it had to draw from the very same segments of the electorate which constituted the support base of the ruling parties. Moreover, the JVP campaign of the post-elections period was featured not only by continuing accumulation of support through aggressive anti-government propaganda but also by more open defiance of state authority, and greater recourse to violence and crime in its quest for money and arms. This, in turn, evoked retaliatory action by the government which took the form of greater vigilance against subversion and more concerted security operations by the armed forces. Raids on JVP hideouts (leading to the discovery of caches of arms), and large-scale arrests (often followed by the customary third-degree treatment) of JVP activists became increasingly frequent. All indications at this stage were that the JVP was in fact preparing itself for an armed uprising. On 16 March 1971 the government arrested Wijeweera and detained him in the high security prison in Jaffna, and announced the declaration of a "State of Emergency" in order to pre-empt an impending "JVP plot" to overthrow the government, thus giving extraordinary powers to the armed forces in dealing with the plot. About three weeks later, while Wijeweera was still in prison, the JVP launched its insurrection.

## The Revolt

The offensive was based on a simple plan. Its first stage was designed to entail swift and simultaneous attacks, mainly with improvised weaponry, on the relatively less well manned police stations located in those parts of the country in which the JVP leaders believed that its fighting cadres had sufficient strength, having isolated the targets with road blocks and destroyed their power supplies and telephone lines. These attacks, along with concurrent raids on a few military posts, were expected to yield a large haul of firearms and ammunition and, more generally, to lead to a collapse of government control over extensive rural areas of the country. The attacks on police and military strongholds located in the city of Colombo and the abduction of several key political leaders, conceived as part and parcel of the initial offensive, were probably intended to serve as diversions, given the fact that no more than a few hundred ill-equipped cadres were mobilised for these daunting tasks. The rapid consolidation of the hold over rural areas was expected to facilitate the second stage of the offensive in which the re-grouped JVP fighting machine, now with increased fire power, would capture the towns and the city. Success in the first stage, it must have been hoped, would also result in the crossover of at least a sizeable proportion in the rank and file of the police and the army (rooted as they also are in the less affluent segments of society), and, of course, a massive wave of popular support on the crest of which the JVP leadership will ride to the apex of state power.

The failure of this plan has frequently been attributed to a misunderstanding of a signal from the JVP high command on the timing of the initial offensive, which is said to have resulted in a premature attack on one rural police station enabling the other stations all over the country to be on full alert when the co-ordinated offensive really began. But even in the absence of such a mishap it seems unlikely that the plan could have achieved sustainable success, for the reason that the entire confrontation was a pathetic mismatch of forces. For instance, the weapon most frequently used by the insurgents was the home-made hand grenade – effective range even when it ignites as intended, usually less than five meters. The attack on the Katunayake airport was to have been accomplished by incapacitating the air force personnel with a herbal laxative. The capture of the Karainagar naval base, "entrusted to ten comrades armed with knives" depended crucially on the sedative effects of the sleeping tablets introduced into the water tank the previous night. The rescue of Wijeweera from Jaffna was to have been carried out by a busload of undergraduates dispatched from Colombo. Needless to say, these attempts failed. But looking back on the heroic thinking behind the plans, one could indeed wonder whether the planners expected that those defending these targets (their own people, in a sense) would not fight back and kill. That the JVP cadres did attack 92 police stations causing extensive damage to 57, and the police themselves withdrew from another 43 stations in anticipation of such attacks, that 63 police and service personnel died in combat, and that routine civil administration was dislodged from many rural areas, do not detract from the fact that the JVP had neither the strength of arms nor the organisational capacity to hold on to its initial gains, leave alone expand its offensive to the principal strongholds of government power. The futility of its overall effort as seen in the light of related details unravelled in the aftermath of the insurrection lends some credence to Wijeweera's later claim that the decision to launch its offensive on the night of 5 April 1971 was, in fact, a defensive move made in the face of impending annihilation.

## Suppression of the Revolt

On 6 April 1971 the government proscribed the JVP, banned the publication of eleven JVP aligned periodicals, imposed a strict censorship on the press, and initiated its military counter-offensive. Several thousands of young men and women uninvolved in combat but suspected of JVP associations were rounded-up, sporadically tortured and killed or kept imprisoned. In the venues of armed conflict the fighting cadres were captured and/or killed, typically in sledgehammer operations. By the end of the month only a few small pockets of resistance remained to be cleared later in almost leisurely fashion. A careful re-examination of the available estimates of the JVP death toll makes it likely that about 4,000-5,000 perished in the confrontations and the mopping up operations. (The officially reported estimate was 1,200; those in the parliamentary opposition blamed the government for killing about 5,000 to 10,000; Fred Halliday placed the number killed at 12,000; Wijeweera announced from prison in 1972 that 15,000 revolutionaries were liquidated; Rene Dumont guessed that the death toll could have been as high as 50,000.) In response to a qualified amnesty offered by the government four weeks after the outbreak of the insurrection, about 5,600 (5,544 men and 56 women) voluntarily surrendered. Yet another 4,492 (4,332 men and 160 women) were

arrested. These along with the JVP combatants captured in battle were estimated to have totalled up to about 18,000.

Following the suppression of the insurrection, and after the initial panic and outrage had been diluted with other emotions such as guilt at the overkill reaction and sympathy for those in sorrow, the authorities of government began to focus on the practical question of 'what next?' Of immediate concern was the issue of the future of many thousands now in custody. In this context, there was, first, the likelihood that some among them were innocent of the violation of any law. Secondly, there was the almost total lack of evidence admissible in the courts of law against many who are likely to have committed acts of crime. Thirdly, and more generally, there was the fact that those in custody were, almost without exception, 'political prisoners' rather than 'criminals' in the conventional sense.

From a political viewpoint, and to the parties in the ruling coalition, there were other dilemmas. The large majority of those in custody were young, semi-educated and poor. Almost all of them were Sinhalese Buddhists (Table 1). There was the likelihood that they as well as their kith and kin had supported the parties in office at the elections held barely an year ago. There was, moreover, some ideological overlap between certain parliamentarians of the parties in office (two of whom were actually accused of having participated in the insurrection) and the JVP. The Marxist parties in the government, at least in theory, had never really discarded the option of an armed uprising as a means of capturing state power. That the image of the 'young rebel' had always been idealised in popular literature and the performing arts, and that there were the barely concealed undercurrents of sympathy for the JVP cause in liberal-intellectual circles, also had some political salience. In working out the strategies for handling the aftermath of the insurrection, all these moral, legal and political considerations had to be weighed against the fact that those responsible for the insurrection had to be condemned and punished, preventing as far as possible the United National Party – the arch parliamentary rival – making electoral gains in the process. There was hardly any doubt among the leaders of the government that the JVP had "waged war against the Queen" and had also caused incalculable chaos and misery.

As a solution to the legal dilemma referred to above, the government enacted in April 1972 legislation in the form of a 'Criminal Justice Commissions (CJC) Act,' on the grounds "that the practice and procedures of the ordinary courts are inadequate to administer criminal justice for the purpose of securing the trial and punishment of persons"... whom a 'Special Investigating Unit' had identified as the leaders and/or the more active supporters of the insurrection. In accordance with the provisions of this act, a Commission consisting of five judges of the Supreme Court chaired by the Chief Justice was appointed about a month later. The commission was entrusted the task of inquiring into a series of charges – (a) conspiracy to wage war against the Queen, (b) conspiracy to overawe by means of criminal force the Government of Ceylon, (c) waging war at various places in Ceylon and (d) the abatement of the waging of such war – against 41 suspects, 33 of whom were present when the inquiries began on 22 July 1972. Of the others, one was discharged, three were produced before the commission while its inquiries were proceeding, and four were believed

to be dead. (The facts on the CJC Act and the related proceedings have been extracted from Alles, 1990:196-217).

Table 1

A Profile of Persons Taken into Custody at the Insurrection of 1971

Percentage Composition

| Age (years) | % | Educational Status | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0 – 14 | 0.4 | No schooling | 2.5 |
| 15 – 24 | 71.9 | Grades 1 - 4 | 17.1 |
| 25 – 34 | 22.1 | Grades 5 - 8 | 42.3 |
| 35 – 44 | 3.7 | Grades 9 - 10 | 32.2 |
| 45 & above | 1.9 | Grades 11 - 12 | 4.1 |
| | | Undergraduates | 1.6 |
| | | Graduates | 0.2 |
| Ethnicity | | Religion | |
| Sinhalese | 97.6 | Buddhists | 94.3 |
| Tamil | 0.7 | Hindus | 0.7 |
| Malays and Moors | 0.6 | Muslims | 0.6 |
| Others | 0.4 | Christians | 3.7 |
| Not recorded | 0.7 | Not recorded | 0.7 |
| Occupation | | Father's Occupation | |
| Unemployed | 17.5 | Unemployed | 2.5 |
| Student | 12.5 | Low income occupations | 48.7 |
| Self-employed in low income occupations | 41.7 | Lower-middle income occupations | 19.4 |
| Lower level salaried employees | 8.4 | Middle income occupations | 5.4 |
| Middle level salaried employees | 12.1 | High income occupations | 0.5 |
| Others, including unverified | 7.8 | Unrecorded | 23.5 |

Note:    This table contains data extracted from Obeyesekere (1974) which have been based on information obtained by a group of administrative officers from 10,192 detainees in government custody after the insurrection of 1971. The source data have been re-arranged in this tabulation.

There is no doubt that these legal measures achieved their purpose. Although the CJC Act became the target of intense criticism (Amnesty International, 1975) mainly for its deviations from the norms of laws relating to evidence, the main opposition parties including the United National Party supported its passage through parliament. In the course of the lengthy inquiry conducted by the CJC, the factional rivalries that had existed in the JVP leadership became increasingly evident, often taking the form of mutual accusations of arrogance, vindictiveness, hypocrisy, cowardice and depravity, thus exposing themselves to public contempt. By the end of the inquiry all indications were that the rifts between the

leaders will never again be mended. This, of course, was just what the government would have hoped for.

The inquiries conducted by the first CJC culminated in the conviction and punishment of the key suspects. Wijeweera was sentenced to life imprisonment, four others to 20-year terms, and most of the others to terms ranging from 1 to 12 years. At the conclusion of all inquiries relating to the insurrection conducted over a period of about five years under the provisions of the CJC Act, 393 suspects had received various terms of imprisonment and 2,492 had been released on suspended sentences (Alles, 1990: Appendix II).

The government's handling of the rank and file of the JVP appears, in retrospect, to have been less productive, politically. The theme of the approach was "rehabilitation of misguided youth," and its focus was on releasing those in custody as rapidly as possible without appearing to be weak and vacillating. According to statements made by the Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike (*Hansard*, 1971: 1832), out of the 14,000 in government custody by July 1971, 7,703 had been rehabilitated and released within the first six months of 1972 (*Hansard*, 1972:18). By the end of 1975 the number in custody had declined to 295 (Samaranayake, 1983:199) – on the face of it, a remarkable achievement.

There were, however, certain complexities that had not been given due regard. For a considerable time after the suppression of the insurrection, those in custody had to live under appalling conditions. The improvements brought about by their subsequent transfer to "Rehabilitation Camps" were by no means uniform, the living conditions in certain camps being worse than in regular prisons. "Rehabilitation" itself merely meant indefinite internment without charges and trail. On the basis of impressions one could speculate that what appears to have mattered even more than these hardships in the long run was the widespread sense of resentment that continued to prevail undiminished among the majority of detainees. Many of them carried indelible scars of the brutality and humiliation to which they had been exposed. When eventually released from custody they invariably encountered prospects gloomier than ever before – an economic recession with open unemployment exceeding the 20% mark – with the added burden of a "subversive" past. Ironically enough, among many of them, there was also a sense of pride. This was often evident in their magnified recollections of the horrors they had experienced and the courage they had displayed. To generalise further, the rehabilitation process had the effect of further alienation. What, in fact, it failed to generate was the expected repentance for past sins and gratitude for being forgiven.

## The JVP in Electoral Politics

Soon after the victory of the United National Party (UNP) at the parliamentary elections of July 1977 the government released all those who were serving prison sentences in connection with the insurrection of 1971, ostensibly to facilitate their return to democratic politics. This was a carefully calculated move (and not an euphoric gesture which it appeared to be at that time), taken in the light of several interrelated considerations. First of all, the supporters of the JVP constituted, by and large, a part of the "natural" electorate of the defeated Sri Lanka

Freedom Party (SLFP) towards which the majority among them were now thoroughly hostile. The general impact of a JVP active in electoral politics was therefore seen as essentially one of fragmenting the anti-UNP forces in the Sinhalese areas of the country, notably in the "deep south" where the JVP had considerable support and the UNP itself had hardly ever performed well at parliamentary elections. It was also believed that since the JVP was in disarray, and since the ultra-radicalism which it espoused would not appeal to the large majority of voters, it will never be capable of posing a serious challenge to the UNP in electoral politics.

Seven years of imprisonment had not diminished Wijeweera's political ambitions. In spite of the fact that almost all his key associates were dead or had left the movement, Wijeweera would have seen new prospects in the changed political situation of the country. The SLFP along with its erstwhile Marxist partners had been ignominiously defeated at the polls. It had depended much on the charisma of its ageing leader and had no obvious successor to serve as flagbearer of the Bandaranaike name. The socio-economic conditions which periodically generate anti-establishment tides were also likely to persist. There was, in addition, the increasing polarisation of the electorate on ethnic lines, and an upsurge of ethno-nationalism in the country, from which there could be no net gains for either the UNP or the SLFP.

There were no politburo or central committee members of the JVP of 1971 to participate in Wijeweera's efforts to rebuild the party and to orient it towards electoral politics. With the earlier exodus of the party stalwarts he towered above those who now rallied around him, most of whom (with the exception of Lionel Bopage and Nandana Marasinghe who left the JVP in the early 1980s) were hardened veterans of 1971 vintage rather than persons with proven organisational skills and ideological commitments. Yet, placing the party once again on some sort of organised footing was not particularly difficult. There were many "rehabilitated" JVP activists who readily returned to the fold. Fresh talent could also be found from among those politically orphaned by the electoral defeat of the SLFP or victimised by the new regime. And then there was the steady trickle of rebels from the reservoir of disgruntled youth in rural and semi-urban areas. Initially, these sources did not add up to impressive numbers. But they were adequate for a fair show of confrontational strength at, say, university student elections, commemoration of martyrs or May Day processions. Unlike in the pre-1971 phase of the JVP, what Wijeweera appears to have focused on at this stage was the accumulation of committed support rather than the building up of a close-knit and centrally controlled party consisting of politically educated cadres. Those who came to constitute this support base may not have been well versed in Marx, Lenin or Mao. Only a few among them would have been aware of the emerging tide of *Jathika Chinthanaya* ("national ideology") in the Sinhalese intellectual circles. Nevertheless, there was no dearth for them of simplistic notions of class conflict and patriotism purveyed through creative writings, popular songs, and the performing arts.[2]

With a ruling party which was not averse to using its massive parliamentary strength for reinforcing its hold over the electorate, and with the upsurge of the economy having a perceptible impact on unemployment (officially estimated rate of which declined from about

24% in 1976 to 12% in 1982), the JVP, also constrained as it was by the meagre financial resources at its disposal, could not make significant progress in electoral politics. At the Colombo Municipal Council elections of May 1979 it secured only 4.9% of the vote. At the District Development Council Elections of June 1981 in which the JVP would undoubtedly have attracted at least a part of the normal support of the SLFP (the main opposition party which did not enter the contest) it polled only 17% of the total vote of the districts in which it entered the fray (Samarasinghe & de Silva, 1982). Wijeweera's campaign at the presidential election of 1982 – largely an exercise in propaganda, a test of strength and a show of defiance – brought him only 250,000 votes from the entire country. But the problem from the viewpoint of the government was that the propaganda and the defiance were becoming much more than mere sources of irritation. The JVP campaigns were becoming increasingly aggressive, bordering at times on personal abuse and incitement to violence. Moreover, there were clear indications that it was also making progress among the younger voters.

The results of the presidential election of 1982 – from all accounts, conducted free of malpractices – is of interest to this study as a reflection of an aspect of the electoral appeal of the JVP in the early 1980s. Each of the main contestants at this election presented a distinctive political option from which the voter could choose. The re-election bid of the incumbent president as the candidate of the UNP was also a test of popular support for the new directions of development charted during his first term of office. The SLFP was represented by one of its second rung leaders who, however, had been at the vanguard of changes (including agrarian reforms) implemented when the party was in office from 1970 to 1977. The contestant from the `old Left' was a charismatic Marxist stalwart who had remained in the limelight of national politics for almost forty years. The candidacy of the Tamil Congress (TC) leader was, by and large, an effort to mobilise personal support from the Tamil segment of the electorate in a contest from which the TC's arch rival, the Tamil United Liberation Front, had decided to keep out. And then, there was Wijeweera of the JVP, appealing almost exclusively to younger segments of the Sinhalese electorate with a revolutionary message and a campaign featured by fierce criticism of all other contestants and what their parties represented.

Figure 1
Voter Support for the JVP at the Presidential Election of 1982
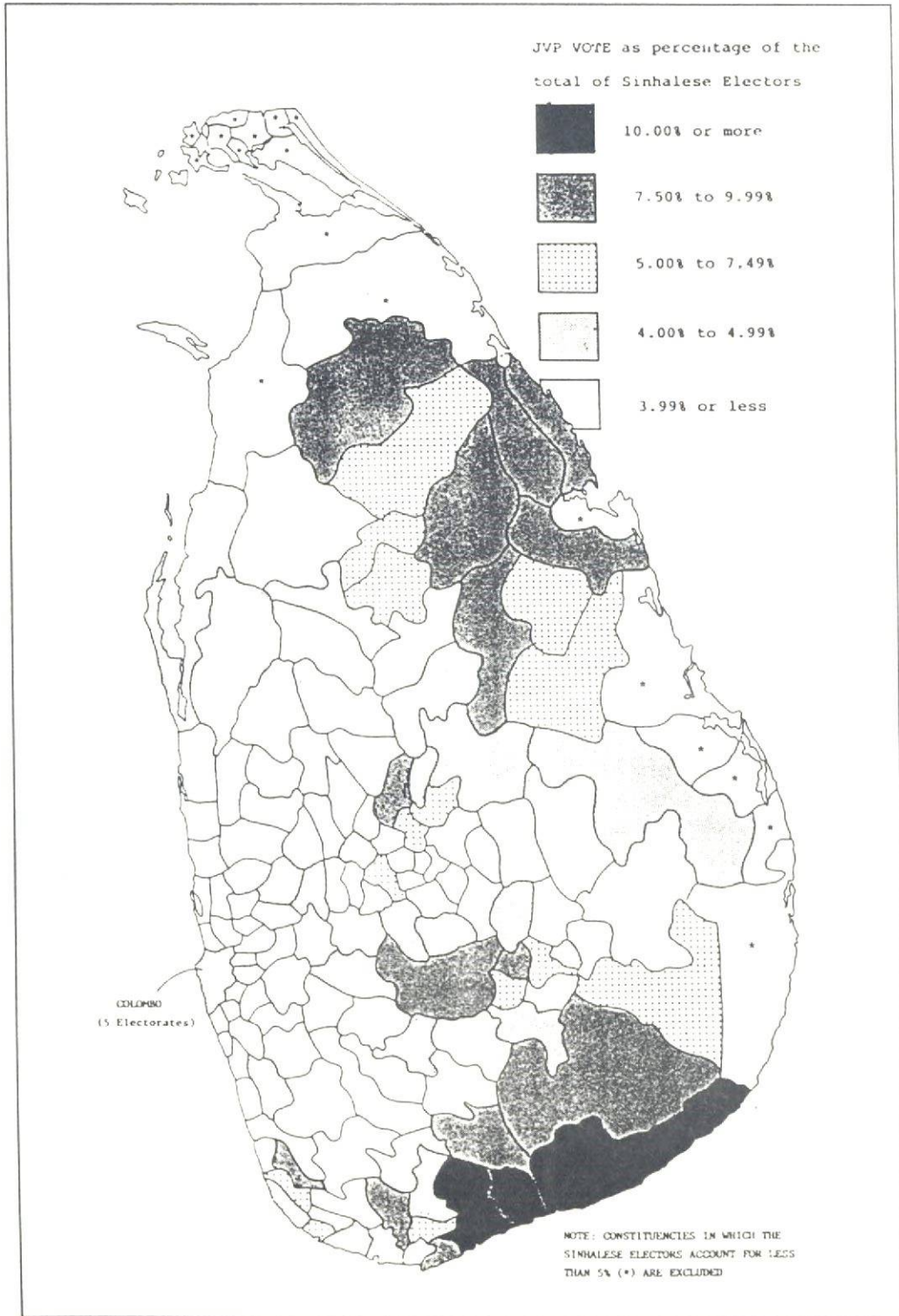
The overall vote polled by Wijeweera accounted for only 4.2% of the total number of Sinhalese electors. His performance, however, varied substantially from one area of the country to another (Figure 1). For example, in the Southern Province (comprising 14% of the Sinhalese electorate in the country, from which Wijeweera obtained 25% of his total vote), the pro-Wijeweera poll in several electorates approximated or exceeded 10% of the total of Sinhalese voters. He also attracted a numerically significant scatter of voters in the north-central and eastern lowlands. In addition, the JVP appears to have had smaller pockets of electoral support in the principal plantation areas of the central highlands (where the Sinhalese population is largely confined to the more remote village settlements). Elsewhere in the predominantly Sinhalese areas of the country, the JVP vote seldom exceeded 4% of the number of Sinhalese electors. The significance of this spatial pattern will be made evident in a later section of this study.

## Second Insurrection

### The Drift Towards Violent Politics

The aftermath of the presidential election of October 1982 could be seen as a critical phase in the return of the JVP to insurrectionary politics. In spite of his resounding victory at the polls, the re-elected president, J R Jayewardene, soon raised the alarm of an impending capture of the main opposition party by anti-democratic forces (which he referred to hazily as "Naxalites") and announced a decision to substitute the forthcoming parliamentary elections with a referendum to be conducted in December that year which was to present the national electorate only with the option of voting for or against an extension of tenure of the existing parliament (de Silva and Wriggins, 1994:540-548). His rationalisation of this decision was barely credible. The irregularities that occurred at the conduct of the referendum, though unlikely to have had a decisive effect on its outcome; and, more generally, the cynical disregard of the norms of fairplay evidenced in several much publicised incidents of this time with which members of the ruling party were alleged to have been associated, created the impression that there was, indeed, a process of criminalisation of politics underway. The resulting disenchantment was advantageous to the JVP both in its impact of further alienation of segments of the voting population from electoral politics, as well as its apparent legitimising of militancy and politically motivated crime.

The outbreak of communal violence in July 1983 had obvious links with the scenario outlined above. The criminal elements that led the mob attacks on Tamils living in the predominantly Sinhalese areas of the country did have a measure of support, if not some guidance, from those representing many shades of the Sinhalese political spectrum, including those in the ranks of government. It is also likely that, despite the ambivalence of the JVP on the ethnic conflict, some of its cadres did participate in the violence. It is even more probable that the JVP saw the conflagration, unerringly as it proved to be, as a means of disrupting the advances achieved through the economic policies of the government. Yet there was no hard evidence to substantiate the government's claim that the JVP and two other political groups of

the extreme Left were responsible for the riots. Nor was there a convincing argument to justify its decision to proscribe them.

The communal violence of July 1983 represented a turning point of macro-economic trends. Though the economy dipped briefly but remained buoyant over the next few months (due mainly to a short-lived boom in the tea market), it soon began to falter in the face of continuing political unrest. The lowered growth rate resulted in increasing unemployment, a trend towards which the retrenchment of workers from the massive infrastructure projects undertaken by the government and completed in the mid-1980s also contributed. In addition, the sharp escalation of violence by Tamil militant groups in the form of both successfully conducted guerrilla operations against the armed forces in the North as well as acts of terrorism targeted on the civilian population in Colombo, pushed the economy further into recession. Under these conditions, the JVP, driven underground after its proscription, gained rapidly in numerical support and armed strength.

From the time of proscription of the JVP its leaders remained in hiding. Wijeweera himself had to move from one hideout to another located away from the areas in which the JVP activities were under scrutiny by the security forces. This meant that political 'education' which had been an integral part of the JVP recruitment process was not conducted now as systematically as in earlier times. The emphasis, instead, was on the accumulation of weaponry and training in the use of firearms, towards which its cadres contributed with increasing recourse to violence and crime. Initially, there were the raids and robberies carried out at 'civilian' sources of money and arms. After a time (from about April 1987) larger military arsenals (Pallekelle Army Camp, Kotelawala Defense Academy) began to be targeted. This accent on enhancement of armed strength facilitated an increased inflow of criminals into the movement for whom its militant politics would have served as a cover for crime. Concurrently, the clandestine existence into which the political leaders of the JVP had been driven also appears to have resulted in a diffusion of decision-making powers.

## The Insurrectionary Offensive

The main writings on the insurrection of the late 1980s (Alles, 1990; Gunaratna, 1990; Chandraprema, 1991) have placed the onset of the second JVP insurrection in the riots that accompanied the signing of the 'Peace Accord' between President Jayewardene and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on 29 July 1987 and the subsequent induction of the 'Indian Peacekeeping Force' to the northern and eastern parts of the country. The justification of this disputable dating is the outburst of anti-government and anti-Indian sentiments among the Sinhalese which accompanied these events, and the fact that from this point of time the principal theme of JVP propaganda was the alleged "betrayal of the motherland" which the occupation of a part of the country by an alien army represented. The JVP along with the SLFP and certain other groups that claimed to represent Sinhalese interests declared that the signing of the accord was an act of treason. The posters and handbills attributed to the JVP advocated "death to the traitors." Ostensibly, from this stage onwards, it was primarily to

carry out this righteous task (and thus "save the motherland") that the JVP and the forces aligned to it engaged in their campaign of violence and terror.

A retrospective examination of the events of this period suggests that from July 1987 until mid-1989 there was a relentless escalation of the insurrectionary offensive in many parts of the country where the Sinhalese constitute the majority. This offensive was conducted from several strongholds of the insurgents, and assumed many forms. Whether it was masterminded from a single centre remains unclear, although most of the major acts of violence and the general incitement to violence appear to have been directed by an organisation referred to as the *Deshapremi Janatha Vyaparaya* (DJV – People's Patriotic Movement), identified as the 'military wing' of the JVP. Public statements and orders of the DJV were issued under the name of "Keerthi Wijebahu" (styled on the eleventh century Sinhalese monarch who evicted the Colas from Sri Lanka and re-unified the country) – widely believed, to have been the *nom de guerre* adopted by Saman Piyasiri Fernando, one of the most daring and ruthless among the JVP leaders.

Among the many forms which the offensive took, propaganda through posters and pamphlets was the most ubiquitous. For instance, large posters produced with considerable calligraphic skill and containing slogans that ranged from the profound ("It is better to die on ones feet than live on ones knees") to the simple ("Let's kill JR") were exhibited, with any one message often conveyed simultaneously in many parts of the country, giving the impression of tight co-ordination. As noted earlier, protection of the motherland was the principal propaganda theme. There were, in addition, the specific "needs" – trade union disputes, student demands, revelation of secrets, threats to individuals or groups, announcement of the martyrdom of comrades, prohibition of voter participation at elections – to which the poster and pamphlet campaign catered.

The disruption of state sector activities such as those in education, health care, public transport, and the distribution of electricity, was another important facet of the offensive. The universities (most of which had already been converted to JVP strongholds) and certain other institutions at which young men and women routinely assemble in large numbers were frequently used not only to conduct campaigns of anti-establishment agitation but also as sanctuaries from which other disruptive activities such as the mobilisation of school children in protest demonstrations, the issue of threats, and the declaration of public curfews were organised, with a measure of immunity from the law enforcement agencies.

Perhaps the most potent weapon of economic disruption employed in the insurrection was the "curfew." From about mid-1988 the insurgents began to impose with increasing frequency and at short notice 24-hour curfews that entailed the banning of all outdoor activities, backed by a death threat to curfew violators. The curfew order was not merely a prohibition of formal economic activities such as those in trade, commerce, industry and the services. In impact, it was those employed in the informal sector whose subsistence was dependent upon daily earnings – invariably the poorest in society – that suffered the greatest hardships.

The more violent manifestations of the offensive took the form of destruction of life and property (Tables 2 and 3). The victims of these acts included political leaders and activists who were believed to be opposed to the insurrection, administrative officers of the state, those employed in the police force, suspected informants, violators of orders issued by the insurgents, and others almost randomly identified as recipients of favours from the government. Additionally, there were many instances of intended victims being forced to perform acts of penance in public in order to save their lives. This type of offensive also included bomb attacks on political rallies and a partially successful attempt to assassinate the leaders of the ruling party at a government parliamentary group meeting.

Finally there were the raids on military bases, bank robberies, and the hijacking of vehicles, aimed at strengthening the armed offensive, demoralising the security forces, and humiliating the government. From July 1987 to the end of 1989, 16 army camps, police stations and other installations of the armed forces were reported to have been attacked. Some such attacks achieved considerable success, yielding large hauls of arms and ammunition. The details relating to some of these attacks began to generate doubt not only on the capacity of the forces to face the onslaught, but also on whether they were genuinely motivated to do so.

Table 2
Politically Motivated Homicides in the 'South'
(from 27 July 1987 to the end of 1989)

|  | 1987 | 1988 | 1989 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Political leaders | 2 | 3 | 1 | 6 |
| Political activists      - UNP | 75 | 685 | 971 | 1,731 |
| - SLFP | - | 30 | 71 | 101 |
| - other parties | - | 25 | 44 | 69 |
| - party unspecified | - | 41 | 13 | 54 |
| Administrative officers | 21 | 135 | 324 | 480 |
| Regular police officers | 14 | 62 | 263 | 339 |
| Other servicemen | 5 | 8 | 185 | 198 |
| Others | 12 | 543 | 2,843 | 3,398 |
| All categories | 129 | 1,532 | 4,715 | 6,376 |

Notes:  'Political activists' include members of Provincial Councils.  'Others' include 30 Buddhist monks, 49 principals of schools, 27 trade unionists.  These data have been extracted from a Police Department file titled 'Statistics of Terrorist Violence (Southern) from 1987 to 1990' and subtitled 'Pertaining to the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna.'  The tabulation does not include homicides which, according to the reporting officers, were unrelated to the insurrection.

Table 3
Reported Destruction of/ Attacks on Property, 1987 to 1990
(total number of items or installations)

| | |
|---|---|
| Vehicles used in public road transport | 613 |
| Other vehicles used in road transport | 162 |
| Railway trains | 16 |
| Post offices | 680 |
| Grama Niladhari offices | 294 |
| Other government offices | 446 |
| Tea factories | 73 |
| Other factories, workshops, depots etc. | 86 |
| Telecommunication installations | 84 |
| Electricity installations | 241 |
| Banks | 38 |
| Dwellings | 299 |
| Other infrastructure (not included elsewhere) | 17 |

Source: same as Table 2

In interpreting the data tabulated above there are several uncertainties which need to be taken into account. First of all, there is the issue of possible misreporting by the police, an institution which was very much a participant in the conflict. The senior officer in charge of this aspect of police administration (through whose courtesy the data were obtained), while conceding the possibility of under-reporting and errors of judgement relating to the classification frame of Table 2, was of the view that the resulting distortions are unlikely to have affected the total picture portrayed by the data. Admittedly, one cannot find a compelling reason to reject this view in respect of reported 'property damage' as shown in Table 3. The enumeration of homicides was, of course, prone to greater distortion especially in identifying the 'insurrection-related' killings as distinct from other homicides. Even if one were to assume that this source of error could not have been widespread (on the premise that an accurate distinction could usually be made of the basis of preliminary inquiries conducted by police officers) there still remains the uncertainty on the extent to which the responsibility for the killings could have been attributed without error to the JVP.

There is a wide diversity of opinion on this latter issue. One could encounter, at the one extreme, the belief that many (if not most) of the homicides for which the JVP was held responsible were committed by others either for using the ethos of lawlessness which prevailed to engage in personal and political vendettas, or as a device of creating public revulsion against the JVP.[3] On the other extreme is the view that all these acts of violence and perhaps many more were committed by members of the JVP under the direction of its high command. Making a decision on which of these views approximates the truth involves conjecture supported only by inconclusive evidence. Two considerations are of salience here. The first is that the counter-offensive against the JVP began in earnest several months after the parliamentary elections of February 1989. What this suggests is that many of the homicides

recorded up to about mid-1989 are likely to have been a part of the JVP offensive. Secondly, from about August 1987 and well into 1989, the JVP did claim responsibility for many of the homicides and other acts of violence (arguably, this could also have been part and parcel of 'framing' the JVP, if ever there was such a process), and, in any event, did not deny responsibility. What, in fact, usually happened as the offensive intensified was that the association of the JVP in the minds of the public with such violence, which the JVP itself fostered at the level of the community, was employed for making the people tremble and obey its commands. It could well have been that the orders to kill, destroy and subvert did not originate in a single source within the JVP. It is also possible that groups of desperadoes acting independently and with motives different to those of the JVP, and over-zealous cadres at the periphery operating without specific orders from above, were responsible for some of the violence. Yet, the weight of evidence appears to favour the notion that a large proportion of the homicides recorded in Table 2 and the acts of destruction enumerated in Table 3 were committed either by the JVP or on behalf of the insurrection to which it provided leadership.

## The Counter-offensive

The vigilance which the government maintained over the JVP after its proscription in July 1983 was perfunctory, and appears to have taken the form of sporadic information gathering on clandestine politics in a few areas of the country. This process soon began to include the arrest and interrogation of those suspected of engaging in subversive activities (with the usual methods employed by the police), and, on occasions', their incarceration without trial. In 1985 there were a few police raids on JVP hideouts, and several incidents of excessive police violence in the course of anti-subversive operations. Detailed information on the trends of this period could be interpreted in one of two ways. One of these, as postulated by Gunaratna (1990: 200-211), is that it was the constant and unwarranted harassment of the JVP that drove it towards greater militancy. The other is that the government, through inefficiency and lack of foresight, failed to prevent the JVP building up its armed strength to a level from which it could vitiate normal processes of law enforcement.

The events of the 1986-89 period seem to substantiate this latter interpretation rather than the former to the extent that they do not represent a steady move-and-countermove escalation of mutual retaliatory confrontation between the government and the insurgents. What one could observe instead in the reactions and responses of the government at least up to the early months of 1989 is a wavering process guided by possibilities and imperatives as perceived in the short-run. It is of interest to note that throughout this period there was only one political leader – President Jayewardene – who persisted with an uncompromising stance *vis-à-vis* the insurgents, referring to them as "brutes (*moorgayo*) who should be annihilated." This, of course, was easier said than done – for several reasons. First of all, there was the doubt regarding the strength to do so – the military capacity to take on the JVP while being engaged in a war in the North. When, from his perspective, the strain in the northern front was eased with the arrival of the Indian army, there still remained the political considerations – the general resentment in the Sinhalese electorate about the presence of the Indians, and the possible electoral consequences of a

ruthless offensive against a "patriotic" movement which was believed to draw support from the younger segments of that electorate. As the next round of presidential and parliamentary elections approached, this latter consideration became vitally important to the other leaders of his party, especially to those who aspired to succeed him as president. Obviously, the government could not afford to ignore the increasing ferocity of the insurrection which, though ostensibly targeted on the existing political system as a whole, had its most destructive impact on the supporters of the ruling party at the grassroots. But it was equally obvious that it could not afford to engage in an all out offensive against the JVP.

Following the announcement in June 1988 of a presidential election scheduled for December, the government became acutely conscious of the possibility of an alliance been forged between the parties of the opposition and the JVP. Apart from the fact that the main opposition parties began at this stage to publicly condemn the alleged "persecution of youth" by the government, concerted attempts were also being made to muster the support of the JVP for Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the SLFP candidate for the presidency. The expected SLFP-JVP link failed to materialise. As the elections approached, the hostility of the JVP was directed to the SLFP and the other parties aligned to it with as much force as it has been to the UNP. It is for these reasons that one could see in the changes in tempo of the government's counter-offensive against the JVP, the impact of short-term changes in the electoral situation reflected with greater clarity than the tactical adjustments to the increasing intensity of the JVP offensive.

When Ranasinghe Premadasa assumed office as President in January 1989, Sri Lanka, as Jayatilleka (1995:1) has so lucidly explained, "...faced all three major categories of threats that any state could face: a threat to national independence and sovereignty; a threat to its territorial integrity; and a threat to the state apparatus and to state power itself." The accent of Premadasa's initial approach to this third threat was essentially one of reconciliation. Several factors made this appear genuine in the eyes of the public. Among the principal leaders of his party he was the least associated with the presence of Indian troops in the country – one of the main ingredient of emotional strength and support for the insurrection. His record of performance as Prime Minister had left little room to doubt the sincerity of his concern about the widening gap between the rich and the poor and his grasp of the causes for political alienation of the youth. The absence of a *radala* (aristocratic or elite) image in his social background, and his personal associations with the under-privileged were also well known. There was, in addition, his barely concealed capacity to match violence with violence, which carried with it the implication that his conciliatory stance was not one of weakness and lack of will. To match his verbal appeals to the insurgents with deeds, the new president lifted the "emergency regulations" that had been in force since July 1983, and released about 1,500 political prisoners from custody (Chandraprema, 1991:259). This was accompanied by a perceptible curtailment of the intensity of anti-JVP operations, especially those undertaken by vigilante squads.

These overtures produced no response from the JVP. Its violence continued undiminished and, in fact, escalated in the weeks leading up to the parliamentary elections of

February 1989. There were several major robberies of cash, jewellery and arms for which the insurgents were held responsible. Curiously enough, the acts of intimidation aimed specifically at disrupting the elections were targeted more on the parties in opposition than on the UNP, giving room for speculation that the JVP was not alone in conducting the campaign of terror. Regardless of the validity of the basis of such speculation, the fact that during the election campaign and in the aftermath of the elections the rivalry between the two main parties – UNP and SLFP – was intense and was not devoid of violence was seen with sufficient clarity.

The elections produced a parliament in which the UNP once again had a comfortable majority, an embittered opposition, and a Sinhalese electorate where the inter-party animosities were more acute than ever before. It is possible that many in the defeated SLFP would have felt that they had once more been unfairly out-manoeuvred. Hence, it was not surprising that in the post-elections political alignments, especially in the more remote rural areas, substantial overlaps developed between the support bases of the SLFP and the JVP. This meant a further increase in the strength of the insurrectionary offensive. It also meant that the counter-offensive of the period which followed barely made a distinction between the JVP and the more ardent supporters of the SLFP in many areas of the country.

By mid-1989 it began to appear that the enhancement of attempts by the government to bring the insurrection under control, resorting often to methods that were intended to terrorise the insurgents into submission, were failing to produced the desired results. There was an impression that the security forces were wayward in their response to the JVP threat, and lacked motivation to extend their efforts beyond the task of protecting themselves. More significantly, unlike at any stage in the past, there was the distinct possibility of an eviction of state power from large areas of the country. It was against this background that at the end of July 1989 the JVP issued what amounted to an ultimatum to the security forces to make a choice between joining the ranks of the insurrection or facing annihilation in the not too distant future.

The ultimatum, as the main writings on the insurrection referred to earlier have shown with hindsight, was an unwarranted gamble by the leaders of the JVP, and soon proved to be a fatal blunder, especially because it was accompanied by some massacres of those linked to the army and the police. The resulting outrage produced, in turn, a backlash of unprecedented fury by the security forces, which engaged, officially, in massive cordon-and-search operations and mass arrests, and on occasions, collaborated unofficially in innumerable abductions and extra-judicial killings.

The government offensive soon made exponential headway. Information obtained through torture of the captured JVP leaders brought about an avalanche of information used for further capture and liquidation. Wijeweera, taken into custody from his hideout on 12 November, was killed the following day. Gamanayake, JVP's second in command, was dispatched a day later. By the end of January 1990, almost all leaders of the insurrection had been hunted down. Of those who are known to have remained in the leadership ranks of the

JVP since 1971 and through the events of the late 1980s, only one person was alive by May 1990.

The cost? Only a few aspects could be quantified even on the basis of guess-work. Chandraprema (1991:312) has estimated that the total death-toll of the second insurrection was about 40,000. According to his reckoning, the anti-JVP operations up to July 1989 would have resulted in "nothing more than eight thousand killings," and "...at least 15,000 people lost their lives" in the intensified counter-offensive of the last few months of that year. The JVP meanwhile had "...finished off about 17,000 people." This latter figure exceeds the officially reported aggregate (Table 2) by about 4,250. Note here that, even prior to the onset of the upheaval, it had been admitted on the basis of a survey conducted by the Research and Development Division of the Police Department that the ratio of reported crime to unreported crime had risen to about 1:3 (IGP, 1986: xiii).

The fate of the many thousands of suspected insurgents rounded-up and herded into prison camps remains unknown. Probably the large majority among them were released. Some continued to remain in custody, and a few were formally charged for various crimes including murder. The related data on students of the Peradeniya University provides a clue on this issue. Between November 1987 and November 1989, 192 undergraduates were reported to have been arrested or abducted (the total Peradeniya student population at this time was about 7,200). At the end of December 1991, 36 had been released and their whereabouts were known, 74 were still in prison and 81 were missing. This last category could have included those who were in hiding. But the likelihood is that most of them were dead (Peiris, 1995:231).

## Youth Unrest

A recurrent theme found in many writings on the political vicissitudes experienced in Sri Lanka during the past twenty-five years is that the two JVP-led insurrections were militant manifestations of widespread unrest among the country's youth. Typically, this unrest has tended to be explained with reference to phenomena such as the failure of economic development to fulfil needs and aspirations in employment and income, the unequal distribution of wealth and power, the endemic weaknesses of governance, and the irreconcilability of youthful ideals with the realities of the adult world. The outbursts of militancy have, in turn, been attributed to causes such as the disintegration of traditional values and norms, the doctrinal legitimisations of revolt, and the ready availability of the means of converting resentment and anger into individual and collective forms of violence. No critic has ever claimed that unrest and violence as exemplified in the insurrections were mono-causal. The interpretational diversity has been mainly in the relative emphasis placed on one set of causes or another. As a point of departure for the present analysis, it is useful to re-examine these 'conventional' explanations mainly for the reason that they could illuminate the backdrop against which the insurrections occurred.

*Economic Change and Youth Unrest*

At the termination of colonial rule in 1948 the economy of Sri Lanka was featured by dependent external relations, low levels of per capita production and consumption, and a firmly established commitment to the provision of basic needs services in education, health care and food supply through state intervention. Estimates of the country's national income available for the post-independence period indicate the persistence of relatively low rates of real per capita growth (which, according to official estimates of dubious quality, averaged 1.5% per annum from 1950 to 1978, 2.6% from 1979 to 1990), alongside rapid advances in the welfare-induced ingredients of the 'physical quality of life' – life expectancy at birth increasing from about 58 to 70 years, and adult literacy from 58% to 86%; and infant mortality declining from 82 to 19 per 1,000 live births, between 1950 and 1990. The slow growth meant a low rate of employment generation, one which lagged behind the expansion of the labour force, the rate of which, in turn, was being constantly buttressed by the demographic effects of the advances made through social welfare. Thus, a cardinal consideration in the choice of development policy options was that an emphasis on growth, if it does result in a curtailment of resources channelled towards the welfare of those in the low income strata, would increase inequalities of income, unless the benefits of growth that trickle down to the poor could compensate for the losses in welfare.

This dilemma was exacerbated by two other considerations one of which was the increasing mismatch between education and manpower needs of the economy. By about the end of the first decades after independence, the educational system that had been shaped to cater to the requirements of an earlier era but had remained unchanged, was becoming intrinsically wasteful due to the economic redundancy of an increasing proportion of its products. Much of the educational effort was also of the type that generated rising expectations and intensified resentments when the expectations remain unfulfilled. To the less privileged in society, at this crucial phase in which they were beginning to gain access to opportunities for formal education at the higher levels, the scope for social mobility through education was becoming more and more restricted. The glut of the 'educated' in the job market was reflected not only in the persisting positive covariance between level of education and rate of unemployment (Table 4), but also in a steady devaluation of education at the higher levels. For instance, the ratio of average earnings among of those employed with education up to the GCE-Ordinary Level, and the employed university graduates, which was 1:3.6 in 1963, declined to 1:2.4 in 1973, and to 1:1.3 in 1981/82 (Central Bank of Ceylon, 1964, 1981, 1984). Secondly, there was the persistence of glaring urban-rural inequalities in the delivery and utilisation of the government sponsored welfare services. As shown in several studies (Richards and Gooneratne, 1980; Peiris, 1982), while certain welfare measures had a negative impact on large segments of the rural population, more generally, their tangible benefits fell short of reaching many rural areas of the country.

Table 4
Level of Education and Rate of Unemployment
(1986/87)

| Educational Status | % unemployed in each category |
|---|---|
| No schooling, illiterate | 3.0 |
| No schooling, literate | 1.3 |
| Primary Level | 4.9 |
| Junior Secondary Level | 19.8 |
| Passed GCE Ordinary Level | 28.5 |
| Passed GCE Advanced Level | 34.8 |
| Tertiary Level | 7.6 |

Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 1990.

In the responses of the Sri Lankan youth to the foregoing conditions there has been much diversity, the nature of which could be modelled as follows. Some in this segment of society were unaffected by the trends of change and hence showed no discernible response. Many others, perhaps the overwhelming majority throughout, reconciled themselves to the changing ethos, and remained in passive acceptance of the prevailing order of things in the hope that with personal effort their own problems could be overcome. A third set of reactions, which is also essentially conformist, is represented by those who opted to agitate collectively against a narrow range of systemic obstacles, usually within framework of existing group identities. Finally, there was the so-called "frustration-aggression" response that has taken a variety of forms both of individual behaviour (acts of despair, rejection and criminality) as well as of collective and organised violence (insurrection). What needs to be stressed in identifying the linkages between the insurrections, on the one hand, and the youth responses to economic change in Sri Lanka during the recent decades, on the other, is that the last category of response referred to was confined to a minority of youth in the country.

The data available on spatial aspects of insurrectionary violence in the late 1980s (Table 5 presents a summary of one such set of data) show considerable diversity in the intensity of violence from one part of the country to another. The Southern Province, and an extensive area stretching south from the north-central districts of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa through Ampara towards Monaragala, standout distinct as venues of relatively high incidence of violence. These two areas, it may be noted, correspond substantially to the distribution of electorates from which the JVP attracted a relatively high level of support at the presidential election of 1982. (Figure 2) In contrast, the intensity of violence along the urbanised coastal lowlands of the west appears to have been remarkably low. It is, of course, possible to attribute this diversity to factors such as variations in the efficiency of policing or in the accuracy of the data. But a more plausible explanation lies in the spatial diversities of economic setting.

Figure 2
The Distribution of Alleged JVP Killings of Police Officers, 1986 to 1989



*Each dot (·) represents
one police officer killed*
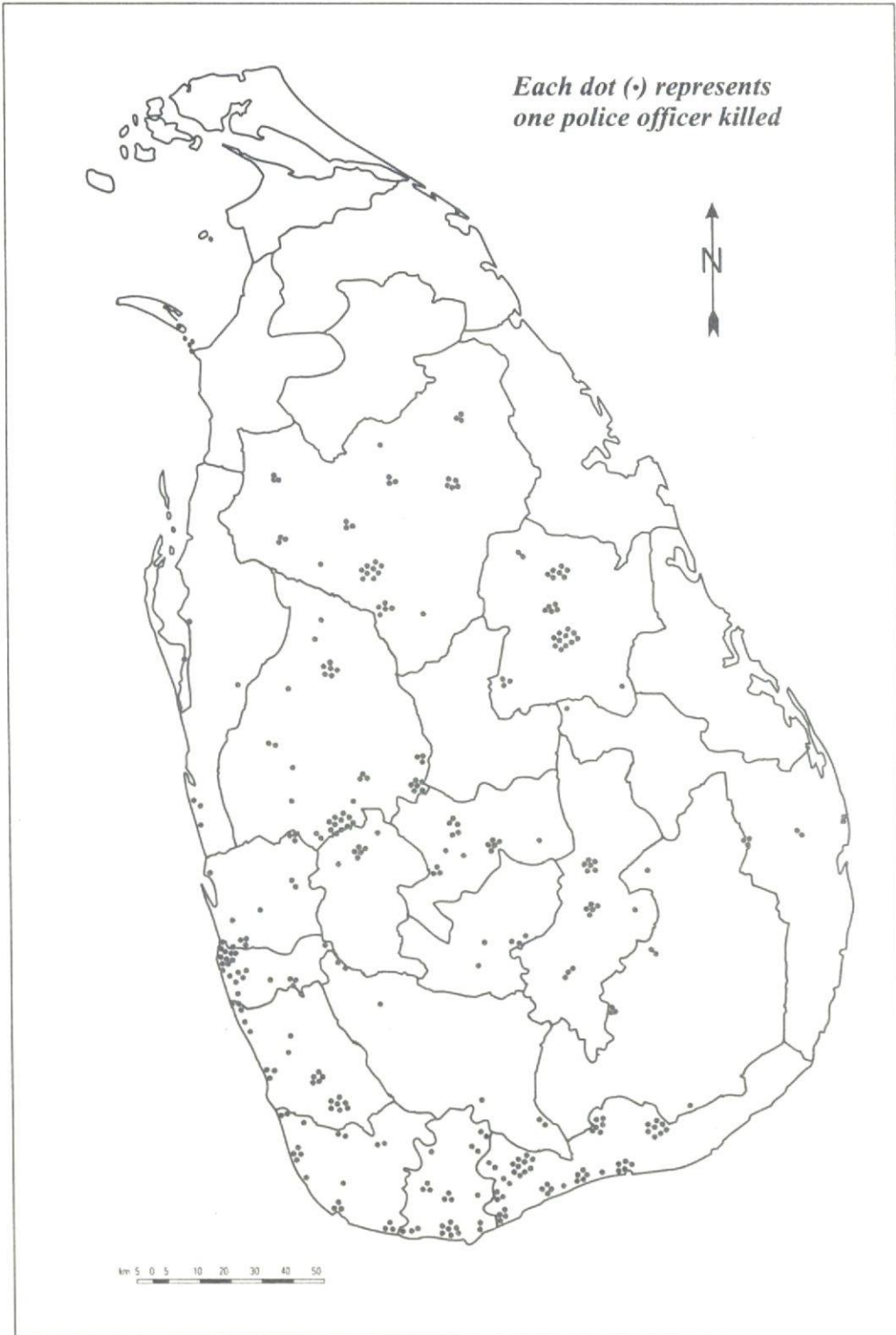
Comparisons have sometimes been drawn between the socio-economic conditions of the deep south (the first area referred to above) and those of the politically volatile Jaffna peninsula (the principal venue of the current ethnic conflict). Both areas are featured by a high population density and a relatively poor physical resource base. There has for long been a tendency for people from these areas to venture out into other parts of the country in search of tertiary sector employment. Thus the economic wellbeing of the people here has always depended much on earnings in external sources, as it has been in Jaffna. A fairly well developed network of secondary education (a legacy of the colonial era in the case of Jaffna, but a feature of more recent origin in the south), along with a tradition of initiative and enterprise among the people, facilitated this greater social and occupational mobility, and the development of more pronounced *petit bourgeois* values in society. Yet, in these two areas, for reasons that could be linked to history, ethno-nationalist sentiments have also remained more intense. If the general impact of the economic trends outlined earlier, especially the steady curtailment of the opportunities for economic advancement through education, were to be placed against the background of the commonalties identified here, it would be possible to find an explanation for the fact that this areas, like the Jaffna peninsula, had been politically more volatile than most other parts of the country throughout the past few decades.

Table 5
District Homicide Rates during the Insurrection of 1987-89

| District | Rate per 100,000 of 1981 population | Rate per 100,000 of 1981 Sinhalese population |
|---|---|---|
| *Lowlands of the Southwest* | | |
| Colombo | 62 | 50 |
| Gampaha | 83 | 90 |
| Ratnapura | 62 | 75 |
| Kegalle | 74 | 87 |
| *Southern Lowlands* | | |
| Galle | 98 | 104 |
| Matara | 182 | 193 |
| Hambantota | 230 | 236 |
| *Western Lowlands* | | |
| Kurunegala | 99 | 106 |
| Puttalam | 84 | 101 |
| *Dry Zone Lowlands* | | |
| Anuradhapura | 205 | 224 |
| Polonnaruwa | 151 | 166 |
| Ampara | 108 | 288 |
| Monaragala & Badulla | 116 | 153 |
| *Central Highlands* | | |
| Kandy | 68 | 91 |
| Nuwara Eliya | 26 | 72 |

Source:   same as Table 2
Notes:    The source data have been re-arranged in a district frame.
          The geographical zonation is intended to highlight the broad regional contrasts in the homicide rates. Kurunegala, Puttalam, Badulla, Kandy and Ratnapura districts are 'trans-zonal.'

The economic setting of the second area identified above as one of higher incidence of violence during the insurrection is dominated by agglomerations of large irrigation-based settlement schemes of recent origin. It has been repeatedly shown through many in-depth studies that these settlements are featured by low overall standards of living albeit with wide intra-community diversities of wealth and income, that most of them are poorly served by educational facilities, that the settlement economy offers little scope for tertiary employment, and that the settlers remain confined to an unchanging agrarian resource base (Peiris, 1989). These conditions imply that the expansion of the settler population over time inevitably results not merely in lowering household incomes but also in the progressive economic destitution of their youth. The problems are further intensified by the lack of social cohesion observed in many settler communities, to produce the type of behaviour at a personal plane which could be mobilised, as the JVP appears to have done, towards collective anti-systemic violence.

In other areas of the country where the scatter of insurrection related crime was less dense (represented by district homicide rates that hover around 100 per 100,000 in Table 5), there were localities with relatively high incidence of violence which, at times (as in the districts of Kandy, Kegalle and Kurunegala), show a rough correspondence with concentrations of people belonging to the "depressed" caste. Further, at a micro-spatial level, it is also possible to identify pockets of intense insurrectionary activity corresponding to the distribution of the so-called "Village Expansion Schemes" in many of which the socio-economic conditions of the irrigation-based settlement schemes referred to above are replicated (Peiris, 1996: 160-161).

It is of interest that the lowest incidence of violence in the late-1980s was recorded in the coastal lowlands of the west – roughly corresponding to the area sometimes referred to as the "Catholic belt." In this part of the country it is possible to identify at least two features which could have acted as checks upon "frustration-aggression" among the youth. On the one hand, those living here received the direct benefits of "economic liberalisation" (the growth-oriented policy reforms initiated in 1977) to a substantially greater degree than those of other areas, and also had easier access to the job opportunities in West Asia. At a somewhat more conjectural plane it is possible to assert that the social impact of the 'Church' was also a check against the tendency towards alienation.[4]

*Governance and Youth Unrest*

Government programmes in food supply, health care and education had, by 1948, already become major spheres of public sector activity. The overall long-term trend over the next three decades was towards the further strengthening of existing programmes, and the initiation of new welfare oriented projects such as those in land distribution, housing, rural electrification and domestic water supply. This is seen to have been accompanied by a steady increase in the direct involvement of the government in other spheres of the economy such as agriculture, industry, commerce, transport and trade.

The economic policy reforms of the late 1970s did represent an attempt to deviate from the earlier trends of increasing government intervention in the economy. The impact of the new policy delineations were reflected in food supply, trade, commerce and transport, and to a less significant extent in health services and education, in all of which greater private sector participation than in former times was encouraged. Nevertheless, it is possible to observe that the basic paradigms of earlier policy – namely, the idea that the satisfaction of livelihood needs of the people is a prime responsibility of the government, one which requires no rationalisation in terms of productivity objectives or cost-benefit considerations in purely economic terms – remained largely unchanged, resulting in the persistence of direct government control over large segments of the economy.

The ramifications of this – one of special relevance to the present discussion – is that political parties in office have always been able to exercise enormous control over the daily lives of the large majority of the people, especially through decision-making concerning the distribution of the benefits of development – jobs, terms and conditions of employment, agricultural land, housing, facilities for education and health care, public utilities and infrastructure services – in which (with the increasing politicisation of government administration, a trend which has been markedly evident from about the early 1970s), favouritism and discrimination based on considerations of electoral politics became increasingly pronounced. There is ample evidence to show that political favouritism and discrimination gradually became barely concealed norms of governance, when, on the one hand, parties holding the reins of office commanded large majorities in parliament and, on the other, the benefits of development available for distribution among the electorate became increasingly scarce in relation to demand.

The high rate of popular participation in electoral politics as evidenced in criteria such as voter turn-out at the polls and attendance at political meetings which, according to some observers of the Sri Lankan political scene (Kearney, 1973; Wilson, 1977), reflected the strength and resilience of the parliamentary form of government, could also be interpreted as a symptom of its weakness, if it is looked at in the light of the procedures of governance outlined above. From such a perspective, it is possible to see mass participation in the electoral processes in the predominantly Sinhalese areas of the country as an intense competition between factions of the voting population identified with one or the other opposing political camps to become the favoured segment of the electorate. The linkages of the main political parties with their respective bases of support have consisted throughout of parallel hierarchies of 'elites' – national party leaders; aspirants for seats in parliament; party activists in trade unions, local government bodies and community institutions; gang leaders and muscle-men etc. – through whom government 'favours' available for disbursement were exchanged in return for loyalty and support when leaders of one or the other political camp assumed office. The operation of this system meant the denial of government patronage to those having no personal links with these 'elites.' Large numbers of young men and women, especially of the low-income strata, could be counted among those who do not have such links.

The importance of the foregoing features of governance as causes that contribute to alienation is underscored by political factionalism which pervades all levels of society and, as several studies of village politics (Robinson, 1975; Wanigaratne, 1971; Lebbe *et.al*, 1977 and the collection of case studies in Brow & Weeramunda, 1992) show, is particularly intense at the level of rural communities. It appears that in many rural settings, each faction is invariably a close-knit and exclusive group which, while wielding its power on the community as political circumstances at a given point of time permit, keeps many in the community excluded from effective participation in its affairs except on the basis of 'client' or 'supplant' relationships with those of the 'elite' group.

The notion that the direct participation of the government in economic activities and the consequent political influences that are brought to bear upon such activities involves increasing levels of corruption has for long been widespread especially among the educated youth. The anger and cynicism which this engenders were used from time to time by political leaders including those of the JVP for mobilising support for militant forms of political protest. In this context, certain changes brought about by the post-1977 liberalisation policies were undoubtedly of considerable significance in creating the insurrectionary milieu of the late 1980s. On the one hand, there were the gigantic projects hurriedly implemented which, regardless of the implementational efficiency they represented, gave impressions of extravagant and wasteful spending. The idea that these were part and parcel of corruption at many levels was fuelled by an increasing absence of transparency in many related transactions. On the other hand, the ready availability of luxury and semi-luxury goods in the market which only the more affluent could buy brought about conspicuous changes in consumption patterns, increasing in particular the related sectoral and regional contrasts. The highly commercialised media of mass communication (especially the newly introduced television), targeted mainly as they were on the urban middle-class consumer, increased the range of goods perceived as essential for a 'decent' living. Visual impressions of 'shared poverty' which featured the economic recession of early and mid-1970s in the form of food queues, frugal rationing and scarcities of essential consumer goods, gave way to the acquisition and display by some in the community of diverse accoutrements of material well-being. These are likely to have instilled in the minds of those whose aspirations remained unfulfilled a legitimate sense of deprivation, along with the idea that, surely, the new life-styles are associated with unlawful gains and transgressions of ethical norms.

*Sociological Perspectives of Insurrection*

A third set of analytical explanations of the Sri Lankan insurrections could be found in a few studies such as Obeyesekere (1974) and Alexander (1981) which may be categorised as those that focus on sociological aspects of insurrection of 1971.[5] They illuminate aspects on which the economic and political analyses do not shed much light.

On the basis of a mass of statistical data on more than 10,000 persons held in custody after the insurrection of 1971, Obeyesekere arrived at the conclusion:

> "The insurrection can be seen as an attack, not only on the government in power, but more importantly, on the elites as a class, whose ranks furnish the political and bureaucratic leaders of the country, irrespective of their political and ideological commitments. The insurgents were not peasants, and the Ceylon insurrection was not a peasant revolt. They were the sons and grandsons of peasants. The leadership of the JVP in particular came from a village aristocracy. ...Twenty years ago these leaders would have been comfortably assimilated into the elite, but in 1971 such assimilation was well nigh impossible."

Obeyesekere's clarification was important specially when looked at in the context of the fashion in vogue at that time of perceiving political upheavals in Asia and Latin America entirely through the prism of agrarian unrest.[6] However, there is some doubt on whether some aspects of his conclusion would apply with the same force as it did to 1971 to the insurrection of the late 1980s, mainly for the reason that the leadership of the latter appears to have been drawn from a wider variety of social classes reacting to a more complex political situation. Moreover, it appears in retrospect that Obeyesekere's assertion about the 'un-assimilability' of the insurrection leaders to the elite also requires qualification.[7]

According to the study by Alexander (based mainly on detailed personal observation during and in the immediate aftermath of the insurrection of 1971 in "a fishing village on the far south coast and an agricultural village 40 miles south of Colombo") the insurrection was essentially the product of conflict between the traditional rural elite ("*pelantiya*" families) that had retained its power and prestige through adjustment to changing socio-economic circumstances, on the one hand, and an increasingly assertive and parochially influential but less stable social group ("*mudalali*") consisting of those engaged in trade and other commercialised intermediary transactions of the rural economy, on the other. Starting with the claim that the convulsions of 1971 were the product of "post-war processes of rural class formation (in Sri Lanka)," the author proceeds to assert that a pronounced element of this process was an intensification of tension and conflicts of interests between the *pelantiya* and *mudalali* "classes" in the rural areas of the country, and perceives the insurrection as a challenge by the latter class on the "*pelantiya* hegemony."

Alexander's field observations (extracts from which are reproduced below) are of interest mainly for their uniquely intimate insights (123).

> In the area where I was living in April 1971 ...most of the participants in anti-government activities were from households which I have labelled *mudalali*. With the exception of fishermen shot while ignoring the curfew, all the people killed in the immediate area were *mudalali* or sons of *mudalali*. Four of the five youths generally accepted as leaders of the area belonged to *mudalali* households. When I visited Tissamaharama, a (southern) town under

insurgent control for three weeks, ...I was struck by the large number of youths who claimed to be related to fish traders based on towns further west.

The *pelantiya*, including the members of the opposition party (UNP) gave their complete support to the security forces. Although many *pelantiya* families had fled to Colombo soon after April 5th, once the security services were re-established, the local knowledge of the *pelantiya* structured the reprisals. The officers of the armed forces lived in the houses of *pelantiya* families to whom they were often related. Names of suspected insurgents were provided by *pelantiya* who accompanied army patrols and selected villagers for questioning and beating. While members of the opposition parties were harassed, beaten and occasionally shot during this period, these actions stopped short of *pelantiya* boundaries.

The foremost problem regarding Alexander's interpretation is, indeed, one which he himself had appreciated – namely, the extent to which the experiences witnessed in the two study villages could be projected to the wider setting (119). There could, of course, be little doubt that in many rural areas elsewhere in the country, it was possible (in 1971) to observe sharp differences within rural communities in respect of attitude towards (and involvement in) the JVP revolt, and a correspondence between such differentiation and variations in socio-economic status. But what appears far less plausible is the assertion that the alleged 'polarisation' *vis-à-vis* the revolt was linked, in general, to a *pelantiya-mudalali* dichotomy in the way that Alexander has seen. There is, in fact, no dearth of evidence to show that the Alexandrian dichotomy here is, at best, overdrawn, and that in many rural situations (including those that have been portrayed in Sociological 'case studies,' of which there is an abundance), the *pelantiya* boundaries were (and are) far less distinct than Alexander would have us believe.

## Socio-Psychological Perspectives

The sociological studies to which reference has been made above relate specifically to the revolt of 1971 and are, to that extent, limited in their usefulness to an understanding the more general phenomenon of 'insurrection and youth unrest' in Sri Lanka. In this context, a more recent writing by Hettige (1992) is seen as opening a new vista for further inquiry – one which is wider in scope and has greater thematic salience to the present study. The conceptual framework for his approach has been derived from certain theoretical writings on youth behaviour in western societies. It begins with the postulate that the change from childhood through adolescence to adult life, which in most traditional societies was a brief transitional phase, tended to become prolonged under the demands and opportunities associated with processes of modernisation. It proceeds to explain that 'youth' as a social class in most societies of today thus represents an adolescence extended well beyond physiological maturation. Persons in this phase of life have to endure post-pubertal psychological stresses and are inclined to be introspective, hypersensitive to criticism, conscious of the contradictions in the world of adults, and anxious to be accepted, yet impelled to assert their individuality. They desire independence, but are compelled to remain dependent on parental support. The individual responses to these stresses are situation

specific. In most instances the tendency of youth is to conform to the systemic expectations. In certain situations there could be processes of 'opting out' of the system. Others produce individual or collective revolt against the system.

In applying this theory to Sri Lanka, it is appropriate to highlight the numerical increase of 'youth' as a social category which resulted from both demographic changes as well as socio-economic transformations of modernisation witnessed during the past fifty or more years, and the increasing stresses and strains to which the youth have been subject in the more recent past, specially in the form of bleak prospects for the future and "relative deprivation" – widening gap between expectations and what could be achieved. Permissiveness in sexual behaviour and, more generally, the 'pleasure ethic' which are believed to serve as relief valves for these stresses in affluent societies are not available to the youth in societies which condemn such behaviour as depravity or promiscuity. In this scheme of thinking, it is possible to explain the observable diversities in the individual response to these circumstances with reference to sectoral, regional, cultural and class heterogeneities that characterise the 'youth' in Sri Lanka.

To examine reality more closely and to illustrate the nature of emotional conditions that nurtured the violence on which this study is focused, I should add to the scholarly works referred to above two brief extracts from Sinhala "creative writing" that represent the extremes of the sublime and the profane. The first is a part of a lyric composed by the foremost Sinhala lyricist, Professor Sunil Ariyaratne, and sung by the popular vocalist Visharada Nanda Malini in her album of songs, *Sathyaye Geetaya* ('Song of Truth') proclaiming a fiery brand of patriotism couched in folksy Buddhist idiom (note, "seela samadan," "muni vatha"). The second is a sad display of excruciating sexual frustration engraved on a desk in the Arts Theatre of the Peradeniya University by an unknown poet, probably in the course of a lecture that had no relevance to his life. At the plane of individual behaviour both extremes were much in evidence in the Sri Lanka convulsions of youth in revolt.

"Cowroon ho mage rata bili de nam
Nopanathkam gini la awulanam
Kumatada oon ha seela samadan
Satanin thora muni vatha awadanam"

"Sarasaviya paththay
Honda honda huthu da eththay
Hukannata neththay
Aney huththay, mahanthathay"

*Aftermath of the Revolt*

The large majority of people in Sri Lanka breathed a sigh of relief when the leaders of the second insurrection were decimated. Unlike in the 1970s even the lyricists and the poets remained mute either for fear or through bewilderment regarding which heroes to

romanticise. There were the occasional concerns voiced about violation of civil rights mainly by those whose social status provided a measure of immunity from their civil rights being violated, and restricted mainly to a few of the much publicised violations of that immunity. Unlike in the 1970s there were no attempts at "rehabilitation of misguided youth." Since the queen had been dethroned, and the warriors were dead, there were no prosecutions for "attempting to wage war on the Queen."

At the campaigns of the presidential and parliamentary elections of 1994 the tragedy of the insurrection was utilised to the fullest by the parties in opposition, as the opposition had done at the elections campaign of 1977. The skeletal remnants of the JVP have been drawn once again into electoral politics. The skeletal remains of its former supporters are also being dug up from mass graves for purposes of electoral politics. Dramas are being produced and novels are being written to prolong the pleasure of sorrow. The JVP has re-emerged as a force to be reckoned with in student politics at the universities where, when there is mourning for the dead once a year, it is possible to see the flutter of red flags and hear all day the same haunting lamentations that were sung for the martyrs of 1971. And, when that happens, there is the eerie feeling that one has been through it all before.

## Notes

1. For a comprehensive guide to this documentation, see Goonetileke, 1978.

2. See, for example, the translated extracts from the poetic works of Monika Ruvanpathirana, Parakrama Kodituwakku and Buddhadasa Galapatti in Meddegama, 1992. One also recalls, in this context, the works of Ediriweera Sarachchandra, Gunadasa Amarasekera and those who represented the "social realism" wave of Sinhala creative writing in the 1960s and the '70s, and, at a somewhat less sophisticated plane, the immensely popular "Songs of Truth" sung by Nanda Malini (the "nightingale of the revolution") and several other vocalists much admired by educated Sinhalese youth, and, of course, the innumerable Sinhala films that had 'class conflict' themes.

3. The impression I gathered in the course of my discussions with people in different walks of life in the areas that were affected by the insurrection of the late 1980s also corresponds to the observation by Kapferer (1994: 82) that, "many felt that the JVP had acted to rectify injustices (committed by immoral persons) which the officials of the state (i.e. police) were unwilling to rectify."

4. The 'social impact' referred to here is that in the predominantly Christian areas the church organisations and activities provide fora for social interaction among youth, often performing the function of inculcating a "sense of belonging" among the participants. Church congregations in these areas usually constitute close-knit and socially homogeneous groups that facilitate various forms of entertainment ("parties") and other leisure-time activities. The fact that Christian churches in Sri Lanka draw their membership largely from the urbanised 'middle class' enhances the social impact of this function of the church.

5. There are several other works which would be placed in this genre (Obeyesekere, 1984; Rogers, 1987; Kapferer, 1988; Spencer, 1990) which, I think, are only of marginal relevance to the present study.

6. Mick Moore (1993) has laboriously re-discovered that the JVP insurrection of 1987-89 was also not a peasant revolt.

7.   It is my impression that, had Obeyesekere looked at the bio-data of the JVP leadership of 1971, he would not have used the phrase "village aristocracy" here. Regarding his assertion of "un-assimilability," note that, of the prominent JVPers imprisoned in 1971, there are at present two deputy ministers of the central government, five university dons (three of them with doctoral degrees), editors of two influential political weeklies, several in the executive ranks of government administration, and many school teachers.

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# The State and *Sangha* in Pre-Modern Sri Lanka

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## Introduction

Religion has been a factor of group consciousness in the past as it is today. It seems to have the greatest potential for the creation of socio-political tensions in the modern world. The growth of religious fundamentalism in some countries has exacerbated this state of affairs.

Countries with populations which are completely homogenous in terms of religion are difficult to come by in the present world. Despite this a few theocratic states do exist. In them the overwhelming majority belong to one religion. There are other states with sizeable religious majorities which, although not theocracies, recognise a single state religion and yet others where the religion of the majority occupies a special position in the constitution. Sri Lanka fits into this last category. For multi-religious societies a completely secular form of government is the ideal advocated by most political thinkers. It is natural that the separation of state and religion is the most acceptable form of fair government to religious minorities. However, majority communities are seen to argue for linking their own religions with the state, often leading to tensions with other groups.

In Sri Lanka not only does Buddhism occupy a special place in the constitution, but the Buddhist clergy or the *sangha* wield a great deal of influence with the state. One of the arguments used by the majoritarians is historical precedent and the nature of Buddhism itself. Implicit in this is that Buddhism with its doctrines of tolerance and impartiality can ensure a democratic political order. This article does not purport to argue against the secular state but attempts to examine the claim of historical precedent and seeks to demonstrate how Buddhism and the Buddhist *sangha* gave legitimation and stability to the Sri Lankan state in pre-modern times.

## *Sangha*-State Ideology - The Early Beginnings

The circumstances which surrounded the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka set the stage for the growth of a political ideology which linked state and religion. Buddhism came from India during the time of King Asoka, a political colossus in Asia during the 3rd century BC. A number of independent polities characterised the contemporary political situation in Sri Lanka. Among them the kingdom of Anuradhapura was the rising star in the political firmament. For Tissa, its ruler, Buddhism and the Asokan connection was extremely opportune. Asoka had sent his envoys to Sri Lanka for goodwill before the introduction of Buddhism. According to

his inscriptions[1] these envoys set up medical care for human beings and animals, planted medicinal herbs, dug wells and planted trees along the roads for the use of people. It would seem that regular contact was established between the two countries. This contact according to the Chronicles of Sri Lanka was with the kingdom of Anuradhapura, a claim which may be supported by the adoption of the Asokan title 'Devānampiya' by Tissa. Furthermore he is said to have held a second consecration ceremony for himself, adopting Mauryan procedures.

Asoka was a Buddhist and even attempted to reform the *sangha* according to his edicts.[2] It was during this time that the mission of *Thera* Mahinda and *Theri* Sanghamitta arrived in Sri Lanka. The fact that the Great Asoka was himself a Buddhist would have been a persuasive factor in the conversion of Devānampiyatissa. In turn the emulation of Asoka even with respect to his personal religion would have enhanced the prestige of the king, given the political reality of rival centres of power in the country. In this one can perhaps see an embryonic stage in the inter-relationship between Buddhism and kingship. It naturally linked the ruler to the Buddhist clergy.

The *sangha*-state interdependence which characterised the Sri Lankan polity developed over time. As an ideology it was encouraged and given legitimacy by the early historians of Sri Lanka, initially the monk authors of the Pali Chronicles, the *Dīpavaṃsa* and the *Mahāvaṃsa*. In these texts the argument for a Buddhist state is woven into the traditional account of the very origin of kingship in the island. Vijaya, the first king, arrived in Sri Lanka on the very day on which the Buddha died. The Buddha himself is said to have visited the country three times, sanctifying it with his physical touch. It is further stated that the Buddha on his deathbed predicted the coming of Vijaya and that his descendants would make Sri Lanka a "dhamma-dīpa," where Buddhism will take firm root.[3]

For the Chroniclers who upheld the Buddhist state ideology the Asokan paradigm was extremely important. In their perception Asoka embodied all the ideals of Buddhist kingship and he was held out as the great exemplar. Therefore his relationship with the *sangha* is constructed as the ideal that should prevail. Asoka, according to the Chronicles, received instruction in Buddhism from the monk Nigrodha, who when invited to take a suitable seat in the palace, sat on the king's throne. Asoka was delighted with the moral confidence of the monk and showed his appreciation by bestowing generous gifts on the *sangha*.[4] The king is shown as subordinate to the higher spirituality of the monk in recognition of which he bestows gifts using his superior material resources. Symbolically the *sangha* is enthroned. This was the model advocated for Sri Lankan rulers who were for the most part guided by it. Nigrodha elevates himself to the throne not to rule but to preach the dhamma. The *sangha* does not compete for secular power and therefore do not directly threaten the state. This functional difference is underscored in a *Mahāvaṃsa* anecdote regarding its hero, King Dutthagāmaṇī. On his deathbed the king is said to have recalled that he once sat on the preacher's chair and tried to preach to the *sangha*. However, because of his respect for the monks, he could not proceed, after which he commanded that monk preachers should be rewarded.[5] There are however, later references to kings who did preach the dhamma.

The first emissaries of Buddhism to Sri Lanka, *Thera* Mahinda and *Theri* Sanghamitta are said to have been the children of Asoka and Asoka himself is intimately associated with their mission. In Sri Lanka Devānampiyatissa's links with the missionary monks and nuns are emphasised with great embellishment, illustrating the mutual advantages of this connection. In this regard Alice Greenwald draws our attention to an anecdote in the Mahinda – Devānampiyatissa association which is truly symbolic of the *sangha*-state ideology. The king it is said offered a mango fruit to the *Thera* Mahinda, who, having eaten it, gave the seed back to Devānampiyatissa. The king planted it and over the seed the *Thera* washed his hands, so that the tree would grow and it did almost immediately, bringing forth fruit. The moral of the story according to Greenwald is that prosperity and growth will result from the interaction between the state and the *sangha*.[6] This certainly is a myth which attempts to idealise a favoured religio-political order, "the ideal social order" according to one writer.[7]

It is important to note that the support Buddhism and the *sangha* received extended beyond Anuradhapura to the other political kingdoms. The Chronicles record that among those present at the ceremonies connected with the arrival of the Bodhi-plant were the ruling families of Kataragama and Candanagama in Ruhuna as well as Brahmin Tivakka,[8] no doubt a significant political personality at the time. When the members of the first group of missionaries died, their relics seem to have been shared among the different kingdoms, for, an early inscription of the 2nd century BC at Rajagala in the Batticaloa district refers to a stupa named after the two monks, Itthiya and Mahinda.[9] Devānampiyatissa and his immediate successors seem to have set the tone for the linkage between *sangha* and state in other parts of the country as well.

## The Concept of a Buddhist-State

It is believed that the Buddha belonged to a princely family and that many of its members joined the *sangha* in his lifetime. We have already noted the tradition regarding the connection between the family of Asoka and the *sangha*. This pattern is said to have been repeated in Sri Lanka. The record is that Arittha, a nephew of Devānampiyatissa, was among the earliest recruits to the *sangha*, soon to be followed by the king's brother.[10] Next was Anulā, a sister-in-law of the king, who joined the female order. Quite a few women of the royal family entered the bhikkhuni order from time to time.[11] Also noteworthy is the fact that men and women from the upper classes joined the *sangha*, so that the ruling class was well represented in the *sangha* community.[12] What is important to emphasise here is that from the very inception of Buddhism in the country close personal and family links were established between the rulers and the *sangha* thereby creating opportunities for mutual interaction and support. The links between the upper class and the *sangha* continued until the last days of the monarchy in Sri Lanka. It has been observed that even in the 18th century the chief monks of the two leading monasteries in Kandy were drawn from the aristocracy.[13]

The above facts show that identifying themselves with Buddhism was a matter of prestige for the political and social elite of the country. This applied to the Brahmin class as well. At least 21 records of Brahmin donations of cave residences to Buddhist monks have

been documented during the early phase of Buddhism (3rd century BC - 1st century AD).[14] These Brahmins not only belonged to the upper stratum of society but were also politically powerful as seen from the association of Brahmin Tivakka with the reception accorded to *Theri* Sanghamitta. The Brahmin donors of caves were either converts to Buddhism or felt it politic to support the *sangha* who were treated with high honours by the rulers themselves. The acceptance of Buddhism by the highest in the land including many among the Brahmins, who may have functioned as spiritual mentors in the community at the time, would have been an incentive for the general public to follow suit.

The patronage of Buddhism and the Buddhist *sangha* by the rulers did not always go unchallenged. Their commanding position met with some opposition from the leaders of other religious faiths at certain times. It is with a fair deal of justification that Paranavitana interprets the events of the reign of Khallātanāga (109-103 BC) and Vattagāmaṇī (103 BC and 99-77 BC) as a response to the overwhelming success of Buddhism and "the complete identification of the interests of the state with those of the *sangha*."[5] Three princes of the Jain faith, nephews of Khallātanāga, plotted to overthrow the king and on discovery immolated themselves in the monastery of the Jain monk, Giri. This same Jain monk is said to have shouted with great scorn when Vattagāmaṇī, the next ruler, was forced to flee by his enemies. Vattagāmaṇī, after victory, retaliated by building the Abhayagiri monastery on the spot on which the Jain monastery had once stood. The opposition to Vattagāmaṇī came not only from the Jains. More formidable was that of the Brahmin Tiya whose rebellion was exacerbated by an invasion led by a group of Tamil adventurers from South India. It was after 14 years of famine, pestilence and utter devastation that Vattagāmaṇī returned to power. During this time many Buddhist monks and nuns sought refuge overseas. The few who stayed behind rallied round Vattagāmaṇī, encouraging others to support him for the restoration of Buddhist kingship. The influence of the *sangha* over the people was a strong factor in the king's favour.

The expansion of Buddhism among the mass of the people made the *sangha*-state connection extremely meaningful in terms of governance. The interaction of the *sangha* with the political establishment on the one hand and the general populace on the other created an effective communication link between the rulers and the ruled. Kings who upheld Buddhist ideals came to be held in high esteem both by the *sangha* and the people, a point illustrated by popular stories preserved in texts like the *Sahassavatthupakaraṇa*[16] and the *Sīhalavatthupakaraṇa*[17] compiled in the mid Anuradhapura period. This came about as a result of a two way process by which Buddhism spread among the people. One was linked to the acceptance of Buddhism by the ruling groups and the other had to do with the grassroots activity of the monks themselves.

In their expansion of Buddhism the *sangha* did not challenge the existing belief systems of the people. In fact the sculptures of *yakkas*, *nāgas* and various other deities prominently displayed at the four entrances to stupas suggest that indigenous beliefs were accommodated within Buddhism, albeit on a lower plane. Popular festivals like the Kārttika were absorbed into Buddhism by associating the day with a Buddhist event.[18] Even gods were not denied but like Upulvan and Vishnu, they were absorbed as guardians of Buddhism.

Therefore, by taking part in Buddhist worship, people did not feel alienated from their cultural roots and the transition was easy.

In the *sangha*, people found a set of moral guides and educators who moved closely with them, begging for alms in the villages and preaching at temples. Although some members of the *sangha* were drawn from the ruling class and the social elite, many others belonged to different social levels down the line. The *sangha* hierarchy was not based on class but learning and spiritual attainment. Buddhist monasteries became centres of learning for both monks and laymen. All this made the *sangha* an extremely influential group in society and they were in a position to influence people on behalf of the state. When kings supported the *sangha* with so much generosity, they knew that they were getting back through that generosity the allegiance of the people. The great endeavours of monarchs reflected in massive religious festivals and building activity brought society together in a grand celebration of religion. The maintenance of the *sangha* who were the repositories of religion was a sacred duty performed by rulers. For this they were lauded and looked up to by society as a whole. Therefore each ruler sought reaffirmation of his legitimacy in the eyes of the people through meritorious works. In the words of one historian, "In a society so closely wedded to religion, a ruler endowing a place of worship is making a political investment and expects a political return."[9]

Dynastic instability was endemic in the Sri Lankan state and endorsement by the *sangha* was an important factor in the consolidation of kingship. An inscription of Mahinda IV (956-972 AD) states that kingship was conferred by the *sangha* in order that the ruler may defend the `bowl and the robe' i.e. the community of monks.[20] On the day of his consecration the king wore a white scarf which symbolised his duty to serve the *sangha*. That the *sangha* was formally involved in the king's consecration may also be inferred from a statement in the Polonnaruwa inscription of the Velaikkāras that Vijayabāhu I (1055-1110 AD) accepted the throne on a request by the *sangha* so that he may protect Buddhism (the *Buddhasāsana*).[21] This same idea is echoed by Nissankamalla (1187-1196 AD) in his inscriptions where he states that it was the king's duty to protect Buddhism.[22] According to R A L H Gunawardana "The myths, the political ideas and the ritual together reflect a political system in which the succession to power was based on lineal descent as well as on the concurrence of the *sangha* who enjoyed great prestige and wielded a profound influence in this society."[23]

The inscriptional sources cited above show that the concept of a Buddhist state was a living ideology and not something infused into the historical record by monk historians. Nevertheless, it is true to say that the Chronicle writers strongly underlined the Buddhist state motif giving sanction to its legitimacy. They helped to perpetuate the idea of the Buddhist state by providing rulers with historical precedent and an ideological framework within which they could claim that legitimacy. Even war was condoned if there was danger to Buddhist kingship. At times the *sangha* had the unenviable task of explaining away the huge contradiction that existed between Buddhist ideals and the inevitable violence of the state. This was faced in one instance and explained within a Buddhist paradigm. No discussion of the Buddhist state in Sri Lanka has failed to draw attention to the consolation offered to Dutthagāmaṇī by Buddhist monks at the end of his war with Eḷāra, a non Buddhist ruler. Only

one and a half human beings were killed they said, the other thousands who had not observed the five Buddhist precepts or taken refuge in the `Triple Gem' being compared to beasts.[24] The hard reality that these theorists had to confront was that the very existence of the state depended on offensive and defensive war and on the punishment of anyone who threatened the state, and this included Buddhist monks. In the Dutthagāmaṇī story two concepts are used to resolve the issue, one is that the lower the spiritual state of the victim, the lower was the *karmic* fall out. The other is that the motive for one's actions is the main determinant of their *karmic* value. The war of Dutthagāmaṇī is justified in terms of ensuring the future glory of Buddhism. In a later period the monk, Kupikkala Tissa is said to have advised a group of ministers to rejoin Vattagāmaṇī, despite his ill-treatment of them, as it is only by the king's victory in the war that Buddhist rule could be restored.[25]

The ideal Buddhist king was the *Cakkavatti* or the righteous monarch who eschews violence and conquers through righteousness. In Sri Lanka kings began to be attributed with qualities of a *Bodhisattva* and the theory that only a *Bodhisattva* could be a consecrated monarch of this country was given currency. An inscription of Mahinda IV asserts that none other than *Bodhisattvas* will be kings of Sri Lanka.[26] Nissankamalla goes even further when he says that having an impartial king is like having a Buddha.[27] According to the chronicles virtuous monarchs are said to have upheld the Buddhist ideals of kingship and a few instances are cited to demonstrate these ideals. For example one meets with the story of a king who freed prisoners condemned to death, pretending to mete out capital punishment by burning dead bodies. Acknowledging the fact that non-violence and the ideal form of kingship were somehow incompatible, the *Mahāvaṃsa* records that this ruler, rather than face the carnage of war, gave up his throne to a rival.[28] The contradiction between the ideal and the real is in a sense countenanced. Rev. Walpola Rahula notes that kings seize the throne after a great deal of destruction of life and property and once they are firmly in place "perform meritorious activities, mainly to evade the evil consequences of the past."[29] Kingship had necessarily to have both a material and a spiritual dimension – *artha* and *dharma*. Bechert observes that Sri Lankan rulers turned to the principles of *arthasastra*, a system of politics which was free from religion.[30] What he sees is a kind of dualism in the early Sri Lankan state, religious legitimation on the one hand combined with purely secular statecraft on the other. The *niti* literature of India formed part of the education of royal princes, which was sometimes imparted not by Brahmin teachers but by the Buddhist monks themselves.[31] The *sangha* no doubt soon came to realise that practical political issues could not always be resolved within the *Cakkavatti* ideal of the Buddhist texts.

The principle that only Buddhists could be conferred legitimate kingship gave Sri Lankan rulers a certain exclusivity in South Asian politics. This position could be used to keep out adventurers from South India from gaining political power in the country. This requirement for legitimate kingship was so strongly ingrained in the political culture of the country that in the 12th century two Sri Lankan kings Vikramabāhu I (1111-1132 AD) and Gajabāhu II (1132-1153 AD) who ruled at Polonnaruwa were denied the consecration because they were not Buddhists.[32] They were both sons of foreign queens which may account for their Hindu faith. Marriage alliances with South Indian royal families seem to have

even paved the way for claims to the throne by foreign princes. In the late Polonnaruwa period, Nissankamalla, faced with the possibility of South Indian aspirants to the throne, does not tire of repeating that non-Buddhist princes of Coḷa, Pāṇḍya or Keraḷa extraction were not fit for kingship in Sri Lanka. The argument he uses is that the country belongs to Buddhism, the *Buddhasāsana*.[33] Chandrabhānu, a Southeast Asian ruler of the 13th century, is said to have invaded Sri Lanka, proclaiming "We are Buddhists,"[34] once again reaffirming the legitimacy of Buddhist rule. Even during the period of the Kandyan kingdom, the Nayakkar rulers, Hindu by birth, became converts to Buddhism in order to be legitimate monarchs. This was one of the most important theoretical concepts which bound the state with Buddhism. It was an ideology which began to grow from the very inception of Buddhism in the country and was perpetuated by the *sangha* whose own interests were linked to the state. The benefits of this theory to the state were equally important.

Therefore, during the early phase of Buddhism there were compelling reasons why the rulers were drawn to the clergy. The social links between them cemented this interrelationship and as educators and opinion makers the monks were able to create an ideological environment in which kings began to consider Buddhism a source of legitimation. Although the incipient stages of this ideology is rooted in the Asoka-Devānampiyatissa-Mahinda connection, its evolution has to be seen in the subsequent political developments in the country i.e. dynastic instability, regional competition and the threat of foreign rule.

## The Influence of the *Sangha* on the State

At a more practical level, it would be necessary to see how the *sangha*-state interdependence operated on the ground. This relationship was not always a smooth one and there were times when tensions between them caused severe strain. Just as there was political rivalry among rulers, there were dissensions among the *sangha*. The *sangha* cannot be perceived in terms of a monolithic organisation. For the most part of the Anuradhapura period, (the period up to the 10th century AD) the monks were divided into three main monastic establishments, the Mahāvihāra, the Abhayagiri vihāra and the Jetavana vihāra. Disputes among them did bring rulers into the scene. Just as the *sangha* scored certain advantages due to dynastic competition, the state could and did intervene to maintain equilibrium among the different *nikāyas* or Buddhist monastic organisations. By and large the rulers extended their patronage to all groups. But the fact that they could tilt the balance in favour of one *nikāya* would have kept the *sangha* from taking undue advantage of the power they wielded over the state. After the unification of the *sangha* during the Polonnaruwa period, the *sangha* became a more powerful force to reckon with but total unity was hardly ever achieved. More than one ruler claims to have united the three *nikāyas* during this period and although some of the earlier divisions faded out, new divisions arose. Particularly important was the *grāmavāsi* (village dwelling)/*vanavāsi* (forest dwelling) distinction within the *sangha*.

With Buddhism becoming a factor of legitimation, rulers began to look to monks for counselling, a trend which was facilitated by the close personal and family ties that existed between royalty and the *sangha*. Priests as political counsellors is a well-known institution in

both South and Southeast Asian politics of the pre-modern period. Before the advent of Buddhism the Indian model of the brahmin *purohita* or political counsellor appears to have prevailed in Sri Lanka. A brahmin was associated with the court of Devānampiyatissa and an early inscription refers to a brahmin who was both the physician and teacher of a king named Devānampiyatissa,[35] who may or may not have been the first king of that name. Since that time one hardly meets with the brahmin *purohita* in the royal court until the period of the Polonnaruwa kings but even here his functions are of a ceremonial character. Parākramabāhu II of Dambadeniya (1236-1270 AD) had a brahmin *purohita* to chant manthras in the royal palace,[36] but there is no evidence of brahmins playing a political role in the country. The traditional role of the *purohita* in Indian politics was taken over by the Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka. In fact even the education of royal princes was entrusted to monks. Sanghamitta, a Mahayana monk, is said to have got himself appointed as the teacher of the two princes Jetthatissa and Mahāsen and in this way influenced Mahāsen (274-310 AD) to break away from the Mahāvihāra.[37] Aggabodhi VIII (804-815 AD) was another ruler whose education was entrusted to the monks.[38] An uncle of Dhātusena (455-473 AD) was a monk who taught him not only religion but also secular state craft.[39]

Both Sanghamitta, the teacher of Mahāsen, and the uncle of Dhātusena acted as king's counsellors and the latter in fact assumed the role of kingmaker. In an earlier instance the monks of the Thūparāma colluded with the ministers of the royal court to place a younger son of Saddhātissa (137-119 BC) on the throne, a move that was challenged by the rightful heir. The monasteries were often safe havens for royal princes during dynastic squabbles and some of them actually donned robes for their personal protection. Saddhātissa, defeated in a fratricidal war with Dutthagāmaṇī, is said to have sought refuge in a monastery.[40] Mahānāma (406-428 AD) and Silākāla (518-531 AD) became members of the *sangha* to bide their time in the relative safety of the Buddhist temple until conditions were conducive to claim political control.[41] All this makes clear how close Buddhist monks were to the corridors of power.

The *sangha*-state relationship acquired a new meaning in the after-math of Cola rule in Sri Lanka. During the Cola occupation of Polonnaruwa in the 11th century, Buddhist kingship had suffered a major debacle. The country was ruled by a Hindu governor appointed by the Cola monarch and the Buddhist centres of Anuradhapura were deserted. Many monks had sought refuge in Rohaṇa and others had left for Theravāda Buddhist temples in South India and Burma. With the restoration of Sinhalese rule by Vijayabāhu I (1055-1110 AD) every effort was made to bring back the old order. The resuscitation of Buddhism and the Buddhist *Sangha* appears to have been a major aspect of the king's internal policy. He had the support of Burma, a Theravāda Buddhist country, in his war against the Colas and Burma was one of the places in which Sri Lankan monks had sought refuge. It is perhaps fair to speculate that these Sinhalese monks played an intermediary role in securing assistance for the king. No sooner was Vijayabāhu I on the saddle, he invited the monks back to restore the higher ordination which had lapsed under Cola rule. Naturally these monks secured a place in the highest counsels of the king and they were even consulted regarding the succession to the throne, when the royal heir, Vīrabāhu, died suddenly.[42] What we have here is a strong reciprocal relationship between the ruler and the *sangha*. The monks were beholden to the

monarch for the restoration of the higher ordination and the king in turn was dependent on the *sangha* for political advice and perhaps even political mediation at the highest level.

The extremely strong position which the *sangha* enjoyed during the reign of Vijayabāhu can be illustrated by a single episode which involved the chief queen, Tilokasundari. The *Cūlavaṃsa* records that she had violated certain privileges given to the Buddhist monasteries. For this infraction she was shorn of her revenues and dragged out by the neck and expelled from the city.[43] This treatment of the chief queen shows the extent to which Vijayabāhu was willing to go to appease the monks.

The utter disgrace and humiliation which the queen suffered in her confrontation with the *sangha* did not go unchallenged. The events that followed appear to have been almost a trial of strength between the two opposing camps. The anti-Buddhist response came during the reign of Tilokasundari's son, Vikramabāhu I (1111-1132 AD) under whom the *sangha* suffered severe privations. Temple lands were confiscated according to the chronicles, monasteries were made the dwelling places of foreign soldiers and the wealth that was offered to the Tooth and Bowl Relics, the king used as he pleased. The Relics which had by now become palladiums of kingship, were spirited away to Rohana by the Buddhist monks for safe keeping, and they also retaliated by denying the king royal consecration. The *sangha* were able to muster all the strength of custom and tradition to withhold legitimate kingship from a ruler who was not a Buddhist. Gajabāhu II (1132-1153 AD) who succeeded Vikramabāhu was also denied royal consecration, but he seems to have realised that he could not ride roughshod over the *sangha*. A more conciliatory policy was adopted and even land grants to monasteries were made by him. The power of the *sangha* could not be crushed because there were alternative centres of power from which they could draw support and also because in the politics of Sri Lanka the legitimating power of Buddhism was far too strongly entrenched.[44]

Although the Buddhist *sangha* had a great deal of support in Dakkhiṇadesa and Rohana, the political kingdoms outside the control of Polonnaruwa, the eclipse of legitimate kingship at the main capital was a great blow to the monks whose position at the centre of power was now undermined. The unification of the country, which was torn between three warring kingdoms, and the restoration of the primacy of Buddhism at Polonnaruwa were major concerns of the *sangha*. Towards these ends the monks began to pursue a vigorous policy of mediation in which peaceful reconciliation was combined with astute diplomacy.

Mānābharaṇa of Rohana is said to have made overtures to Gajabāhu II for a peaceful settlement, approaching him in the company of the monks of the three *nikāyas*. The recognition of Mānābharaṇa, a Buddhist prince, as the heir to Gajabāhu at Polonnaruwa would ensure the peaceful realisation of the goals of the Buddhist establishment. The same end would be served if the succession went to Parākramabāhu of Dakkhiṇadesa, the other contender to the throne. Here again the Buddhist monks played an active role. At the outset Parākramabāhu's position in Dakkhiṇadesa itself was somewhat volatile and among those who helped to stabilise his claims to this principality was the chief monk of the Panca-parivenamula,

the most important monastic establishment of the time. The resolution of his long drawn out war with Gajabāhu was also brought about by the intervention of the *sangha*. Tired of war, it was Gajabāhu who sought the good offices of the *sangha* and among them an extremely shrewd formula was devised by which the legitimacy of Parākramabāhu as heir to the throne of Polonnaruwa was ensured. The treaty between the two opponents was said to have been inscribed on a stone at Maṇḍalagiri vihāra, the present Mādirigiriya. This record has not turned up among the ancient remains at Mādirigiriya but a copy of it inscribed at Sangamu vihāra has been discovered.[45] It is very likely that the monks of this temple were also guarantors of the deal. The final statement in the agreement is that anyone who acts contrary to it would be going against the authority of the Triple Gem i.e. the Buddha, the dhamma and the *sangha*. These events are a strong illustration of the mediatory role of Buddhist monks in conflict resolution and the enormous influence they wielded as political decision-makers. In their endeavours the *sangha* did not lose site of the ultimate goal of a Buddhist state. In one of his inscriptions, Parākramabāhu I claims to have restored Buddhism which had been ruined for a period of 42 years since the death of Vijayabāhu I.[46] These 42 years constitute the reigns of Vikramabāhu I and Gajabāhu II, a period of severe tensions when the kings of Polonnaruwa and the *sangha* confronted each other from their own positions of strength. The *sangha* had the backing of centuries of tradition as well as the more immediate support of rival claimants to the throne of Polonnaruwa. In these circumstances the *sangha* emerged victorious and the traditional Buddhist state legitimacy was restored.

The Buddhist state was once again in crisis during the occupation of Polonnaruwa by Māgha (1215-1236 AD). Monks were forced to flee to safer areas, carrying with them the Tooth and Bowl Relics of the Buddha. Vijayabāhu III who mounted the opposition to Māgha had the support of the chief monks of the two most important monastic groups, the *vanavāsi* and the *grāmavāsi*. Liyanagamage observes that "there is little doubt that these mahātheras wielded great influence with the Buddhist population and their cooperation and goodwill is likely to have contributed in no small measure to strengthen his position as the ruler of Māyārattha."[47] Therefore what the ruler derived through the *sangha* was legitimacy and popular support.

The mediatory role of monks in politics was not confined to problems of internal conflict. They appear to have been the best ambassadors of goodwill and peace the country could have in its dealings with neighbouring lands. Monks and nuns travelled on pilgrimage to and from the Indian centres of Buddhist worship quite regularly. In times of crisis they sought refuge in Buddhist monasteries in India and sometimes Burma. They also travelled to important centres of Buddhist learning for intellectual exchange and discourse. In this way religion became an extremely useful conduit for meaningful ties in Buddhist Asia. It has been noted earlier that the Anuradhapura kingdom would have gained a great deal of political mileage from the Mauryan connection and the mutual exchange of Buddhist monks and nuns, although culturally motivated, would have been politically advantageous. During the Gupta period it was the Buddhist connection which is thought to have led to diplomatic relations with the Indian court of Samudra Gupta. (c. 4th century AD)[48] Even when Sri Lankan rulers were at war with South Indian states, the Buddhist *sangha* of both regions maintained close

friendly ties so that communication lines were not totally severed. In fact Sri Lankan monks fleeing from South Indian armies sought refuge in Buddhist monasteries in the Tamil country. Buddhist nuns were useful in cementing commercial ties between Sri Lanka and China for Nandi, the envoy cum naval commander of a ship made two consecutive trips to China in order to transport Buddhist nuns who established the Sinhala ordination in that country.[49] Monastic links with Burma were extremely useful during the political crises which engulfed the country during the 11th and 12th centuries. It was suggested earlier that monks may have played a mediatory role in securing Burmese assistance for Vijayabāhu in his war against the Colas. Much more conclusive is the evidence for the intervention of the *sangha* when Sri Lanka went to war with Burma, its one time ally, during the reign of Parākramabāhu I. The Burmese who wanted to end the war are said to have sent envoys to the *sangha* in Sri Lanka requesting them to intercede with the king on their behalf.[50] This demonstrates the importance of the Buddhist connection for diplomatic relations and underscores the high status and power enjoyed by the *sangha* in the counsels of the king. It is important to note that both in Burma and Sri Lanka the *sangha* was closely linked with the state.

The international linkages formed through the *sangha* benefited both the *sangha* and the state. For the *sangha* it facilitated pilgrimage, provided them with safe havens in times of crisis while at the same time they opened up opportunities for missionary work and intellectual exchange. For the rulers the *sangha* provided a line of communication which was useful both in times of war and peace. The reciprocal advantage to the *sangha* and the state bears repetition.

## State Power over Religion

In the discussion so far attention was mostly directed towards the issue of the influence exerted by the *sangha* over the state. It is equally important to look at the other side of the coin and see what control the state had over the *sangha*. The Buddhist monks were perceived as the spiritual leaders of society and in this sense had superior status over the rulers. Kings on the other hand were regarded as the defenders of the religion and it was their duty to see to the preservation of the high spiritual status of the monks. The perception was that the purity of the *sangha* was the responsibility of the state – in a sense state control over the *sangha*. There were no clear rules as to how this was to be achieved. Ambiguity in this regard was natural as the *sangha*-state interdependence evolved over time and was in some instances dictated by political and other factors which were peculiar to a particular period.

In the early phase of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, kings, nobles and others donated modest dwellings which were mostly rock shelters to the *sangha*, whose subsistence depended on the daily offerings of the faithful. However, with their numerical growth and the uncertainty of regular alms during droughts, famines, pestilence and war, kings and the well-to-do in society began to transfer permanent sources of income to the *sangha*, a course of action which was facilitated by the economic changes that were taking place around the turn of the pre-Christian era. Kings were the most frequent donors of land and other material resources.

Grants were usually made to the different monasteries, donations to individual monks being few and far between. The growth of monastic wealth affected the character of the clergy bringing in its wake problems related to discipline, the administration of land, taxation etc., most of which involved the state. These issues were further complicated by the divisions within the *sangha* and the absence of a single ecclesiastical authority to lay down the law. The unification of the three *nikāyas* in the 12th century and the appointment of a chief monk or mahāsvāmi (later known as sangharāja) changed matters somewhat but the responsibilities of the state over religion appear to have continued.

The economic dependence of the *sangha* on the rulers and the ruling class did mean that the state had a certain hold over the *sangha*. With time however there was a certain erosion of this authority, especially with respect to some of the more important monasteries. An important development of the 9th and 10th centuries was the transfer of fiscal and even certain judicial rights to individual monasteries and even nunneries. The intervention of state officials in the administration of monastic property was kept at a minimum by immunity grants. These were, however, not blanket rules and immunities were not uniform across the board. Privileges once granted seem to have been binding on the state, although theoretically kings could confiscate land and withdraw immunities. There were certain customary rights which the monasteries enjoyed which rulers could not override without serious repercussions. This was brought home to Udaya III (935-938 AD) who killed certain treacherous ministers who had taken refuge in a temple. The protest of the monks was taken up by the army and the people and Udaya III had to seek the assistance of the monks to restore peace. Withdrawals of monastic land grants by rulers are on record which underlines the fact that for economic well-being the goodwill of the kings mattered.[51]

Rulers exercised certain regulatory powers over monastic institutions and very often reforms initiated by them related to both matters of temple administration and to discipline. Buddhist monks did not always take kindly to all interventions. Kaṇirajānutissa (29-32 AD) interfered in a dispute over the disciplinary rules of monks after which they plotted to assassinate the king. The plot was discovered and it was the king's turn to put the monks to death.[52] Mahāsen (274-302 AD) who tried to discipline the monks of the Mahāvihāra met with stiff opposition and eventual victory in this instance is claimed for the *sangha*.[53] This could be a biased version of the events as the evidence we have is from the Mahāvihāra records. According to the Chronicles between the 5th and 10th centuries AD as many as eight rulers are said to have effected *sangha* reform.[54] Two significant inscriptions which can be cited in this regard are those of Kassapa V (914-923 AD)[55] and Mahinda IV (956-972 AD).[56] The first was issued on behalf of the Abhayagiri vihara and the second refers to the Cetiyagiri monastery. They set out regulations for the conduct of affairs in the two monastic institutions, demonstrating the fact that the state had a role to play in ordering the lives of the *sangha*.

After the unification of the *sangha*, reform acts of a more general nature were promulgated. Kings like Parākramabāhu I (1153-1186 AD) and Parākramabāhu II (1236-1270 AD) held Buddhist Councils at the end of which a code of disciplinary rules or a *Katikavata*

was announced. The *Katikāvata* of Parākramabāhu I, inscribed at Galvihāra, draws attention to the severe indiscipline among the monks and the king is said to have feared the destruction of the religion if he had not interfered.[57] The reiteration of the disciplinary rules of monks by royal proclamation suggests the need for the imprimatur of the state in important religious matters. It is noteworthy that the leading Buddhist monks of the time collaborated with the rulers in *sangha* reform. Any deterioration of the *sangha* was as much a concern of theirs as it was of the state.

Kings not only initiated *sangha* reform but also played a leading role in ceremonies associated with the admission of new monks and the *upasampadā* or higher ordination. These were periodic events and some rulers even held them annually. These grand spectacles held in the capital were symbolic expressions of the centrality of the state. Ordination ceremonies were held even under the Nayakkar kings of Kandy.[58] An interesting statement in the *Cūlavaṃsa* is that candidates for monkhood, in one instance, were examined by the heir to the throne before they were declared fit to enter the order.[59] It would seem that the role of the state was not merely ceremonial.

An important function of the kings was the granting of formal approval to ecclesiastical appointments such as those of *mahāsvāmi* and sangharāja. In the Dambadeni period even heads of monastic colleges required the king's approval.[60] The basic understanding in all this is that the king as the head of state was responsible for the protection and promotion of Buddhism.

## Religions other than Buddhism and the Buddhist State

The elevation of Buddhism and the Buddhist *sangha* to a superior position did not preclude kings from supporting other religions and their clergy. The recorded history of the island speaks mostly of the destruction of Buddhism by non-Buddhist kings rather than the other way round. Apart from one or two rare episodes such as the elimination of a Jain temple by Vattagāmaṇi[61] and the destruction to two devales by Mahāsen,[62] the record of Sri Lankan rulers was not one of mere tolerance but active support of other religions. Up to the 9th century AD there are no epigraphic references to any donations to Hindu temples or Brahmin priests. It is possible that the accommodation of Brahminical gods within Buddhist worship may have eliminated the need for separate temples. In the Polonnaruwa period, kings such as Nissankamalla took part in the *navagrahasānti* ceremony[63] while participating fully in all forms of Buddhist worship. The tradition that prevailed in Asokan India was to honour all religions and the Buddhist rulers of Sri Lanka seem to have followed in the footsteps of Asoka who was perceived as the ideal Buddhist king. In Sri Lanka kings did not play an antagonistic role towards other religions but helped to make all religions inclusive within the wide umbrella of Buddhism.

## Conclusion

From the earliest period of state formation Buddhism was linked to the state. That the country belonged to Buddhism, that rulers had to be Buddhists and that the support of Buddhism and the Buddhist *sangha* legitimised the state were all part of the Buddhist state ideology. There were a few times when this position was challenged by internal rebels and foreign invaders. The aftermath of such attempts always saw a reaffirmation of the traditional standpoint. The *sangha*, as political counsellors, intermediaries, diplomatic envoys, peacemakers and strategists, were inextricably linked to the state. The state on the other hand played a regulatory and an economic role in the affairs of Buddhism and the authority of the state was recognised by the Buddhist establishment. Despite certain tensions, the *sangha* and state were not rival centres of power but each acted as a restraining influence over the other. It is important to recognise that there were many areas of state activity which did not come within the purview of the *sangha*. Secular aspects of statecraft employed different theoretical concepts and mechanisms. There was on the whole a certain pragmatism in the functioning of the state in pre-modern Sri Lankan history.

## Notes

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2.   *ibid.*, Minor Pillar Edicts at Sarnath, Kosambi and Sanchi.

3.   *Mahāvaṃsa*, W Geiger (ed.), Pali Text Society, London, 1934, (Hereafter *Mhv*) chs VI & VII

4.   *Mhv*, ch V.

5.   *ibid.*, ch XXXII, vv 42-6.

6.   Alice Greenwald, "The Relic on the Spear" in Bardwell L Smith (ed.), *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka*, Chambersburg, 1974.

7.   Bardwell L Smith, "The Ideal Social Order as Portrayed in the Chronicles of Ceylon" in Bardwell L Smith (ed.), *op.cit.*

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9.   S Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon*, Vol. I, Colombo, 1970, No. 468.

10.  *Mhv*, ch XVI, vv 10-1; ch XVII, vv 57-8.

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     *Dipavamsa*, ed. and trans. H Oldernberg, London, 1879, ch 18.
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22.   *ibid.*, No. 28, p 97.

23.   R A L H Gunawardana, "The Kinsmen of the Buddha: Myth as Political Charter in the Ancient and Early Medieval Kingdoms of Sri Lanka" in Bardwell L Smith (ed.), *op.cit.*

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26.   *EZ*, Vol. I, No. 20.

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28.   *Mhv*, ch XXXVI, vv 80-1 & 91-2.

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32.   Sirima Kiribamune, "Buddhism and Royal Prerogative in Medieval Sri Lanka" in Bardwell L Smith (ed.), *op.cit.*

33.   *EZ*, Vol. II, Nos 17 & 28.

34.   *EZ*, Vol. II, ch LXXXIII, v 37.

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36.   D B Jayatilaka (ed.), *Kandavurusirita*, Maharagama, 1956, p 63.

37.   *Mhv*, chs XXXVI & XXXVII.

38.   *Cv*, Vol. I, ch XLIX.

39.   *ibid.*, ch XXXVIII, vv 20-2.

40.   *Mhv*, ch XXIV, vv 39-46.

41.   *Cv*, Vol. I, ch XXXVII, vv 209-10.

42. *Cv*, Vol. I, ch LX, v 87.

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54. *Cv*, Vol. I, ch XXXIX, v 57; ch XLI, v 2; ch XLIV, vv 46 & 75-70; ch XLVIII, v 71; ch LI, v 64; ch LII, vv 10 & 44.

55. *EZ*, Vol. I, No. 4.

56. *EZ*, Vol. I, No. 7.

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# Buddhist Interests, Activists and Pressure Groups

## K N O Dharmadasa

"Political combat" as pointed out by Maurice Duverger, "is made up not only of the battle for power but also includes battles between powers because power is never totally unified."[1] In the Sri Lankan context, as generally accepted, the Buddhist leadership is a crucial power factor, and anyone expecting to govern this country has to take that factor into consideration. The Buddhist leadership is, of course, not organised to form one or more distinct pressure groups. Looking back we note that only on one occasion, namely in the mid-1950s, did it come very near the classic form of a unified pressure group. At other times, most notably in the sixties, seventies and the eighties, the Buddhist leadership remained divided on political lines. But all political parties, even those representing minority interests, accepted the fact that the Buddhist opinion in general was a crucially important factor in the politics of Sri Lanka.

As students of social movements we know that Buddhist opinion gained such salience not just because it represented the interests of the majority group of the population. The power at its command today is the result of a long drawn-out process, which commenced in the latter half of the 19th century, during what is recognised as the 19th century Buddhist revival.

Resurgent Buddhism was modelled on Christian missionary organisational and tactical prototypes. The success it gained through the combined efforts of the printing press, voluntary associations and the schools system was largely due to the deliberate use of new (European) means to achieve the desired end – viz. the preservation and the promotion of Buddhism. When the efforts of revivalists such as Migettuwatte Gunananda, Hikkaduwe Sumangala and Anagarika Dharmapala were bearing fruit by the first decade of the 20th century, there appears to have been a self-confident militancy very much in contrast to the apathy and indifference during early and mid 19th century, about which many European writers had commented upon.

But the enthusiasm thus generated was not converted to a programme of political action in the 20th century, due largely to the sober attitude of the political leadership represented by personages such as F R Senanayake, W A de Silva and D B Jayatilaka. Particularly Jayatilaka, who as a scholar conversant with Buddhist scriptures, seems to have believed that the badge of Buddhism could not and should not be used for direct political activism. Hence we do not find in Sri Lanka the emergence of a Buddhist political party

comparable to those Europe such as the Christian Democratic Party, or even political concepts being articulated in Buddhist terminology as happened in Burma.[2]

Buddhism hence remained a mere presence; but a tremendously powerful one at that. A power which all political groups had to taken into consideration. And whenever Buddhist interests were articulated, either by the traditional ecclesiastical centres such as those at Asgiriya and Malvatta in Kandy, or by the newly emergent Buddhist associations, they carried tremendous weight.

In modern Sri Lanka Buddhist interest groups have generally been of two kinds – purely ecclesiastical and mixed, where laymen and monks joined hands. The traditional ecclesiastical organisations, the heads (*mahanayaka*) of the various fraternities (*nikaya*) and their committees of management (*karaka sabha*) which consisted solely of *bhikkhus*, on the one hand, and the modern groupings such as the Young Men's Buddhist Associations (YMBA) inaugurated in 1898 manned by laymen in collaboration with *bhikkhus* on the other. As befitting the traditional code of *bhikkhu* behaviour the *mahanayakas* and the *nikaya* organisations generally never articulated specific political interests. Even when it was believed necessary to do so it was couched in circumspect and covert language. The mainly lay organisations such as the YMBA, the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress, on the other hand, were more forthright in their interest articulation and put forward direct demands to political authorities. There have been occasions however, when this difference became blurred, and Buddhist monks formed *ad hoc* associations to agitate on specific political issues. Interestingly, in spite of misgivings expressed by some about such "unbecoming" behaviour by *bhikkhus*, such agitations have had remarkable potency.

### *Bhikkhus* in the Political Arena: The First Phase

The first occasion in which *bhikkhus* came out openly into the political arena in recent times was in the aftermath of the publication of the *Report of the Special Committee on Education* in 1943. There were two radical recommendations in this report – that education should be in "the mother tongue," and that education should be "free," meaning that tuition fees should not be levied from the students and that the state should take the financial responsibility of education. In the context of mass politics engendered by universal adult franchise introduced in 1931, such proposals seemed to have had tremendous political appeal. The existing system was conducive to perpetuate the prevailing class stratification. For, only the affluent could generally reap the benefits of educational facilities available in the better schools which were fee-levying and where the medium of instruction was English, which was the language of government and the gateway to higher education. As the majority of these better schools were managed by Christian missions the proposal for "free" education in particular was envisaged as a threat to the advantageous position held by the Christians in the field of education. Significantly, the State Council in 1944 passed a resolution that Sinhalese and Tamil should replace English as the language of government. Thus a social change appeared imminent. This caused much anxiety among those who wanted to safeguard the *status quo*.

A vigorous campaign was launched by missionary educationalists against the adoption of the recommendations of the Special Committee on Education. They received the support of the two leading newspaper companies – the Lake House Group and the Times Group. Moreover they were able to enlist the support of some powerful members of the State Council, prominent among whom was D S Senanayake, the Minister of Agriculture, who succeeded Jayatilaka as the Leader of the House in 1944.

On the other side of the divide, there were several councillors led by C W W Kannangara, the Minister of Education. As this was an issue with great political potential in rousing popular enthusiasm it was taken up by the Marxists who had several representatives in the State Council such as N M Perera, S A Wickramasinghe and W Dahanayake. Public meetings were organised and, significantly, several leading Buddhist educationalists joined in, namely, G P Malalasekera, E W Adikaram and C Meevanapalana. The other significant development of this time was the involvement in the agitation of several young *bhikkhus*, some of whom were radical in outlook, and most of whom were associated with the Vidyalankara Pirivena at Peliyagoda, a suburb of Colombo. They were Udakandawala Saranankara, Narawila Dhammaratana, Hadipannala Ponnaloka, Bambarende Siri Sivali, Kalal Alle Ananda Sagara and Walpola Rahula. The four years from 1944 to 1948 witnessed the gradual advent of some of them to the centre of the political arena. This was a momentous development in the history of Buddhism and politics in modern Sri Lanka.[3]

As expected, the conservative politicians were greatly disturbed by the "political" involvement of the young *bhikkhus*. D B Jayatilaka the president of the Vidyalankara Patronage Association (*Dayaka Sabha*) who, was at the time in India as Sri Lanka's official envoy wrote in early 1944 a few months before his death:

> I cannot believe the news that the Vidyalankara Pirivena would be a party to such an unbecoming effort... If the Pirivena gets mixed up with politics the strong bonds of my firm trust and devotion binding me to the Pirivena would be severed.[4]

D S Senanayake, the Vice President of the Dayaka Sabha, J R Jayewardene, the councillor representing the Kelaniya electorate where the Pirivena was situated, and D R Wijewardene, the newspaper magnate tried hard to dissuade the Vidyalankara *bhikkhus* from getting involved in the "free" education agitation and other political issues. They had no success. The teaching staff of the Pirivena compiled a document titled "*Bhikkhus* and Politics" clarifying their position and released it to the public on 13 February 1946. The "Vidyalankara Declaration" (*Vidyalankara Prakasanaya*) as it was called asserted that it was,

> nothing but fitting for the *bhikkhus* to identify themselves with activities conducive to the welfare of the people – whether these activities were labelled politics or otherwise – as long as this activity did not impede the religious life of a *bhikkhu*.[5]

The declaration further pointed out that "today *bhikkhus* by being actively engaged in education, rural reconstruction, anti-crime campaigns, relief work, temperance campaigns,

social service and such other activity are taking part in politics." Such activity, it was pointed out, was approved of by the society at large. It was only when certain "vested interests" were threatened that the cry "*bhikkhu* politics" was raised. The declaration wanted to emphasise that

> It is incumbent on the *bhikkhu* not only to further the efforts directed towards the welfare of the country, but also oppose such measures that are detrimental to the common good. For example, if any effort is made to obstruct the system of free education, the great boon which has been recently conferred on our people, it is the paramount duty of the *bhikkhu* not only to oppose all such efforts, but also to work towards making it a permanent blessing.

The increasing political involvements of these *bhikkhus* met with stiff opposition. The *Dayaka Sabha* of the Vidyalankara Pirivena, which consisted of certain political leaders of the country, was able to enlist the support of the conservative members of the *sangha* in this opposition. Thus, for example, venerable Yagirala Pannananda, the chief prelate of the Southern Province, presided over a meeting that condemned the actions of the Vidyalankara *bhikkhus*. Again Professor Malalasekera, the President of the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress, addressing its 26th annual session in 1944, disapproved the participation of the bhikkhus in political affairs. Despite these, however, the Vidyalankara *bhikkhus* continued with their agitations. They established in 1946, a *bhikkhu* organisation, the first of its kind in Sri Lanka, the *Lanka Eksath Bhikkhu Mandalaya* (LEBM), launched a newspaper titled *Kalaya* (time) which was brought out at irregular intervals, and Walpola Rahula, the first *bhikkhu* graduate of the University of Ceylon, wrote *Bhiksuvage Urumaya* (The Heritage of the *Bhikkhu)* setting out examples drawn from the scriptures, commentaries and historical sources supporting the view that the *bhikkhu* had an active role to play in the educational, cultural, social and political life of the community.

The year 1947 witnessed the climax of this first phase of *bhikkhu* involvement in politics during which there was, first, the controversy over the Education Amendment Bill of 1947 aim of which was to establish greater government control over state aided schools, many of which were being run by missionary organisations which carried on a intense campaign to forestall the move. The supporters of the Bill took it to the public platform and it became a hot issue since the general elections were scheduled to be held later in the year. Public meetings were organised, and signatures to mass petitions were being collected. As befitting their new role the Vidyalankara *bhikkhus* were at the forefront of the agitation, and the LEBM held a series of meetings in Colombo, Kandy, Kurunegala, Ratnapura and Galle. The newspaper *Kalaya* carried on a sustained campaign attacking opponents of "free education" which according to its view was "the only scheme for the country's welfare proposed in the state council during all the sixteen years of its existence." A number of petitions by large numbers of signatories were presented to the State Council. Significantly, many of the petitions had been prepared by *bhikkhu* organisations such as *Samagi Vardhana Bhiksu Samitiya*, Ceylon Union of *Bhikkhus*, Elpitiya Bhiksu Sangamaya, Udarata Maha Sangha Sabha, and Dakshina Lanka Eksath Bhiksu Sangamaya.[6] Obviously these were *ad hoc* organisations, hurriedly got together for the purpose at hand. However, this would have demonstrated the

fact the Vidyalankara group's influence was spreading to different parts of the country and that at least some sections of the *sangha* were getting mobilised on political lines.

The strong campaign in support of the 1947 Bill (popularly referred to as "The Free Education Bill") had the effect of silencing its opponents in the council including D S Senanayake and J R Jayewardene. For, they and other prospective candidates at the forthcoming general election did not want to take the risk of opposing a Bill which appeared to have widespread support. Thus when the vote was taken at the second reading of the Bill on 15 May 1947 it was passed unanimously. A large number of *bhikkhus* were seated in the Council's public gallery watching the proceedings, and it was generally acknowledged that they had played a decisive role in effecting the Council's decision. As Councillor V Nalliah, a Tamil and a Hindu, observed in his speech:

> If today we are here, in a spirit of calm resignation, discussing this education Bill, we owe that fact to the politically conscious section of the Buddhist clergy. This is the first victory they have won, and that is why I say that this Bill will go down history, not because of any great intrinsic merit in it, but because of the manner if will go through this assembly... This Bill marks the first great indication of a political awareness, of an awakening, among the masses of this country."[7]

If indeed there was such a mass awakening in the country it was in no small measure due to the agitational activity of the Vidyalankara *bhikkhus*. Undoubtedly the *bhikkhus* became aware of the political power potentially at their command. However, there was no steady follow up on political lines after 1947. Although a few Vidyalankara activists such as Walpola Rahula, Kalal Alle Ananda Sagara and Kotahene Pannakitti addressed political meetings at the general elections held in September supporting Marxist candidates and other who held "progressive" views, the *bhikkhu* political movement passed out of the scene soon after. It was claimed in Vidyalankara, however, that while there were only 3 Marxists in the State Council of 50 members previously, 18 Marxists and several progressive independents could get into the 1947 Parliament of 95 elected seats was in no small measure due to the support given by the politically active *bhikkhus*.[8]

## The 1956 Election Campaign:
### Sinhala Language and Buddhist Religion as Political Causes

The second phase of Buddhist pressure on political decisions came in mid-1950s. The main protagonists were laymen, although *bhikkhus* too played an important role. Significantly, the Marxist or the radical orientation of the *bhikkhus* which was very much visible on the earlier occasion was less prominent if not totally absent this time. And the larger segment of the *bhikkhus* were well known scholars holding moderate views. The principal lay organisation which acted as a strong pressure group was the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (hereafter ACBC) founded in 1918 as an umbrella organisation federating young men's Buddhist Association and other similar groupings in all parts of the country. The ACBC under the leadership of Professor G P Malalasekera (who had been its president since 1939) had by 1950 emerged as the chief spokesman of Buddhist interests.

Appeals by the ACBC to Prime Minister D S Senanayake, and to his successors, Dudley Senanayake and John Kotelawala during the period 1950-54 for inaugurating measures to remove the "disabilities" placed on Buddhism during the colonial period and to help it to regain its "rightful status" did not bring about a satisfactory response, and the ACBC itself appointed a Buddhist Committee of Inquiry in April 1954. The visits of this committee consisting of leading scholar *bhikkhus* and prominent lay Buddhists to various parts of the country, collecting evidence on the disabilities suffered by Buddhism contributed to a remarkable fanning up of popular enthusiasm. This was augmented by other factors as the *Buddha Jayanthi*[9] celebrations and the campaign for making Sinhala the national language.

In the mid-1950s other *bhikkhu* organisations such as the *Samasta Lanka Bhiksu Sammelanaya*, the *Sri Lanka Maha Sangha Sabha* (which amalgamated in mid 1956 to form the Eksath *Bhikkhu Peramuna) emerged;* and then there were other organisations articulating Buddhist interests such as *Sinhala Jatika Sangamaya* led by *bhikkhu* Baddegama Wimalawamsa and the *Bauddha Jatika Balavegaya* led by L H Mettananda.[10]

There was some form of continuity from the 1940s in the sense that Bambarende Siri Sivali and Kotahene Pannakitti of the Vidyalankara group were active in the mid-1950s. Kalal Alle Ananda Sagara had given up monkhood and contested the Horana seat as Sagara Palansuriya, winning it with a comfortable majority. But most of the more prominent activists were new-comers. Baddegama Wimalawamsa was the principal of Sri Lanka Vidyalaya Maradana and Henpitagedara Gnanaseeha of the *Sri Lanka Maha Sangha Sabha* was from Ratnapura. Talpavila Seelawamsa, a forceful orator was the chief incumbent of a temple at Borella. He and the other stalwart of the *Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna*, Mapitigama Buddharakkhita (who was to become the most powerful *bhikkhu* during the time of the Bandaranaike government of 1956-59) were founder members of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP).

It can be said that the power of Buddhist pressure groups reached its climax during the mid-1950s. As K M de Silva has pointed out, the 1956 election campaign saw the *bhikkhus* stepping out of their temples "literally in their hundreds if not thousands, in all parts of the Sinhalese areas of the country, to urge the peasant masses to turn the UNP out of office, and to substitute for it a government led by Bandaranaike that would reflect the views and aspirations the *bhikkhus* were articulating on public platforms – the electoral activity of the Marxist *bhikkhus* of the 1940s paled into insignificance in comparison to this."[11]

With the establishment of the government of S W R D Bandaranaike in 1956 the Buddhist demands put forward by the ACBC and the other Buddhist interest groups appeared in sum to indicate the vague principle of according Buddhism "the rightful place" in the affairs of state. In order to satisfy this expectation the new government appointed the Buddha Sasana Commission in February 1957. Its terms of reference were wide and included the finding of ways and means to reform the *sangha*, an issue which many of the *bhikkhu* activists would have preferred not to raise. The commission consisted of 10 leading *bhikkhus* some of them widely acclaimed for their piety and learning and 5 lay Buddhist leaders. Its report was presented to Prime Minister Bandaranaike in mid-1959. But he did not live to see

the issues it raised taken up for discussion. The short caretaker government which succeeded him after his assassination had the report published, but was politically too weak to take any follow-up action. In retrospect we can say that the report of the Buddha Sasana Commission contained a very comprehensive scheme dealing with many aspects of the problems faced by the Buddhist clergy in modern times – that of Sangha organisation, discipline, the control of temporalities and the relationships with the state machinery.[12]

There were four major instances in which the Bandaranaike government of 1956 had to reckon with *bhikkhu* if not Buddhist pressure. One was the creation of the department of cultural affairs. The fact that N Q Dias, a committed activist in the Buddhist movement of the fifties was appointed the first Director of Cultural Affairs set the tone for the future activities of this department. The traditions set out during the initial stages were to continue. The minister in charge was to be a Buddhist. And "In terms of the fund allocation to the three services – i.e. promotion of religion, art and literature – religious activities claimed the lion's share. And amongst the religious grants to various communities, the amount allocated for Buddhist activities was larger than the grants allocated for the religious activities of Hindus, Muslims and Christian."[13] This remained the form until two ministries, one for Hindu Cultural Affairs, and the other for Muslim Cultural Affairs, came to be created in the 1980s.

The other welcome measure as far as Buddhist interest groups were concerned was the elevation to university status of the two major institutions of Buddhist learning in the country, Vidyodaya and Vidyalankara. The Vidyodaya University and Vidyalankara University Act of 1958 specifically mentioned that these were established to work for the "advancement and dissemination of knowledge and for the promotion of Sinhala and Buddhist Culture." Furthermore the Act stipulated that the two universities were to maintain Buddhist traditions, the heads of these institutions were to be *bhikkhus*, and all statutes made by their governing councils were to be in accordance with the Buddhist ecclesiastical laws of discipline (*vinaya*). Females could enrol only as external students. For many years to come most Heads of departments and Deans in these two universities were *bhikkhus*.

In two other political decisions the Bandaranaike government fared badly if not disastrously. One was in the attempt to placate Tamil opinion in the aftermath of "The Sinhala Only Act" of 1956. In the face of communal clashes and a civil disobedience campaign Prime Minister Bandaranaike came into an agreement in July 1957 with S J V Chelvanayakam, the leader of the Federal Party, which had spearheaded the protest movement. By this agreement Tamil was to be recognised as an official language for administrative purposes in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, Regional Councils were to be set up throughout the country thus facilitating Tamil speaking areas to have a certain degree of local autonomy in administrative matters, and thirdly, limits were to be imposed on the settlement of Sinhalese colonists in the irrigation schemes of the Northern and Eastern Provinces so that indigenous Tamils could maintain their majority position in those areas.

The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam agreement became the target of vehement protests from Bandaranaike's own party as well as from the opposition United National Party which was looking for means of staging a comeback. The most vociferous opposition to the

agreement was from the *bhikkhu* activists in the *Sinhala Jatika Sangamaya*, such as Baddegama Wimalawamsa and Devamottawe Amaravamsa and in the *Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna* such as Mapitigama Buddharakkhita and Talpavila Seelavamsa who were in Bandaranaike's own political camp. Even the hierarchy of the conservative Malvatta and Asgiriya chapters of the 'Siamese' fraternity in Kandy came forward to express their deep concern over this "first step toward the setting up of a separate state."[14] The climax of the campaign against the Agreement came with a sit-in demonstration by a group of *bhikkhus* led by Wimalawamsa in front of the Prime Minister's residence on 9 April 1958. Pressurised by party stalwarts as well, Bandaranaike gave in, and declared the Agreement null and void. In the wake of this decision a wave of communal violence ensued and some 300-400 lives were lost. Order was restored in May under a state of emergency.

The other issue in which Bandaranaike had to face the opposition of some powerful individuals in the *bhikkhu* hierarchy was the implementation of the Paddy Lands Act of 1957 introduced by his Marxist cabinet colleague Philip Gunawardene. Envisaged as a socialist measure to prevent the exploitation of tenant farmers by absentee landlords, the Paddy Lands Act sought, among other things, to secure perpetuity of cultivation rights to the tenant farmers and to fix a land rent advantages to them.

The *Viharadhipathis* (temple-chiefs) particularly of the large temples in the interior who controlled large extents of land with which were bound traditional service obligations (*rajakariya*) to the temples found the Paddy Lands Act a threat to the continuance of the institutional activities of the temples as well as an infringement of their rights as landlords. Thus the Viharadhipathi and Trustee Association as well as the *Mahanayaka* Theroes of the Malvatta and Asgiriya Temples submitted appeals and memoranda to the Prime Minister and the Governor General. A few *bhikkhus* in the Eksath *Bhikkhu Peramuna* such as Mapitigama Buddharakkhita, who also owned considerable property joined in the protest against the paddy lands act. They were supported in this by some members of the cabinet, themselves rich landlords. But it was obvious that the larger majority of the Sangha also were not personally affected and who could view the Act as a progressive measure beneficial to a large section of the population, preferred to see it coming into operation. The *Eksath Bhiksu* Peramuna itself split over the issue and the role played by the hierarchy of the Malvatta and Asgiriya Viharas contributed only to re-affirm their popular image as political reactionaries. A similar fate befell Buddharakkhita and the other *bhikkhus* of the EBP who opposed the paddy lands act and they were exposed as pseudo socialists.

In retrospect it may be said that the three and a half year Bandaranaike government marked the peak of *bhikkhu* influence on the politics of Sri Lanka. Mapitigama Buddharakkhita and Talpavila Seelavamsa, stalwarts of the EBP being executive committee members of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, while Henpitagedara Gnanasiha, the mentor of N Q Dias, was ubiquitous as a power broker. Buddharakkhita more than any other *bhikkhu* wielded tremendous influence in the government and he was a powerful figure in the anti-Marxist faction of the governing party. It is well known that he was in the forefront of the campaign which succeeded in ousting the two Marxist ministers Philip Gunawardene and William Silva from the government in May 1959.

With the split in the EBP over the paddy lands legislation the "progressive" faction formed another organisation called *Lanka Sangha Sabha*. Buddharakkhita, the key figure in what was left of the EBP, smarting under his failure to prevent the Paddy Lands Act coming into operation was soon envisaging a change of party leadership. As a key figure in the SLFP, he made an attempt to oust Bandaranaike from party leadership at the election of party office bearers in late 1958. Failing that in early 1959 he was considering the possibility of forming a new political party.[15]

If the Bandaranaike administration of 1956-59 witnessed the peak of *bhikkhu* influence on the political life of Sri Lanka, his assassination in September 1959 saw an equally dramatic reversal. The revelation that the assassination was master-minded by a group led by Buddharakkhita resulted in a strong wave of condemnation of *bhikkhus* involvement in politics. Perhaps this tragic incident was a mere opportunity for the sudden outburst of a popular opinion which had been gathering momentum in spite of the scholarly reasonings of the Vidyalankara *bhikkhus* and politics in practice by their successors of the SJS and the EBP. Hence, after 1959 for several years *bhikkhus* thought it politic to keep away from public functions other than strictly religious ones. Significantly, at the two general elections of 1960, in March and July, there was a complete absence of *bhikkhus* on political platforms. In course of time, however, *bhikkhus* were to return to the political platform. But it needs be noted that *bhikkhu* political involvement never recovered from the terrible misdeeds of September 1959.

Looking back at the events of the 1950s while one could say that the Buddhist pressure group led by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress succeeded in effecting some positive changes, the sum total of *bhikkhu* involvement as active political protagonists or generally as a pressure group was negative. This is very much in contrast to the role played by the Vidyalankara *bhikkhus* who should get a large part of the credit for the educational reforms of the late-1940s.

## The *Bhikkhu* Comeback after the Debacle of 1959

During the premiership of Sirimavo Bandaranaike (1960-65) the *bhikkhus* were able to stage a comeback into political activity, albeit in a less prominent way. Several factors facilitated their re-entry. These were

(a)     the issue of the state take-over of schools (1960)
(b)     the abortive *coup* attempt led by some Christian officers in the armed services (1962)
(c)     the issue of controlling the major newspaper companies (1964)
(d)     the "toddy proposal" and the campaign against the Marxist members of the Cabinet (1964)

The most salient political issue of the early 1960s was the completion of the process of state control over education begun by Kannangara in the second State Council. With the Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act of 1960, the government of Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike went ahead with extending state control over the "assisted schools" most of which were being controlled by Christian organisations. The Roman

Catholic hierarchy, which controlled most of the leading schools, put up a resolute opposition to the move, and there was a period of acute tension, which fortunately did not lead to any outbreak of violence. While the UNP opposed the move the government received the support of the Marxists. There were public meetings and newspaper campaigns in support of the government move and, as could be expected, some *bhikkhus* joined in this popular movement.

In 1962 there was an abortive *coup d'état* in which the leadership consisted of certain Catholic and other Christian officers in the army, navy, and the police. The revelations that occurred during the trial created a great deal of political sympathy for Mrs Bandaranaike. The schools take-over issue appeared to be one cause for the coup attempt. Several *bhikkhus* began coming into the popular campaigns against "Catholic Action" launched by Buddhist leaders such as L H Mettananda and the *Bauddha Jatika Balavegaya.*

Towards the end of Mrs Bandaranaike's first tenure of office as Prime Minister the *bhikkhus* got an opportunity to return to politics on a larger scale because of two issues – the press control issue and the "toddy proposals" by the Minister of Finance N M Perera.

The issue over the control of the press came up with the publication of the *Report of the Press Commission* in 1964. Exposing the fact that the two major newspaper companies, the Lake House Group and the Times of Ceylon Group had followed a deliberate policy of safeguarding the privileges of the Christian minority "which they had grabbed from the Buddhist populace during the last four centuries," the commission recommended the remedy of bringing all newspapers under the control of an independent Press Council. The publication of the *Report of the Press Commission* coincided with the budgetary proposals of the Minister of Finance N M Perera who had joined the government a few months earlier under a coalition agreement with Mrs Bandaranaike's SLFP. Among his budgetary proposals was a measure to allow under license, permission to tap palm trees for the production of toddy – an alcoholic beverage. It was envisaged that this would have the effect of reducing the manufacture of illicit liquor as well as increase government revenue. The major newspaper companies, now threatened by impending state control, grabbed the opportunity of discrediting the government for such open encouragement of liquor production and consumption. Special features were published in the newspapers, pamphlets were written and distributed, public meetings were organised and hitherto politically indifferent *bhikkhu* leaders such as Amunugama Vipassi, the *Mahanayaka* of Malvatta and Kalukondayawe Prajnasekera, the Dean of the faculty of Oriental studies at Vidyodaya University were persuaded to join the campaign against the "toddy proposal." Other prominent Buddhist leaders enlisted in the campaign against the government were the *bhikkhus* Talpavila Seelavamsa of the then defunct EBP, and Devamottave Amaravamsa of the defunct SJS and the leader of the not so active BJB, L H Mettananda. The newspaper companies were thus trying to revive the potency of a weakened Buddhist leadership for their own advantage.

A Bill purporting to transfer the ownership of the Lake House Group of newspapers to a government corporation was presented to parliament on 15 October 1964. On 6 November a joint action committee of Buddhist organisations issued a public statement

opposing the press take over. This committee included organisations such as the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress, the Young Men's Buddhist Association of Colombo, the Buddhist Theosophical Society, the *Mahabodhi* Society, the *Bauddha Jatika Balavegaya* and the Buddhist Students Federation. An appeal to the same effect by the *Mahanayaka* of Malvatta, the venerable Amunugama Vipassi, was rejected by the Prime Minister and on 28 November the *Mahanayakas* of Malvatta and Asgiriya summoned a public meeting in which the leaders of the UNP and the MEP also participated.

Several new organisations of *bhikkhus* came up. The *Maha Sangha Peramuna* under the leadership of *bhikkhus* Devamottave Amaravamsa and Meetiyagoda Gunaratana, and *Samastha Lanka Maha Sangha Sabha*, *Thrai Nikayika Bhiksu Peramuna*, *Thrai Nikayika Maha Sangha Sabha* were all *ad hoc* anti-government organisations, obviously sponsored by the newspaper interests. There was one organisation however, the revived *Lanka Eksath Bhiksu Mandalaya* under the leaderships of Nattandiye Pannakara, a Vidyalankara *bhikkhu*, which continued to support the government in what it believed was a measure controlling an institution which had gained notoriety as "a bastion of reaction."

The government was defeated at the voting for the Throne Speech in November, 1964 because a section of the government party led by a cabinet member voted against it. He accused the government of "accepting the anti-religions principles of totalitarianism" and discarding "the advice of the *maha sangha* of the three *nikayas*, thereby leading the country to chaos."[16] Parliament was dissolved soon after, and a general election was held. In the election campaign large numbers of *bhikkhus* appeared on the UNP platform appealing to the electorate to save the country from Marxist dictatorship. In an unprecedented event the *Mahanayaka* of Malvatta himself had a long statement printed and distributed to all the temples in the island, a venture probably financed by the newspaper companies. In the face of such a formidable opposition the pro-government campaign of the few *bhikkhus* of the LEBM had little impact, and the UNP, in coalition with the MEP and the FP came to office in 1965.

In spite of the debacle of 1964-65 the administration of Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike witnessed the consolidation of Buddhist supremacy in the socio-political life of Sri Lanka. The schools take-over completed the replacement of Christian interests by Buddhist interests in the educational system. In the aftermath of the abortive coup in 1962, the incumbent at the Governor General's post Sir Oliver Goonatilleke, an Anglican, was removed, and William Gopallawa, a Buddhist was appointed, and soon after, many changes were made in the hierarchy of the armed forces, a virtual purge, under the direction of N Q Dias, the Buddhist activist who now held the powerful post of the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Defence and External Affairs.

## Elite Displacement: The Triumph of Orthodox *Bhikkhus*

The UNP administration of 1965-70 witnessed a remarkable transformation of the public views on *bhikkhus* leadership. The influence and prestige of the politically active *bhikkhus* which had suffered a heavy blow after the Bandaranaike assassination continued to decline.

And the *Mahanayakas* of Malvatta and Asgiriya, with their tradition on non-partisanship came to be viewed as the more acceptable spokesmen of Buddhist interests.

The Dudley Senanayake government of 1965-70 had to face the opposition of the *bhikkhus* and the traditionalist Sinhala elite in two major issues during its administration. They were the enactment of Regulations for the use of Tamil in government transactions as laid down in the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958, and the Regional Councils issue, both concerning concessions to the Tamil minority whose representatives, the Federal Party, had now become coalition partners in the government. In both these issues the SLFP and the two Marxist parties, the LSSP and the CP, enlisted the support of *bhikkhus*, Buddhist organisations and teachers unions to campaign against what was termed as a betrayal of Sinhala interests. The *Mahanayaka* of Malvatta, who had supported the UNP to come into power, himself came out in opposition to the Act.

On 8 January 1966 when the voting on the Act was to take place an anti-government street demonstration ended in a police shooting and one novice monk losing his life. This incident was described by a SLFP propagandist as "the only instance since colonial times when a *bhikkhu* sacrificed his life for a nationalist cause."[17] In spite of such vehement opposition the government went ahead with the legislative enactment.

In the other issue, which became public as the Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Agreement whereby it was expected, among other things, to set up District Councils which was designed to transfer a measure of political power from the central government to elected bodies at the level of districts. Although it was specifically stated that these councils were to function "under the control and direction of the central government" the bill provoked a wave of protest from Sinhalese interest groups who were joined by the Muslim minority group as well. An opposition politician R G Senanayake, a cousin of the Prime Minister, formed a new party called the Sinhala Mahajana Paksaya which had the special blessings of a considerable section of the Buddhist clergy. As the opposition to the District Council Bill gathered momentum there were misgivings within the UNP as well about the political wisdom of the proposal and the Prime Minister was forced in mid 1969 to abandon it.[18]

During the premiership of Dudley Senanayake certain steps were taken to placate Buddhist opinion. In 1965 a *poya* holiday system (one based on the lunar cycle) was adopted in place of the Sunday holidays. In recognition of the exalted status of the two *Mahanayakas* of Malvatta and Asgiriya they were offered two official residences in Colombo. And a Buddhist institution of higher learning was established in the historic city of Anuradhapura.

When the United Left Front under the leadership of Mrs Bandaranaike came into power in 1970 another significant step consolidated the supremacy of Buddhist interests. In the new Republican constitution of 1972 it was stated.

> The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster Buddhism while assuring of all religions the rights guaranteed by 18(1)(d).

Viewed in the historical context this recognition was merely a symbolic gesture bestowing on Buddhism what was deemed "the rightful status" in the Sri Lankan polity. It needs particular mention that all other religions had their own rights guaranteed by the constitution.

In spite of several populist measures to its credit the 1970 government headed by Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike continued to become unpopular and suffered an ignominious defeat at the parliamentary elections of 1977. The UNP came into power with an almost 4/5 majority in parliament. A new Constitution was adopted in 1978. While retaining the "foremost place" given to Buddhism and to the official status given to the Sinhala language by the first Republican Constitution, the new Constitution sought to meet the grievances of the estranged Tamil community by the inclusion of several new features. These were guarantee of fundamental rights, the recognition of Tamil as a "national language" and the recognition of Tamil as a language of administration. These measures, however, failed to satisfy the extremist elements in the Tamil community who had by this time launched a movement for the establishment of a separate state.

The constitutional imprimatur given to the primacy of Buddhism in public affairs remained a grievance of the Tamil community. In the resolution adopted at the inauguration of the Tamil United Liberation Front in 1976, specific reference was made to the special status accorded to Buddhism as one of the manifestations of "aggressive Sinhala nationalism."

## Tamil Separatism and the Sinhala-Buddhist Response

Beginning from about mid-1970s several Tamil separatist groups have been carrying on a terrorist movement using guerrilla tactics aiming at the establishment of Eealm, a Tamil state in the Northern and Eastern areas of the country. South Indian territory had been used as a base by several of these terrorist groups and India was providing them training facilities and even arms.[19] Tamil terrorists have occasionally attacked targets in Colombo and other areas inflicting heavy casualties on Sinhalese civilians on the grounds that the Sri Lankan armed forces have inflicted such casualties on the Tamil civilian population. There have been incidents such as the massacre of a bus-load of *bhikkhus* at Arantalawa in the Eastern Province and an attack on the Sacred Bo Tree premises at Anuradhapura where 146 pilgrims and *bhikkhus*. The events that led to the signing of the Rajiv Gandhi-J R Jayewardene Accord of July 1987 and the induction of an 'Indian Peace-Keeping Force' into the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka have been documented in detail and, hence, need to repetition here. What requires specific mention, however, is that, despite the massive wave of protest by the Sinhalese which accompanied the signing of the Accord, the Parliament passed with a two thirds majority the 13th Amendment to the Constitution whereby Tamil was given equality of status with Sinhala as a national official language.

The separatist war effected many developments within the ranks of the Buddhist interest groups. Firstly, *bhikkhu* political activism, which had received a massive reversal in the wake of the Bandaranaike assassination was able to recover and stage a strong comeback during the more dramatic moments of the war. Instances such as the Arantalawa and

Anuradhapura massacres provided the opportunity for *bhikkhu* activists to come forward as defenders of the Sinhala race, and the *Deshapremi Bhiksu Peramuna, Deshapremi Taruna Bhiksu Sanvidhanaya, Samasta Lanka Pragathishili Bhiksu Peramuna* which are exclusively *bhikkhu* organisations and the *Sinhala Bala Mandalaya, Sinhala Janatha Peramuna, Jatika Peramuna, Jatika Chintanaya* group, *Hela Urumaya* group, and the *Mavbima Surakime Vyaparaya* most of which include both lay and *bhikkhu* members have come up since the late 1980s in response to the threat posed by terrorism and secessionism in the north of the island. The general role played by these organisations is that of defenders of Sinhala-Buddhist interests whenever politicians appeared to be "betraying" them for the sake of political expediency.

A highly significant aspect of the phenomenon of Sinhala–Buddhist political activism has been its ideological justification. A dramatisation of the issues involved occurred in 1993 in the aftermath of the publication of a book entitled *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka* by Stanley Jeyaraj Tambiah, a professor at Harvard University, an expatriate Tamil, Christian, Sri Lankan. In this book, Tambiah argued that the basic principles of scriptural Buddhism had been "betrayed" by the modern Buddhist political activists, prominent among whom are *bhikkhus,* themselves, so that

> Important tenets of their religion regarding detachment, compassion, tranquillity and non-violence and the overcoming of mental impurities are subordinated and made less relevant to Sinhala religio-nationalism and social reform goals. In this changed context, Buddhism in its militant, populist,. ...form, as espoused by certain groups, seem to... have been emptied of much of its normative and humane ethic... and to function as a marker of crowd and mob identity, as a rhetorical mobiliser of volatile masses, and an instigator of spurts of violence.[20]

An intense campaign occurred in the Sri Lankan press, as protest against Tambiah's book. Understandably, the Buddhist activists saw in these questionings, occurring as they did in a context where the Eelamist lobby was highly active in the US and in Northern Europe, as an attempt to weaken them morally and ideologically. As Nalin de Silva, a former professor of Mathematics and a chief spokesman in the *Jatika Chintanaya* group put it, the Buddhists in Sri Lanka have been forced into activism by circumstances:

> when we look at the history of this country the truth that emerges is that Buddhists have resorted to war (violence) only for self-defence. The Buddhists have never resorted to war for propagating their religion or for imperial expansion... It is not wrong for the *bhikkhus* to get involved in political activity as it has happened in the past and as it happens today. We can cite statements supporting such action from the works of the Buddha himself. For *bhikkhus* to be active in religious nationalism is not a drifting away from the doctrine or a betrayal of Buddhism. What happens there is nationalism being enriched by Buddhism... At the same time lay Sinhalese Buddhists have for self preservation engaged themselves in violent politics (in war). If that did not happen there would not have been a Sinhala nation today.[21]

As far as the leadership among the *bhikkhu* opinion leaders is concerned another significant development seems to have occurred during recent years. While the more

vociferous and the more aggressive type of *bhikkhu* received the ears of authorities as well the general public in the 1940s and the 1950s, there is very little credence given to such *bhikkhus* today. As mentioned earlier, established authority in the *sangha*, the *Mahanayakas* of the three *Nikayas*, are generally considered the authentic representatives of Buddhist opinion. Also, *bhikkhus* who have generally not been identified with any political party, but who are well known for their piety and erudition, like venerable Madihe Pannasiha also are highly respected as Buddhist opinion leaders. Incidents during the period 1970-90 have generally contributed to strengthen these trends. For example, the "unification" of the highly fragmented Amarapura *Nikaya* with one *Mahanayaka* as the head of the *Samastha Lanka Amarapura Maha Sangha Sabhava*, a post held for many years by Madihe Pannasiha, has strengthened the position of the Amarapura sect. It has also given Rev. Pannasiha greater recognition as an opinion leader. Secondly, the creation of the *Uttaritara Sangha Sabhava* where the *Mahanayakas* of all three *Nikayas* come together to advice the Ministry of Buddha Sasana established under the Premadasa presidency has virtually created an officially recognised apex institution which represents Buddhist interests.

The *Deshapremi Bhiksu Peramuna* (The Patriotic Bhikkhu Front) which published the above rebuttal by Nalin de Silva to Tambiah's *Buddhism Betrayed?* is an organisation of young bhikkhus which came to the limelight in the early 1990s. There are several such bhikkhu organisations generally consisting young *bhikkhus* which sprang up or come into the limelight during the last decade or so. Thus for example, the *Samastha Lanka Eksath Bhiksu Sammelanaya, Dharmadvipa Arakshaka Bhiksu Sanvidhanaya, Ruhunu Rata Bkhisu Peramuna, Kelani Visva Vidyala Bhiksu Sanvidhanaya, Sri Jayewardenepura Visva Vidyalaya Bhiksu Peramuna,* and *Antar Visva Vidyaliya Bhiksu Bala Mandalaya* – the last three being *bhikkhu* organisations in the universities. All the *bhikkhu* organisations have come under the umbrella organisation *Jatika Ekabaddha Kamituva* (National Joint Committee) which was formed in 1995 in order to counter the moves of the PA Government to effect a devolution of power to regional units. The proposal devolution was seen by these *bhikkhu* organisations as a sell-out to the secessionist Tamil groups who have been carrying on a persistent campaign for the creation of a separate Tamil state in the northern and eastern parts of the island.

The National Joint Committees includes 46 organisations that have come together to work against what they allege to be "a dismemberment of the country" and "an attempt to pave the way for the establishment of a separate Tamil state." Some organisations that have become part of the NJC are longstanding Buddhist associations such as Colombo Young Men's Association, The *Mahabodhi* Society, The All Ceylon Buddhist Congress and the Buddhist Theosophical Society. In addition some recently formed organisations too are included in the NJC. Namely, The *Dharma Vijaya Padanama, Samastha Lanka Bauddha Kantha Sammelanaya, Sinhala Arakshaka Sanvidhanaya, Loka Bauddha Sammelanaya, Sasana Sevaka Samitiya, Cintana Parshadaya,* the Success Organisation, *Swarna Hansa Padanama,* Sri Lanka *Ekiya Sanvidhanaya* and *Sinhala Vira Vidahana.* While all these organisations are fairly well known as they have been active in one way or the other, several other organisations mentioned as constituents of the NJC are of very recent origin. They are the professional organisations such as *Bauddha Vaidya Sangamaya,* Sinhala *Nitigna Sangamaya* and *Ekiya Lanka Injineru Samitiya,* of the physicians, lawyers and engineers respectively, and other organisations

with religious, ethnic or political focus such as *Panca Bala Sabhava, Sinhala Sanvardhana Sanvidhanaya, Ekiya Sri Lanka Arakshaka Sanvidhanaya, Lanka Deshapremi Sanvidhanaya, Sri Lanka Daham Denuma Padanama, Dharmadvipa Padanama, Puravesi Handa, Lakvesi Peramuna, Sinhala Sahajivana Sangamaya, Kelanipura Bauddha Bala Mandalaya, Tavalama Sanvardhana Padanama, Sri Lanka Deshapremi Peramuna, Bauddha Punarjivana Mandalaya, Sinhale Nidahas Peramuna, Sri Lanka Bauddha Peramuna, The Sinhala Sangamaya* of the United Kingdom and the *Sinhala Bala Mandalaya* of the United Kingdom. As their names indicate the last two are overseas organisations.

Interestingly, one constituent organisations in the NJC is the *Deshapremi Kristiani Vyaparaya* (the Patriotic Christian Movement). Possibly some professional organisations mentioned above such as those of physicians, lawyers and engineers also include some Christians as well.

In 1995 the NJC appointed an independent commission which came to be known as the Sinhala Commission, to invite submissions and to identify the injustices suffered by the Sinhalese people and to make recommendations for the removal of those injustices. The Commission visited several parts of the country and published an interim report in 1997 and its conclusions and recommendations in July 1998. Interestingly, while the majority of the groups and individuals who appeared before the Commission to give evidence were Buddhists there were two delegations from among the Christians, one lay, and the other clerical. Two matters highlighted by these Christian delegations need special mention.

The three Christian clerics conceded that "the Sinhalese-Buddhists of this country suffered much in the hands of the various brands of Christianity that invaded our land." They proceeded to state: "In the spirit of the works of Pope John II we hasten to tender our apologies to the Sinhalese-Buddhists." Also, contradicting the stance taken by critics such as Professor Tambiah, the Christian priests stated: "Buddhism, even as a religion practised in our land, it has to be conceded, has reflected the liberative experience of its core message to a remarkable high degree," asking the questions "How else can we explain, as for instance the sense of tolerance shown to minority groups, in Hinduism, Islam and Christianity?"[22]

Another significant point made by the Christian dignitaries was the fact that for the overall moral and cultural development of the Sri Lankan Society as a whole, due recognition needs be given to the rights and aspirations of the majority of the populace. They highlighted the fact that if the majority has been wronged, and continues to suffer the deprivations that had been heaped on it, the overall moral and material of developmental efforts not averse to the giving of due recognition to Buddhism in the Sri Lankan polity.[23]

This brings us to the most prominent of the political issues today, the devolution proposals of the People's Alliance government. These proposals known as "The Package" has had mixed responses. The proposals put forward in piecemeal fashion from late 1994 when Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga was sworn in as President, were finally incorporated into a draft constitution which was published in October 1997. It appears that the major Buddhist organisations oppose these proposals. The most vociferous opposition came from

organisations such as the *Jatika Sangha Sabhava* where the prominent figures are venerable Maduluwawe Sobhita and venerable Muruttettuwe Ananda and the *Deshapremi Bhiksu Peramuna* whose leading figure is venerable Bengamuve Nalaka. At the same time, however, there is a group of monks, who are also political supporters of the ruling People's Alliance, who have come out openly in support of the government proposals. The key figures among them are, venerable Kumburugamuve Vajira and venerable Watinapaha Somananda, the latter being the President of the *Sri Lanka Bhiksu Peramuna*. After a period of intense debate, the four *Mahanayakas* (chief incombents) of the three *Nikayas* met on 20 January 1998 in Kandy, and decided to "totally reject" the government's draft constitution. The reasons stated in the statement issued under the signature of venerable Rambukwelle Sri Vipassi of Malvatta, and venerable Palipana Chandananda of Asgiriya, the two High Prelates of the Siamese Sect, venerable Madihe Pannasiha, the head of the Amarapura Sect and venerable Wewaldeniye Medhalankara, the head of the Ramanna Sect, were:

(a)   That it will lead to the creation of ethnically based units dismembering the unitary state of Sri Lanka

(b)   That it will not bring about peace as expected, and

(c)   That it will definitely lay the foundation for the Eelam of the separatists

While it can be conjectured that the *bhikkhus* by and large would be opposed to the government's devolution proposals and that those who support it consist a small minority of party loyalists we cannot help observing a general lack of enthusiasm on this issue among the *sangha*. This lack of enthusiasm on a crucial national issue is all the more obvious when compared with the situation in the mid-1950s over the national language issue. One reason for this could be the bad publicity the politically active *bhikkhus* received during the last four decades or so.

Another possible reason for the non-involvement of large numbers of *bhikkhus* in this type of issue could be due to what appears as a strong inclination among younger bhikkhus to be sympathetic to the anti establishment Janatha Vimukti Peramuna. It has been no secret that the JVP insurrection of 1971 as well as that of 1988-89 had enlisted a sizeable number of young bhikkhus, particularly from among university students. It has been revealed that during both insurgencies the JVP organisational structure included a "bhikkhu front" (*bhikshu peramuna*) along with "student," "women," "worker," and "youth" fronts. Even presently, a strong JVP presence among the university students is a well known reality. And it is alleged that just as much as the *Antar Vishva Vidyaliya Sishya Bala Mandalaya* (the Inter-University Student Federation) is in essence a JVP dominated organisation, the *Antar Vishva Vidyaliya Bhikshu Bala Mandalaya* which is a similar inter-university organisation of *bhikkhus*, has identical political leanings.

The young *bhikkhus* with such a political orientation are generally critical of the older *bhikkhus* who are loyal to the establishment represented by the *Mahanayakas*. Apart from the generation gap there obviously is an ideological cleavage in which the young *bhikkhus* are for an active involvement in socio-political issues particularly with a radical political transformation

as envisaged in the JVP ideology. In that context it appears unlikely that the young *bhikkhus* would take up with enthusiasm issues in which the other *bhikkhus* play the leading role.

## Notes

1.    Duverger, 1954, p 120.

2.    K M de Silva, 1993, p 311.

3.    Dharmadasa, 1997, pp 250-255.

4.    Wijesekera, 1973, p 157.

5.    Rahula, 1948, Introduction.

6.    Debates of the State Council, 1947, col. 1254, 1255, 1433, 1489.

7.    Debates of the State Council, 1947, col. 1665.

8.    Pragnaarama, 1970, pp 115-116.

9.    2,500th anniversary of Buddha's death.

10.   For details see Phadnis, 1976.

11.   K M de Silva, 1993, p 320.

12.   For a comprehensive summary see Phadnis, 1976, pp 217-220.

13.   Phadnis, 1976, p 138.

14.   Phadnis, 1976, p 271.

15.   *The Report on the Assassination of Prime Minister S W R D Bandaranaike*, Sessional Paper III of 1965, pp 51-52.

16.   Speech of C P de Silva, reported in *The Ceylon Daily News*, 4 November 1964.

17.   Jayakody, 1967, p 221.

18.   de Silva, 1986, p 193.

19.   Weaver, 1988

20.   Tambiah, 1992, p 92.

21.   Nalin de Silva, 1993, pp 22-23.

22.   *The Island*, 3 August, 1997.

23.   *op.cit.*

24.   Wasantha Dissanayake, *et.al.*, pp 276-278.

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# Religion and Processes of Modernisation in Contemporary Sri Lanka

## John Clifford Holt

In this essay, two ways in which modernisation is changing the character of Buddhism within the recent Sri Lankan social context are explored. My approach is guided by the theoretical assumption that though religious sentiments are often generated and expressed individually and personally within philosophical, psychological, artistic or other contexts and discourses, institutionalised religion, including the performance of rituals and the formal articulation of normative statements of doctrine, cosmology, ethics or more generally, world view, is intrinsically a socially conditioned phenomenon. As a socially significant phenomenon itself, religion may also affect the structures and ethos of society-at-large. That is, the relationship between religion and society is reflexive in nature. It follows from this that basic changes in society are often reflected in changes that take place in religious practice. Given the dramatic changes in Sri Lankan society during the post-colonial era, it is not surprising that the character and forms of religious expression are also changing dramatically in response.

Two recent studies of the relationship between religion and social change in contemporary Sri Lanka adroitly identify several emergent patterns of affected religious practice. George Bond[1] analyses how Sri Lanka's social processes of modernisation have contributed to the rise of lay oriented and individualistic "Protestant Buddhism," the political "neo-traditionalism" of the 1950s Buddha Jayanthi period, the increasing practice of *vipassana* meditation among the laity, and socio-ethical programmes aimed at economic development (especially the Sarvodaya Shramadana movement). Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere[2] have studied the manner in which population migration and intensified urbanisation have abetted the emergence of "Protestant Buddhism," some newly incorporated Buddhist rituals (such as marriage and *bodhi puja*) for the laity, the resurgence of Buddhist "nuns," and numerous cults of "spirit religion" or "white magic" in Colombo, the latter of which, in turn, are exercising a profound influence on the practice of Buddhism in general, especially among urban middle class laity. While both of these studies offer compelling insights into the manner in which the modalities of religious revivals and transformations occur in response to social change, the sweep of religious change occurring throughout Sinhala society includes many other dimensions as well. We still await, for instance, major studies of the important changes now occurring within the ranks of the contemporary *sangha* or among the array of various types of village Buddhist communities throughout non-urbanised Sri Lanka. While I cannot undertake studies of those two major issues in this essay, I will explore briefly two other changing dimensions of religion affected by processes of modernisation, dimensions that are not addressed directly in the two previous studies noted above. The first of these is the apparent importance (assigned by many

scholars) of the role of religion in the dynamics of the current ethnic conflict. The second is the profound impact of technological change upon the nature and ethos of Buddhist ritual culture. What continues to transpire within these two dimensions (religion in relation to the politics of ethnicity and technology) of the modernising process will have profound impacts on how Buddhism is articulated in the 21st century. In the conclusion of this essay, I will also comment on some other trends likely to be of significance in the next century.

## The Politics of Ethnicity and Religion

My thesis in this first section of the essay is that the importance of religion in the current ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has been over-determined and overplayed by many and that, given the high profile religion has received in the popular press and in scholarly literature regarding the causes of Sri Lanka's turmoil, the culpability of religion, in fact, needs to be de-emphasised. Over concern about the role of religion misdirects attention away from the more fundamental problems now at hand and unnecessarily inflames passions that are already far too combustible. While some segments of the Buddhist community have definitely aggravated rather than ameliorated tense relations between the Tamil and Sinhala communities, I would contend that the deep-seated causes of ethnic alienation are more economic in kind than religious. In this section of the essay, I shall explain the reasons and in doing so, try to indicate that some of the more reactionary expressions of certain Buddhists are more a *response* to the current ethnic conflict than a major contributing *cause*.

Since the mid-1950s, and thus shortly after independence from British colonial rule, when the Western educated, Christian-raised and low country elite politician S W R D Bandaranaike[3] opportunistically raised the political stakes of ethnic identity in Sri Lanka by advocating to the majority masses of Sinhalese Buddhist voters a platform of instating "Sinhala only" as the sole official national language of the country and "restoring Buddhism to its rightful place," tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities have erupted sporadically, simmered and then spectacularly exploded (especially in the early 1980s) before degenerating into what has amounted to a protracted civil war. The ongoing political debate and military confrontation over the *de facto* or *de jure* division of the country by Tamil militants in the north and east of the island and the recalcitrance evident in both communities that prevents a negotiated political solution is but an expression of a deeper fundamental problem. The mounting number of violent deaths, including in 1993 the assassination of the president of the country, Ranasinghe Premadasa, and before that many other important government officials and politicians, the continuous disintegration of what was at one time a socially segmented yet relatively stable and somewhat ethnically cross-fertilised society, the deterioration and distortion of an economy already in a state of transitional development, the resulting increased diaspora or "brain drain" of talented Tamil and Sinhalese youth from the country, the often desperate plight of Sri Lankan Tamil expatriates as refugees or seekers of political asylum throughout the world, etc., have motivated an avalanche of recent academic studies from a variety of disciplinary perspectives aimed at ferreting out the root causes and tragic significance of "the ethnic conflict" in modern Sri Lanka.[4] The subject is very complex indeed, and I do not pretend to offer any facile solutions, nor, in fact, do I propose any radically new insights. I simply would like to provide a bit of balance in one facet of the

debate. It is true that religion has had a place in the political events of many eras of past Sri Lankan history, as it has certainly had in the political events of recent times. Indeed, the manner in which Buddhism has been implicated in the ethnic conflict is a measure of how its social significance has been manipulated. However, to reiterate, the gravity of responsibility sometimes assigned to Buddhism as a cause of the contemporary ethnic conflict has been over emphasised or partially misunderstood by some scholars and journalists.[5]

The academic analysis of ethnicity in Sri Lanka has rightly revolved around a discussion of how language[6] and religion are the two most powerful factors that create ethnic identity. These were, of course, precisely the very aspects of ethnicity that Bandaranaike appealed to when, caught up in the short-sightedness of seeking election as the country's prime minister in 1956, he unwittingly unleashed what was to become an uncontrollable force of modern historic proportions for post-colonial Sri Lanka. By appealing to the Sinhala ethnic sentiment of the majority masses, he also managed to alienate and to frighten the Tamil community. Sinhala ethnic consciousness and identities, despite extensive acculturation of Hindu and European Christian elements over many centuries by the Sinhala Buddhist community,[7] has a very protracted history in the island's politics, but perhaps Buddhism had never been so consciously manipulated before in the political life of the country until the 1950s. That Buddhism could become such a lightning rod symbol of post-independence Sinhala political power is quite understandable historically, given the preferential treatment enjoyed by Christianity and the suppressive measures suffered by Buddhists under British colonial rule.

While language and religion are no doubt important contributing factors to the formation of ethnic identity, the factors giving rise to ethnic consciousness or ethnic identity (language and religion) need not be regarded as the same factors giving rise to ethnic alienation. In a recent study of Buddhism, politics and art in 18th century Nayakkar Kandy,[8] I have discovered that the same kind of economic irritation between ethnic communities today actually existed between the Sinhalese and Tamils at that time as well. The difference between Nayakkar Kandy and the present condition is primarily one of scope and degree. It is therefore not surprising that, given the historical depth of the problem, control of economic opportunity remains a very critical factor in the contemporary acrimonious relations existing between the Sinhalese and Tamils in the present. The tragedy of ethnic conflict between the Sinhalese and Tamils seems to be born of the social act that both communities have now developed the perception that they are economically disadvantaged in relation to one another. Both seem to be mired in "minority complexes" with regard to perceived economic opportunity. Moreover, economic rivalry might be understood as the most aggravating root cause, not only between Sinhalese and Tamils, but between the various classes of both ethnic communities as well. The fact of the matter is that the lower class masses of each community have continued to feel alienated or disenfranchised from the *status quo* of the political economy. The economic problem, therefore, spans both ethnic and class divisions in modern Sri Lanka.

With regard to current Tamil alienation, G H Peiris has described the contemporary situation in the following terms:

> [t]he increasing politicisation of administrative processes and what it has meant in respect of the disbursement of benefits of development among the people appear to have had an even more profound impact upon ethnic relations in Sri Lanka, especially on the increasing alienation of the Sri Lankan Tamils from the economic mainstreams of the country...[A]lmost throughout the period after independence, the Sri Lankan Tamils have been in 'opposition' which, in turn, meant that their interest and aspirations...have not been adequately represented in the vital day to day affairs of government. Though some of the frequently articulated Tamil claims seem to lack substance and objectivity, it cannot be denied that, especially since the early 1970s, the working of the political system in respect of economic affairs placed them permanently in the position of a disadvantaged segment of the electorate. To some extent the emergence of a militant separatist movement among them can be attributed to this phenomenon.[9]

One could read Peiris's description of the contemporary dynamics of Sri Lanka's political economy and imagine its accuracy in principle for depicting the dynamics afoot in the Kandyan kingdom some two hundred and fifty years ago, except that the group being precluded from participating in the administration of the economy at that time would be the Kandyan Sinhalese nobles and members of the Buddhist *sangha*, largely alienated by an economic disenfranchisement due to various reforms initiated by the Kandyan Nayakkar king, Kirti Sri Rajasinha, attempted to assassinate a Tamil head of state. In 1993, Tamil militants, though they deny it publicly, may have been responsible for the murder of a Sinhalese head of state, as well as several other leading government officials.

While religion and especially language are certainly ethnically definitive and have functioned as powerful political rallying cries that guarantee votes in popular elections, perceived economic deprivation produces a still more powerful emotion. Again, language and religion are formative for ethnic identity, but perceptions of who has more and who has less, and who controls access to who will have more or less in the future, foster alienation *per se*, whether or not it is alienation along ethnic lines or between classes within ethnic communities. Economic deprivation certainly was the deep-seated motive in the failed, intra-ethnic conflicts or revolutionary movements launched by the Sinhalese Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) in 1971 and again in 1988-90, when masses of rural and economically disadvantaged and therefore alienated Sinhala youth sought to disestablish what was perceived to be an elite-Sinhala dominated government acting preferentially in the interests of those with vested political and economic power (JVP Buddhist statements about protecting "the motherland" notwithstanding). Perceived economic deprivation was also a key motivation in the rise of the revolutionary Tamil militants, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who have displaced the traditional political leadership of the Sri Lankan Tamil community formerly provided by the more well-to-do land-owning caste of the Jaffna peninsula. In neither Sinhala nor Tamil revolutionary contexts has Buddhism or Hinduism played a significant role in either the formation of ideology or in the claims of special identity. In the late 1980s there were a few rare attempts by the JVP to directly link religion (Buddhism) to their cause and only very

sporadically have attempts been made to link the cause of the LTTE to religion (Christian liberation theology).

To illustrate and further frame the pivotal importance of the economic factor in creating alienation between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities and in order to press my case for de-emphasising the religious factor as a key contributor to the ethnic conflict, I need to digress.

During the last week of July 1983, one day after riots had erupted throughout the neighbourhoods of Borella in the Colombo district on the Sunday evening following the funerals of thirteen Sinhalese government soldiers who had been blown up by a land mine allegedly planted by Tamil revolutionaries in the Jaffna peninsula the week before, I arrived in Sri Lanka to begin a two year stint of teaching and research. On my way from the airport to the city, I could see, in all directions, plumes of smoke steaming skyward from burning factories, stores and houses (which I learned later were owned by Colombo Tamils). Backtracking on major thoroughfares in order to reach Negombo in search of safer environs, I observed a scene that, in hindsight, was important for how I eventually came to understand the other bewildering events that occurred during the rest of a week that was filled with killing and arson throughout the Sinhalese regions of the island. While nearing the strip of beach hotels in Negombo, I observed a group of young men who were throwing stones at one of the hotels, tentatively breaking into its premises, retreating, and then stoning it again. About a half an hour later, the hotel under siege had been set ablaze, its occupants and employees sent fleeing on to the beach or into the road while the gang of young men who had been throwing stones set about finishing off their work. I was but one of several Westerners who simply stood paralysed and watched as the hotel was looted and almost totally destroyed by fire.

Now, most academicians and journalists have emphasised specifically how the politicisation of religion and language are the deep-seated reasons giving rise to Sri Lanka's continuing pattern of communal violence over the past 40 years and have cited, as I have also done in the opening paragraphs of this specific discussion, the pivotal Bandaranaike election campaign of 1956 filled with rhetoric about language and religion, a campaign that has fundamentally changed the political landscape of the island ever since. Furthermore, especially in Europe and America, the spectacular July 1983, week of violence was initially reported or typified by journalists and later often misconfirmed by some Western academicians (almost all of whom were not in Sri Lanka at the time) as a Sinhalese Buddhist/Tamil Hindu conflict. Even today, more than a decade after 1983, Western media reports of armed conflicts between the Sri Lankan military forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam almost always include a reference to the fact that the Sinhalese are Buddhists and that the Tamils are Hindu. In the academic context, it is still often asked whether or not the Buddhist religion itself, a religion known throughout Asia and the rest of the world for its teachings of peace, had not been betrayed by Sinhalese adherents, not only in the context of 1983, but more generally in the period leading up to and following political independence from Britain.[10] Buddhist militancy

has certainly been on the rise during this time of heightened ethnic consciousness and has certainly contributed to the problem by sharpening the delineated lines of ethnic identity. But one has to ask, is it really accurate to portray the ethnic conflict resulting in violence as the result of a religious split between Hindus and Buddhists? Was the defense of Buddhism a genuine underlying cause of violence in 1983 or, in general, for the ethnic conflict *per se*? Some Buddhist monks may have helped to inflame communalist passions. Some (a very notable Buddhist monk, Ven. Walpola Rahula, for instance)[11] have been so bold in published statements as to justify political violence in what is argued as a defense of the religion. In this particular instance, it can be said that the teachings, and especially the monastic discipline of the Buddha canonised in the *Vinayapitaka*, have been seriously misconstrued or tragically perverted. Students of Buddhist thought with a cursory understanding of the philosophical foundations of Buddhist ethics or a basic awareness of the manner in which village Buddhists essentialise the practice of Buddhism as fundamentally a matter of not killing,[12] should object to such blatant distortion whenever it appears in whatever guise. "Militant Buddhism," it should be understood, is but a militant response to the more general condition of militancy in contemporary Sinhala society. But it cannot be philosophically attributed to either the ontology of Buddhist ethics, or the ethos of village Buddhism. It is created by the politically (not religiously) inspired.

An over-emphasised and sometimes misplaced assumption in many of the scholarly attempts to sort out reasons for the 1983 conflagration has been that the perpetrators of the violence were all Buddhists and that the victims were all Hindu or Christian. Such a religious characterisation of the participants is thoroughly misleading. Furthermore, because popularised Buddhist sentiments, i.e. the *Mahavamsa's Dhammadipa* legacy that the Sinhalese people of Sri Lanka are destined to preserve Buddhism in its pristine purity, were (unfortunately) expressed by some misguided Buddhist zealots to rationalise or to explain away the crimes committed in July 1983, the case against Buddhism has proceeded apace. It should be noted, however, before returning to the question about exactly who was attacking whom at the Negombo hotel in 1983, that the same kind of discursive rationalisation was made in the 19th century of the 18th century Sinhalese Buddhist nobles and monks who attempted to eliminate their "heretical Saivite" king, Kirti Sri Rajasinha.[13] In both instances, reactionaries attempted to legitimate violence by appealing to the ruse of defense of the religion.

Certainly it is the case that language, traditional mythic and ritualistic religious patterns, and specifically and assiduously asserted religious identity, have all contributed to a heightening consciousness of ethnicity among Sinhalese Buddhists, especially since many post-independence politicians in Sri Lanka have often pandered to language and religion as the distinctive features of Sinhala ethnicity. But it does not follow that these critical elements contributing to ethnic identity are the direct causes for ethnic violence of the type characterising the 1983 pogrom, nor perhaps the essence of the conflict *per se* between these two ethnic communities since the 1950s.

Let me return to the incident that I witnessed on that scorching Monday in the last week of July 1983, to better illustrate my point. Those young men who looted and burned

that Negombo hotel, owned and operated by Tamils, were not the kind of organised (by chauvinistic sections of the government?) intruding thugs who, on the following day I saw arriving in lorries to begin torching Tamil shops in upcountry Peradeniya and Kandy. Rather, they were locals known to the employees and proprietors of the nearby hotel where I was staying. And, I was told that they were nominal Christians. That, of course, was not surprising, given the Negombo venue of this incident. My point, obviously, is not to blame Christians or Christianity for the communal violence I witnessed. Nor is it to argue that most of the perpetrators of violence in 1983 were not, in fact, nominal Buddhists. Instead, what I am trying to point out is that religion did not have much, if anything, to do with the immediate problem at hand. In this case specifically, and I now would assert in general, the violence of "ethnic conflict" is born of economic rivalry between communities who identity themselves ethnically primarily on the basis of language and only secondarily by religious affiliation. In Sri Lanka, being a Christian does not exclude one from being either Sinhalese or Tamil. Linguistic affinity is far more crucial in this regard. (This fact was cruelly born out during the 1983 violence in the method used by some groups of Sinhalese thugs who stopped public and private buses to discriminate between Sinhalese and Tamil passengers.) But while language, and to a much lesser extent religion, are definitive for ethnic identity, they need not be identified as the primary causes of violence. Indeed, genuine religious sentiment across Sri Lanka's religious communities remains one of the recognised hopes for ameliorating the continuing ethnic problem today, even though the ethnic split is currently so profound that the Roman Catholic Church has ruptured organisationally along Sinhalese and Tamil lines.

The immediate causes of the 1983 riots were at first emotional in nature. Violence (Tamil militant violence against Sinhalese soldiers) itself incited the passions for Sinhalese violence of the revengeful sort against Tamils in the south. Language and religion foster ethnic identity, aggressive violent provocation generated even greater ethnic violence, but the primary underlying causes of ethnic alienation setting the table for violence were (and remain) economic.

Those terrible events that occurred in that week in 1983, in turn, had the effect (as almost an example of *karmic* retribution) of refuelling the determination of Tamil militant groups to strike back with vengeance, in ways equally as despicable, in the years that have followed. The Tamil militants, as pointed out before, are also driven by a hatred bred originally and primarily from an economic grouse.[14] But what is stressed again is that Hinduism and Christianity have played no real part in the ideology of the Tamil Tigers (except perhaps only indirectly in their cult of martyrdom) just as Buddhism was not a major inspiration for the JVP, nor for the uncontrolled Sinhalese mobs of organised thugs in 1983. Religion, it has to be recognised finally, is not the primary culprit here. Only in a limited sense has the legacy of Buddhism been appealed to as an *ex post facto* rationalisation by some controversial zealots. Most truly religious Buddhists are genuinely peace-loving people, as are most truly religious Hindus and Christians. Many of them acted courageously in providing shelter to the desperate during the time when the police and army had absconded from their responsibilities. On the other hand, the politically inspired often misuse religious identity to

further their non-religious aims. One question regarding the future of religion in Sri Lanka in this particular instance is whether or not religion will be continuously abused by politicians and whether or not its powers to heal by means of raising ethical awareness can be harnessed for the betterment of society. Will religious leaders re-emerge within the Buddhist community, from either the *sangha* or the laity, who will muster the great courage needed to defend Buddhist tradition from further association with militance and political violence?

## Technology and the Transformation of Buddhist Religious Culture

This second part of the essay, deals with the other process of modernisation noted in the introduction. Historians of religions are aware that fundamental technological innovations, as well as sea changes in politics, can produce profound affects upon the nature of religious practice and culture. The invention of the printing press, for instance, made a dramatic impact upon the religious culture of Christianity during the birth of Protestantism in 16th century northern Europe. At the same time that Luther and Calvin were articulating and advocating forms of religiosity based upon personal, unmediated, non-ritualised, and non-priestly apprehensions of the sacred, the printing press was making it possible for the laity to read the Bible outside the context of specifically religious occasions and to contemplate individualised or private understandings of its spiritual meaning independent of mediated priestly interpretation. One only needs to recall how the proliferation of printing presses in the 19th century gave birth to a similar type of revolution in the Buddhist religious culture of Sri Lanka.[15] Today, in the pages of virtually every issue of every daily newspaper published in Sri Lanka, English or Sinhala alike, it is possible to find an article written about the meaning of Buddhist teachings by some pious layman. Moreover, most of the significant scholarship in Buddhist studies in the 20th century has been undertaken by lay Buddhists. This section, will examine some of the other ways in which the appropriation of technological advances have profoundly affected the nature of religious experience and Buddhist religious culture in contemporary Sri Lanka.

In a seminal article that eventually inspired a series of writings on "Protestant Buddhism,"[16] Obeyesekere has written about the manner in which colossal Buddha images have been constructed along public thoroughfares in contemporary urban Sri Lanka. His main point was that Buddhism was in the process of being dragged "out of the monastery and into the market place," that as a religion Buddhism was increasingly becoming a matter of public, lay and political discourse, rather than a spiritual sphere of social life marked off from or set apart from secular society by conventions of sacred space and sacred time. Since Obeyesekere made this astute observation, the pace of the secularisation of Buddhism seems to have accelerated even further in Sri Lanka. Increasing secularisation is seen not only in the manner in which Buddhism has been continuously and consciously incorporated into the political life of the country as a powerful constituent symbol of resurgent ethnic identity, but in a variety of other ways as well, these perhaps less intentional but significant in more than symbolic ways nonetheless. The number of monks receiving a secular education in public universities is a salient case in point. The number of Buddhist *viharayas* in urban Colombo with attached technical training institutes is another. The secularisation of Buddhism, I would argue, is fostered in part by technological change.

With regard to what has happened to the image of the Buddha in ritual context, who can deny that the public "persona" of the Buddha has not undergone a dramatic transformation since the proliferation of electrical power in Sinhalese society, one of the chief aims of all post colonial governments in Sri Lanka? Spectacular designs of "electric Buddhas" adorn the tops of pandals constructed in urban areas during Poson or Vesak celebrations each year. Far from expressing the qualities of gentility, serenity, wisdom and compassion (the religious values aesthetically articulated in centuries of traditional Buddha images ensconced within temples), these electrified behemoths render the Buddha image as a symbol of power and pomposity, a landmark blazing into the night seemingly signalling that the time for partying and revelry is definitely on. Religion need not always be a dour affair, but pulsating spectacles of the Buddha splashing a multi-coloured luminescence into the night are more emblematic of carnival time than sacred time. They convey a very different sense of "enlightenment." Perhaps overly illuminated and gaudily ornamented nativity scenes at Christmas reflect the same commercial and communal impulse to secularise the sacred not only in Sri Lanka, but wherever popular cultural expressions are given an unbridled free reign to transcend traditional conventions of aesthetico-religious sensibility within the context of symbolic and ritual form. As electricity has made possible the appearance of "the electric Buddha," newly emergent modern expressive cultural forms such as this actually seem to change the meaning of the symbol. If form follows function, then the question can be raised about whether the electric symbolisation of the Buddha doesn't somehow change what the image means in the contemporary social context. In this context, the Buddha image is clearly expressive of power.

Turning to another example of how technology assists the process of secularisation of Buddhist religious culture, spectacular advances during the last 50 years in transportation technology have made a profound impact on the religious culture of traditional sacred places and pilgrimage destinations. The pilgrimages to Kataragama or Sri Pada, for example, are no longer arduous physical experiences of asceticism requiring days and weeks to complete. They can be reached easily from any part of the island within a days drive by car or bus. Here, the effect of advancing technology has been at least twofold: on the one hand, more and more people visit these sacred sites each year, a phenomena that on the surface has lead some scholars to suggest that Sri Lanka is experiencing an upsurge in the popularity of deity veneration and vow-taking; on the other hand, it also suggests that "pilgrimages" to places like Kataragama have become part and parcel of a good holiday outing for family and friends, an event to be combined by the middle class perhaps with a concurrent visit to see the elephants at Yala National Park. Modern transportation has made possible a recreational aspect to ritual activity. That is, technological advances in transportation have lead to the domestication of ritual pilgrimage and accelerated the process by which popularised sacred sites now represent potential and realised venues for concerted commercialisation. The commercial exploitation of sacred sites in Sri Lanka seems no more apparent now than at the sites under the control of the offices of the so called "Cultural Triangle," a project initially and well-intentionally funded in part by UNESCO, but now one that has grown into a government backed business that seems to have taken on a life of its own. As jet planes have made Sri

Lanka a popular destination for European tourists in times when ethnic and class conflicts are not making headlines in the West, the "Cultural Triangle" has made the artistic, architectural, archaeological, and religious artefacts of Dambulla, Sigiriya, Polonnaruwa and Anuradhapura "user friendly" for visiting foreign tourists, but for a price that often exceeds by as much as an astounding 80 times the normal price of admission for Sri Lankan residents. The presence of hordes of European tourists being hawked unmercifully by tourist touts alters an atmosphere formerly conducive to spiritual exercises, or at least peaceful contemplation. Places at one time regarded as sacred have now been transformed into profitable international tourist attractions and politically significant domestic landmarks. The efforts of the "Cultural Triangle" are not far from producing a social experience similar to what the Government of Indonesia has wrought at Borobudur in Java where crowds of European and Muslim tourists daily enjoy their sandwiches, soft drinks and cigarettes on top of perhaps what is the most extraordinary Buddhist monument and pilgrimage site replete with the most exquisite Buddha images ever constructed. The line between secularisation and desecration is sometimes quite thin. In either case, sacrality is sacrificed.

Yet, there is an even more poignant example to consider. Technological advances in sound amplification have also produced a fundamental change in the religious experience of some Buddhist rituals. For those who have experienced the peace of mind produced from hearing the sonorous chants of Pali texts within *pirit* ceremonies, the distorted amplification of these chants through microphonic transmission are aurally antithetical to the affect produced by the natural version. Moreover, the changed character of this ritual, one that was formerly celebrated within the fairly intimate confines of a small attendant group of people, to one in which an entire neighbourhood or small town wittingly or unwittingly must participate aurally, perfectly illustrates the larger point of this second section of the essay: that technology has been a profound factor in the increasing secularisation of Buddhist religious culture. Or to put the matter in another way, the social culture of Buddhist ritual is being increasingly publicised, its contexts no longer constituted by sacred space or sacred time. Both sacred space and sacred time are in the process of becoming secularised, in a sense, desacralised, or perhaps even more ironically, "transcended."

## Conclusion

What is the prognosis for Buddhism in Sri Lanka during the 21st century? It will certainly depend upon the modernising and post-modernising forces affecting social change within the various sectors of Sinhala society and the manner in which Buddhists of various persuasions choose to respond to those changes. In a previous study, I argued that new religious forms are incorporated into the Sinhala Buddhist tradition not only because they are understood to be immediately efficacious in assuaging the problem of *dukkha*, but because they can be rationalised or situated within phases of the soteriological path of Theravada and thus related to its *telos*.[17] That argument, however, was derived from a detailed historical "macro analysis" of how elements of the Mahayana had been assimilated into Sri Lanka's Theravada tradition over a period covering some 13 centuries of religious change. Further, it was attributed to the inclusive propensity or ethos of traditional Sinhala Buddhism, a Buddhism whose structures now largely exist chiefly within the parameters of an enduring and conservative

village context. The changes addressed in this essay, as well as those characterised by Bond and Gombrich and Obeyesekere in their recent studies, have been chiefly concerned with the dynamics affecting urbanised and middle class Buddhists in contemporary times. I am not sure that these changes having to do with ethnicity and technology can be so readily incorporated and rationalised.

My sense is that during the 21st century the social and cultural gap between the urban and rural segments of Sinhalese society may continue to widen. As a result of this increasing gap and a continuation of recent trends, we might expect to see more of the kind of developments recently identified and analysed by Gombrich and Obeyesekere within the context of Colombo religious life, e.g., an acceleration and proliferation of forms of "spirit religion" which will have a significant impact on how Buddhists practice Buddhism. *Bodhi puja* is a relevant case in point. We might also expect to see, in the rural sector, the possibility of recurring JVP type of phenomena. The net result, therefore, is likely to be an increasing influence of supernaturalism or "white magic" in the lives of many Buddhists on the one hand, and a further politicisation of religion on the other. If this does occur, the question is whether or not the traditional inclusive ethos of Theravada tradition is elastic or creative enough to accommodate these pressures well into the future. In the past, Buddhism has been a kind of glue to the various dimensions of Sinhala culture and society, an ideological foundation for many of its social and cultural institutions. But with the appearance of so many diverse pressures from various segments of Sinhala society, one wonders if the middle path of the Buddha can retain its foundational legitimising function without suffering too many distortions in the process.

Another issue worthy of note in this context is reform. Since the beginning of the 20th century, those Buddhists following the persuasions of such people like the Anagarika Dharmapala have articulated an ethos not so much of inclusivity, but rather of exclusivity, an ethos that seems to have been building greater momentum in recent years. In his studies of Buddhism in Sri Lanka during the early 1980s, Southwold repeatedly drew our attention to a tension existing between urbanised middle class Buddhist "modernists" on the one hand and village Buddhists on the other. The "modernists" advocate an essentialised "true Buddhism" drawn from a doctrinal understanding of the Pali canon translated into English and are severely critical of what they regard as "accretions" that have "corrupted" village Buddhism, a Buddhism that "modernists" regard as medievally unenlightened.[18] This "modernist" attitude of exclusivity carries with it the possibility of future reform, but the irony here, according to Southwold, is that while reform movements generally carry out their task with the idea that they are seeking to re-establish the original form of Buddhism, in fact, in this instance, "modernist" reformers of the future may well engage in a process whereby they will succeed in emasculating village Buddhism of those very forms of practice which are, in fact, probably the most ancient.

Serious motivations for reform of the *sangha* may possibly lead to an ecclesiastical umbrella, or supra-organisation to oversee the disciplinary problems of the *sangha*, though stiff resistance to this possibility is sure to be offered.

The process that will definitely change the nature of Buddhism in the 21st century most significantly is secularisation. In this essay, I have attempted to provide some illustrations of how technology is changing the ethos of Buddhist ritual culture. In fact, this one aspect of secularisation is but a fragment of its overall significance. Urban Sri Lanka, and to a lesser extent village Sri Lanka, is now bombarded by international influences owing not only to the spectacular growth of telecommunications since 1979 when television was first introduced, but owing as well to the opening up of Sri Lanka's markets within the context of a globalising world economy. It may come as a too obvious and also as well worn generalisation or adage, but few in this country would doubt the fact that a smaller percentage of youth these days are inclined to embrace a religious world view, or to regard religion as seriously as previous generations. Moreover, there are others, rightfully critical of the non-traditional social and economic behaviour of some monks, who wonder whether or not a smaller percentage of the *sangha* actually embrace a religious world view as well. In any case, if Sri Lanka's experience of secularisation follows the patterns characteristic of other Asian cultures, especially those in East Asia, the importance of Buddhism as an ideological foundation for Sinhala culture and society, or as the substance of a viable modern personal world view, may further recede.

Finally, a case might be made that the resurgence of the order of "nuns" in Sri Lanka may be a harbinger of a larger trend to come. It is very possible that the first ordained Sinhala Buddhist *bhikkhuni* will be fully ordained by the end of this century and that a cadre of other Sinhala *bhikkhunis* will soon exist to carry on ordinations on their own without the assistance of Taiwanese nuns. This will, of course, be a controversial development, but one, I suspect, that will gather increasing momentum. Many *dasasil matas* already enjoy considerable support and admiration from some sections of the lay Buddhist community. The reason for this measure of support and admiration lies in the perception that women Buddhist renunciants are unlikely to enjoy many of the material or worldly advantages that can accrue to a male who joins the *sangha*. Therefore, the motives of women for renouncing the secular to embrace the religious life are often, or seem more likely, to be purely religious. In the 20th century and especially since political independence, the social and economic status of women in Sri Lanka has continued its trend toward equality with men. In the 21st century, if religious change is responsive to social change, we should expect no less than the realisation of this trend within the sphere of the religious vocation as well.

In this essay, I have tried to indicate some of the ways in which religion is affected by and responds to process of social change. On the negative side of religious change, there is already some evidence to suggest a growing disillusionment with militancy created by the politically driven, secularisation reflected in the commercialisation of sacred places and in the materialism and this-worldly behaviour of some members of *sangha*. Historically, when the laity became sufficiently disillusioned, monastic reforms were undertaken. We may see some of that in this next century. It will depend upon lay initiative. On the positive side, if better

educated monks are able to relate the teachings and practice of the Buddha to the ever changing processes and perspectives of the modern and post-modern world that people in Sri Lanka must inevitably engage, they might prove to be the kind of spiritual exemplars that the contemporary world will always need. If the teachings and practices of the Buddha can produce a positive affect on social change, and not only respond to social change, we might expect a reaffirmation of Theravada well into the 21st century.

## Notes

1.  George Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka*, Columbia, SC, University of South Carolina Press, 1988.

2.  Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1988.

3.  Cogent analyses of Bandaranaike's impact on the Sri Lankan political landscape may be found in Howard Wriggins, *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1960; R N Kearney, *Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1967; K M de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1981, pp 510-524; and James Manor, *The Expedient Utopian: Bandaranaike and Ceylon*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

4.  Among the many, if certainly not the most provocative analyses of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict to date, are Jonathan Spencer, *A Sinhala Village in Time of Trouble*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1990, and Jonathan Spencer (ed.), *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, New York, Routledge and Co., 1990; K M de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies: Sri Lanka 1880-1985*, Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 1986; Social Scientists Association, *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1984; Chelvadurai Manogaran, *Ethnic Conflict and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1987; Bruce Kapferer, *Legends of People, Myths of State*, Washington, DC, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988; S J Tambiah, *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986; K M de Silva *et.al.*, (eds), *Ethnic Conflict in Buddhist Societies: Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma*, Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1988; and Michael Roberts, *Exploring Confrontations: The Political Culture of Sri Lanka*, London, Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994.

5.  Here, I want to be absolutely clear in saying that I do not mean to imply a pointed criticism of S J Tambiah's provocative book *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics, and Violence in Sri Lanka*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993, which has recently become the target of irresponsible innuendoes and distorted interpretations in the Sri Lankan press. Nowhere in his analysis does Tambiah blame Buddhism *per se* for the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka. Rather, his aim has been to describe and analyse the forces giving rise to Buddhist militancy in the contemporary era. In fact, I find Tambiah's study clarifying, a work that pinpoints the extent to which Buddhism can be distorted by Sinhala ethnic chauvinists in their attempts to rationalise violence. I especially appreciate the long epilogue of this study in which the author writes an essay demonstrating the inclusive character of Sinhala in earlier eras of Sri Lankan history, a characteristic that makes the current postures of exclusivity appear anomalous.

6.  The best source for exploring the issue of how language has been politicised in late medieval and contemporary Sri Lanka is K N O Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion and Ethnic Assertiveness: The Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism in Sri Lanka*, Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan Press, 1992. Another excellent discussion, this one focused on the last 50 years from the 1940s, can be found in K M de Silva (ed.), "Language Problems: The Politics of Language Policy" in *Sri Lanka: Problems of Governance*, Delhi, Konark Publishers, 1993, pp 275-305.

7. For an account and analysis of religious acculturation among the Sinhalese, see my *Buddha in the Crown*, Oxford University Press, 1991, especially the first chapter.

8 John Clifford Holt, *The Religious World of Kirti Sri: Buddhism, Art and Politics in Late Medieval Sri Lanka*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996.

9. G H Peiris, "Economic Growth, Poverty and Political Unrest" in K M de Silva (ed.), *Sri Lanka: Problems of Governance*, Delhi, Konark Publishers, 1993, p 268.

10. S J Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed?*, *op.cit.*

11. *ibid.*, pp 23-29.

12. On this specific point, see Martin Southwold, *Buddhism in Life: The Anthropological Study of Religion and the Practice of Sinhalese Buddhism*, Manchester, UK, Manchester University Press, 1983.

13. The *Sasanavitarna Varnanava* is a mid-nineteenth century work in verse and prose describing the eighteenth century Buddhist revival in the up-country. See C E Godakumbura, *Sinhalese Literature*, Colombo, Colombo Apothecaries Co, 1955, p 126.

14. I do not mean to down play the other issues of importance to the Tamil community including language and educational opportunities.

15. See Kitsiri Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750–1900: A Study of Religious Revival and Change*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1976, pp 188-248.

16. Gananath Obeyesekere, "Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon" in Bardwell Smith (ed.), *The Two Wheels of Dhamma*, Chambersburg, PA, American Academy of Religion, Studies in Religion Monograph, 1972, pp 58-78.

17. See John Clifford Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, *op.cit.*, p vii.

18. See Martin Southwold, "True Buddhism and Village Buddhism in Sri Lanka" in J Davis (ed.), *Religious Organisation and Religious Experience*, London, Academic Press, 1982 and Martin Southwold, *Buddhism in Life*, *op.cit*, 1983.

# Buddhist Nationalism in Sri Lanka:
# Perceptions, Change and Reality

## Ananda Wickremeratne

The ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka and its dramatic escalation in the 1980s influenced the traditional configurations of Sri Lankan historiography a great deal. The issues of identity, hegemony, and prescriptions for conflict resolution, made Buddhist nationalism the primary focus of attention. It was putatively the key to both understanding the nature of the conflict and the means for its final resolution.

In surveying the plethora of academic writings it is evident that Buddhist nationalism was clearly viewed in largely pejorative terms. Some saw Buddhist nationalism as a pathology and – to continue the analogy – and were at pains to define its aetiology and semiology, and as good physicians should, prescribed appropriate therapies.

Is Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka a pathological condition? A traditional view of nationalism (a term proverbially hard to define) which long prevailed was that nationalism was a means to an end and not an unending process of an intrinsically protean nature. In Europe, nationalism saw the emergence of the nation state and the evolution of the nation state and the evolution of powerful industrial powers. In Africa and in the third world, nationalism was the process whereby many nations achieved freedom from centuries of colonial rule. That nationalism in one form or another should exist beyond this point was unthinkable and an outrage. The phenomenon of post independent nationalism springing up like the fabled dragon's teeth was particularly galling to third world Marxists who whilst they grudgingly accepted the victory of bourgeoisie nationalism in achieving political independence, were waiting in the wings for the real act which was the onset of class warfare. In the event the battle that began to rage was of another sort and saw the class conscious proletariat join the ranks of ethnic zealots and make common cause with less evolved souls.

The reaction of Kumari Jayawardena, a prominent Sri Lankan social scientist was typical. How was it possible for ethnic consciousness to grow in strength in a period of development marked by the spread of education, scientific and technological knowledge, and rationality? "Those on the left are particularly concerned to understand why the working masses of Sri Lanka, who had attained a level of consciousness" should become a "prey to ethnic prejudice."[1]

The simple answer might well be that the Sri Lankan proletariat have a mind of their own and view with suspicion their self appointed mentors who are themselves bourgeoisie – still a typical, phenomenon in third world countries – and are a culturally *déclassé* element. Or is it that the evolving economic base, for all outward appearance of sustained growth, is fragile and narrow incapable of generating economic opportunity thereby making it virtually impossible for the proletariat to achieve a homogenous class-consciousness? Clearly the rebuke is unfair to those whose well being it is articulated.

But what ideological force inspires the critique which described indigenous nationalism as chauvinism.

II

Theoretical formulations in studies of nationalism have been dominated by western paradigms. Many third world scholars have either uncritically used such models to understand the complex phenomenon of nationalism in Asia or Africa (with unhappy consequences) or, as is the trend more recently, challenged the very assumptions on which the paradigms have been constructed. There is also the facile assumption that such paradigms have universal validity. The latter assumption is certainly evident in the much quoted writings of Elie Kedourie and those of Ernest Gellner particularly the latter's seminal work, *Nations and Nationalism* which was, interestingly, first published in 1983.[2]

To both Kedourie and Gellner, nationalism is outmoded both as a concept and as a force within a given polity in its everyday transactions. If we are willing to ignore Bonsai as an aberration, and if we are focusing on Western Europe alone, the theory holds true.

Gellner, more sensitive than Kedourie to the implications of the industrial age in the west, visualises the emergence of a high culture with a global ambience which virtually displaces the folk cultures and little traditions – the surviving artifacts of pre-industrialised societies. If the latter survive it is only because they are kept artificially going "by language and folklore preservation societies." Gellner tells us too that with effective industrialisation, "inter-cultural and inter-linguistic differences will degenerate into merely phonetic chaos." Gellner in visionary vein surmises that if a "basically homogenous industrial culture" were to become a fact on a global basis, culture (and therefore linguistic) differences would cease to be significant and would not produce nationalist tensions. Although Gellner later on peppers the vision with caution, remarking that nations are not after all, all alike, he stands by the foregoing thesis.[3]

It is however, essentially an Euro-centric view based on the collective European experience involving the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, and on going dynamic technologies which have effectively subsumed old traditional sectarian divisions of ethnicity, religion, language, and parochial culture.

Unfortunately, we are not in the same position and we have to accept the reality that in our part of the world a given state is torn asunder by competing diversities struggling for hegemony. This is either a fact or is often potentially so.

We have therefore to construct a paradigm to account for a phenomenon that is widespread and recurring, and more challengingly, ask ourselves why we have so far failed to evolve a viable encompassing ethic which would subsume, or at least mute factious diversities going beyond the mere expression of vacuous platitudes such as the secular state, or pluralistic societies – *mantaras* that ring hollow given the sheer primordial force of the parochial nationalism we are talking about.

This is our task, and one day we must accomplish it to better understand a complex phenomenon and do so without private judgement.

For my own part, I would like to work my way into the subject of Buddhist nationalism by using a paradigm of a different order, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, which was also published in 1983. A nation becomes a nation because it is imagined into existence by a theory, an ethic, or force brought into play to weld the disparate parts together. Whether the ethic or unifying idea is cognitively objective, or rational, by outside standards, is immaterial. What matters is that the people concerned within a given entity accept it as such.

Anderson was evidently inspired by Seton-Watson who in *Nations and States, An Inquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism*, states that "...a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one." Anderson in turn says that a nation is imagined "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."[4]

All this is not to say that a nation is necessarily spurious. On the contrary Anderson conveys to us something of the primordial force of nationalism when he points out that in a given nation there could be a great deal of inequalities and exploitation among the classes that comprise the nation. Yet in spite of it there is a homogenous horizontal sentiment that produces a sense of common fraternity. "Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible ...for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings." Indeed Anderson takes issue with Gellner too for saying that "nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist." He points out that Marxists classically erred in their theoretical constructs in down playing nationalism and regarding it as an anomaly.[5]

For his part Anderson sees nationalism in terms of culture – as a cultural artifact. It was the foundation of the historian to understand how the cultural artifacts in a given country came into being, and why they have "aroused much deep attachments."

Anderson's idea is an excellent analytical tool. It enables us at one and the same time to accept nationalism as a definitive reality on the one hand, and to theoretically dismantle an established nationalism on the other, to see what it was before the encompassing ethic came into play. The concept has a built in resilience and suppleness.

<div align="center">III</div>

In Sri Lanka, the fact that a very large number of people were Buddhists did not automatically bring about a Buddhist nation. What was the unifying ethic? Since Buddhism has existed in Sri Lanka for over two millennia, there is clearly more than one answer to the question. One possibility is Buddhist revivalism which in its various manifestations and phases clearly reflects a self conscious identification as Buddhists. It is possible to identify four such phases. First, the Valivita Saranankara phase of revivalism of the eighteenth century when Buddhists, Buddhism, and the institutions of Buddhism were redefined and emphasised after a long period of decline. The second was a polemical confrontation and phase of revivalism spearheaded by Migettuwatte Gunananda, Vaskaduve Subhuti, Hikkaduve Sri Sumangala, and a host of others. Through tracts, pamphlets and newspapers (notably the *Sarasavi Sandaresa* and the *Satya Margaya)*, Buddhists realised a sense of community, more correctly a sense of religious community. The third phase was the Theosophical phase (usually wrongly represented as the Buddhist revival proper), led by Olcott, Blavatsky, Leadbeater and Annie Besant. A sense of a united self-conscious community was once again reinforced, with manifest potential for future growth.

The seemingly discrete manifestations of Buddhist revivalism clearly require elaboration before we could determine their cumulative importance. Valivita Saranankara (a figure of towering significance in Sri Lankan Buddhist hagiography), was a *bhikkhu* who lived in the Kandyan kingdom in the eighteenth century. The kings of Kandy had successfully resisted European rule which began with the coming of the Portuguese in 1505 and their occupation of the maritime districts of Sri Lanka, and continued with the Dutch who expelled the Portuguese in 1658 and established their own rule, in these regions. In remaining independent, the Buddhist kings of the Kandyan kingdom became heirs to a long tradition of Sinhalese rulers who had exercised political control over much of the island for over a millennium till early medieval times. In keeping with the established paradigm of a Buddhist state, there was in the kingdom of Kandy a close symbiosis between the ruler (the king) and Buddhism. Reduced to its lower terms the function of the ruler was to foster Buddhism, protect its institutions, and create an ethos conducive to its active practice by the state and by the people at large (*Bahujana*).

Saranankara was concerned with two problems involving Buddhism. There was no doubt that Buddhism in the lowland Sri Lanka – the low country as it is known – was in a parlous condition. Buddhists were hard put to profess their faith openly much less retain their traditional identity as Buddhists. The Dutch followed the Portuguese in a policy of vigorous proselytisation imposing discriminating and Draconian regulations on the Buddhists. Buddhism since 1505 had ceased to be a state religion in Sri Lanka anywhere other than in the territories belonging to the Kandyan kingdom.

There was little Saranankara could do in that direction. From time to time the kings of Kandy protested to the Portuguese and to the Dutch (the latter more receptive than their predecessors for political reasons), at the treatment meted out to Buddhists in the maritime districts and at the blatant desecration of well known Buddhist centres of worship of great sacral importance. Since there was no visible end to the European occupation of the maritime districts, there was a sense of demoralisation which presaged the ultimate demise of Buddhism.[6]

It is possible that the decline was to some extent part of the more general demoralisation of Buddhism in the island. Saranankara was concerned with the phenomenon within the Kandyan kingdom itself. Its most conspicuous symptom was the degeneration of the *sangha* of the Buddhist order. Regardless of the norms of conduct prescribed in the *Vinaya* (the compendium of rules governing the conduct of monks as laid down by the Buddha), many individual monks had become laws unto themselves. Laxity in clerical conduct was such that the sharp lines traditionally separating the monks from laymen were blurred. Moreover the process by which new recruits to the ranks of monkhood were formally ordained as full fledged monks *(upasampada,)* had ceased to exist making it necessary to bring in monks from distant Siam (Thailand) to restore the *upasampada* tradition. Saranankara used his great influence with successive kings of Kandy to achieve the objective as well as to restore the *sangha* to its pristine condition. Saranankara's stature, his erudition, and emphasis on maintaining the high traditions of clerical literacy brought about a change of climate. More than institutional reforms he effected with the co-operation of a willing monarchy, the change in ethos was the substantive achievement of the Buddhist revivalism of the period. [7]

The dialectic of revivalism and malaise was next played out in a wholly altered context. By the middle of the nineteenth century when we first see the stirring of another revival, the British had been masters of the entire island for almost half a century. The Kandyan kingdom, and with it the Buddhist state, had long ceased to exist. Unlike in India where the British East India Company discouraged European missionary activity to prevent hurting the susceptibilities of its Hindu subjects, the British government in Ceylon gave missionary organisations tacit support. The missionaries did not receive government salaries but the clergymen who in various towns set up churches to serve the spiritual needs of civil and military officials of state (the core of their congregation) did. Although

the distinction was important and made it possible for the government to claim that religion was a matter of private conscience and the state was religiously neutral, the public perception was otherwise.[8]

The problem was compounded by shifts in British policies towards Buddhism. When the Kandyan kingdom was finally conquered in 1815, an agreement was made between the British and the Kandyan chiefs. By the fifth clause of the Kandyan Convention, (as it was called), the British government undertook to protect Buddhism "and to maintain its rites, ministers, and places of worship." The commitment was clear and unequivocal.[9]

By the 1850s however, in a vastly altered context, the British government was contemplating reforms whose specific focus were the lands belonging to the Buddhist temples *(viharas)* and their appurtenances. The lands – the cumulative result of endowments made to various temples over the centuries – were extensive. Initially however the question was whether the lands constituted a special genre which legally the government was powerless to touch, in terms of previously made treaty commitments. The government took up the position that it had no special obligation towards Buddhism and its institutions arising from the Kandyan Convention of 1815. The Colonial Office in London explained the legal position to the Governor in a despatch remarkable for its length, lucidity, and attention to details.[10]

In this way the path was cleared for legislation (the Temple Lands Registration Ordinances and the Service Tenures Ordinance of 1869) which on balance over a length of time had a deleterious effect on the economic base which sustained Buddhist temples and therefore their over-all effectiveness.[11]

From a narrowly juridical view, there was more than a semblance of justification for the British position. In the Proclamation which the government issued following the suppression of a formidable rebellion against British rule which took place in 1818, the original commitment to Buddhism spelled out in the Kandyan Convention was considerably watered down. In the Proclamation the government merely undertook to "respect" the Buddhist religion adding significantly that the respect shown to Buddhism should not impinge on the rights and liberties of other faiths in the land.

Time was to show that the Kandyan Convention was indeed a broken reed. Yet from time to time in the nineteenth century and later, whenever constitutional reforms were being considered, Buddhists (and here we should not be understood as delineating a monolith but simply as drawing attention to evidence of a consciousness of a Buddhist identity), invoked the Kandyan Convention with touching but misplaced faith. Significantly in the vernacular literature the Kandyan Convention was referred to as the *Udarata Givisuma* or the Kandyan agreement, in which one of the contracting parties solemnly undertook to protect Buddhism.

Was it simple naiveness, wilful disingenuousness, or a genuine misreading of the purport of the Kandyan Convention that led the Kandyan chiefs to believe that they were not only safeguarding Buddhism but were also ensuring the perpetuation of the Buddhist state under the British? After all under the Nayakkars (strictly an alien dynasty and in some ways more repugnant to Kandyan sensibilities), Buddhism had flourished. The latter explanation may help us to account for the presence of a religious (or non-political) clause in what was essentially a political document dealing with the transfer of power.

Expedience on the other hand was the hallmark of British policy. In the immediate aftermath of the hard won conquest in 1815, it was politic to appease the chiefs and allay their anxieties and concerns about the fate of Buddhism. By the 1850s however the British were firmly in the saddle and felt less threatened by internal political dangers. The Kandyan Convention was an embarrassment which had to be expeditiously put away, especially at a time when the country was economically developing on entrepreneurial capitalist lines, and there was a great demand for land.

IV

The status of the Kandyan Convention however was not the focus of the Buddhist revival during this phase. Larger issues which had a critical bearing on the Sri Lankan Buddhists perception of their own identity, clearly dominated the agenda. For virtually the first time, Buddhism in Sri Lanka confronted the British focus of Protestant Christianity and was compelled to define its underlying ontological and soteriological premises as well as its world view in the unfamiliar terrain of comparative religion involving non Buddhist religions.

It was a far cry from the days when Buddhism grappled with schisms within the tradition – occasional ripples of the Vaitulyavadins that did not really disturb the placidity of the pool. Buddhism over centuries evolved in comparative seclusion. Periodical contacts with other like-minded Theravada countries, notably Burma and Thailand, helped to reinforce the existing configurations of the tradition rather than channel them into entirely new directions. Nor did the all too visible presence of Hinduism, (which predates the formal introduction of Buddhism to the island), make a difference either. The very gods of Hinduism including Vishnu were incorporated within Buddhist hierarchical pantheon in which the Buddha was supreme. Nothing seriously affected the sense of poise, certitude and *sangfroid* which Sri Lankan Buddhism famously acquired over the centuries, and invested its followers with vestigial traces of these very facets.

It is true that subsequently, as we move to the modern period, the coming of the Portuguese and the Dutch obviously created a consciousness of the other – a Christian presence. Since both followed aggressive policies of proselytisation, Sinhalese Buddhists were made acutely aware of the differences between the Christians, Christianity, and themselves, including beliefs, rituals, and a whole culture of religiously inspired attitudes.

One should not certainly underestimate the importance of the confrontation. But what was its nature, and what did it tangibly lead up to? The theological dimension (if we may call it that) was clearly subordinate to a larger political issue to do with the very survival of Buddhism and its institutions which occupied the minds of the Sinhalese, now living in a world of explicit hostility.

The essential difference was that whereas neither the Portuguese nor the Dutch priests seriously believed thàt friendly persuasion and reasoning, without resort to any sort of coercion, was the principal method of conversion, the Protestant Christian missionary in nineteenth century Sri Lanka did. The new battle in nineteenth century Sri Lanka was fought on a *Kurushetra* of a different sort – that of polemical publication, and well publicised debate.

When British rule began early in the nineteenth century, it seemed to Protestant missionaries that the systematic study of Buddhism – with a view to its final demolition in Ceylon – together with a knowledge of the Sinhala language, were clearly prerequisites for success. Many missionaries believed that within a comparatively short time Buddhism would decline and that Buddhists in large numbers would embrace Christianity. The optimism was derived from a belief that ideologically Buddhism could easily be refuted.

The Christian Missionary Society (CMS) and the Wesleyans led the way. Polemical tracts began to appear. Buddhist notions of cosmology, presumably lacking serious scientific validity, and Buddhist soteriology (especially the idea of nirvana) were obvious targets for criticism. The all too evident gap between lofty Buddhist precept and the everyday conduct of Buddhists, provided additional grist to the mill.[12]

Among the Protestant missionaries, Daniel Gogerly who came to Ceylon to join the Wesleyans in 1818 and stayed on till his death in 1862, was by far the most significant figure. Gogerly studied Pali to gain an intimate knowledge of Buddhism. He did so in spite of the absence of an established tradition of western studies in Pali and albeit randomly on Buddhist themes. There was in his writings the unmistakable stamp of detached scholarship. The exception to the rule – was his publication in Sinhalese of the *Kristiyani Projnayapti* [the evidence and doctrines of the Christian religion] in 1848. The work was widely read and provided effective ideological ammunition to the Christians.[13]

In general, the activities of the missionaries caused consternation in the ranks of the Buddhists, especially when they considered the rather difficult situation they found themselves in. Indeed for all its professions of religious neutrality, the impression was widespread among Buddhists that the British government in the island was partial to Christianity and lent it tacit support. To some extent the belief came naturally to Buddhists accustomed to the tradition of a close identity between state and religion.

Facts too believed the official position. For one thing Anglican clergymen – as elsewhere in the British colonies – including the bishop of Colombo, their head, received government salaries on the grounds that they served the spiritual needs of the British officials serving in the colony. Yet many clergymen did missionary work in close association with the CMS which strictly came under the purview of the Anglican Bishop of Colombo.[14] He issued licenses to individual missionaries and had a say concerning which localities they should be working in. Moreover, a number of provincial government agents and assistant government agents appeared on missionary platforms, and in general, openly identified themselves with the objects the missionaries were striving to achieve.[15] Indeed in their reports to London both the CMS and Wesleyans often acknowledge that but for the provincial agents of government their task would be immeasurably harder. Meanwhile in the lower rungs of the administration, "native officials" – Mudaliyars, Muhandirams, Ratemahatmayas – a great many of whom had converted to Christianity, were even more open in their support of the missionaries. In a society notably susceptible to elitist example, the fact was particularly galling, and seemed to portend more general missionary successes.[16]

For Buddhists there was much at stake. It was however only in the period 1860-80 that we see clear evidence of a Buddhist counteroffensive. Buddhist leaders emulating the example of the missionaries invested in printing presses and published tracts and other ephemera of their own to counter the *Lakminipahana*, a Wesleyan Sinhalese newspaper, the Buddhists began a newspaper, the *Satya Margaya*. It became defunct after a few years due to lack of continued financial support and was replaced in the 1880s by the immensely more popular *Sarasavi Sandaresa*. Going beyond mere theological discussions in the modalities of Christian Buddhist controversy, the *Sarasavi Sandaresa* articulated the economic and social aspirations of the Buddhists who begin to emerge as a self-conscious entity in a land that was modernising with imperceptible gradualness.[17]

A noteworthy feature of the period – which dramatically highlighted the identity of the Buddhists – was formal debates held between the Protestant missionaries and the Buddhists. Both sides were represented by protagonists skilled in oratory and well versed in each other's faiths. Five such debates were held from 1864 to 1899 and aroused immense interest in Ceylon and abroad. In spite of the abrasive sectarian issues raised, the debates took place without incident – and if Sinhalese transcripts of the debates are an indication and often in a mood of civil and friendly banter.[18]

However, in terms of reinforcing a sense of identity among Buddhists, the next phase of the Buddhist revival – the Theosophical phase – was possibly of greater significance. In May 1880, H S Olcott and Madam Blavatsky – the founders of the Theosophical Society accompanied by a few Hindus and Parsees, arrived in Ceylon. Shortly afterwards in the presence of vast numbers of Buddhists, both Olcott and Blavatsky embraced Buddhism. The unique event, together with subsequent visits Olcott made to

Ceylon, gave a tremendous psychological boost to Sri Lankan Buddhists.[19]   Putting to effective use his innate organisational skills, Olcott accomplished the difficult task of bringing about a sense of unity among Buddhists to transcend caste and regional differences.   He defined the goals the Buddhists of Ceylon should strive for, and intervened successfully with the government to obtain for Buddhists a modicum of official recognition and rights. Olcott also launched an ambitious educational fund to help Buddhists have their own schools. The cumulative effect of his activities reinforced incipient Buddhist consciousness.[20]

Although Annie Besant who succeeded Olcott as the President of the Theosophical Society in 1907, was less identified with Buddhist causes, her own visits to the island and the sentiments she expressed, further reinforced the sense of Buddhist consciousness. Going beyond Olcott, and drawing significant parallels with India, she infused into Buddhists a sense of nationalism.   Just as much as she believed that resurgent India was quintessentially a Hindu India, in a notable speech at Dharmaraja College in Kandy, she declared that Sri Lanka must always derive her identity from Buddhism.[21]

These phases of the revival were clearly surpassed by the last (and most significant phase) which was led by Anagarika Dharmapala and extended from 1893 till 1933.   By a skilful use of history (derived largely from the Puranic and *vamsa* traditions intertwined with highly idiosyncratic interpretations of early Judaeo-Christian history), the philological work of Eugene Burnouff, Max Muller and Rhys Davids, theories of Aryanisation, Indian economic history of the sort Romesh Chunder Dutt fathered with this famous open letters to Lord Curzon creating the classic stereotype of an exploitive Raj – using these diverse elements Dharmapala created a strong Buddhist consciousness which inseparably linked the bourgeoisie Buddhists and the Buddhists of rural Sri Lanka with the glories of Buddhist India and the fabled ambience of the Ganges Valley. The cement binding the Buddhist consciousness was to outlast by decades after his own demise.[22]

However, revivalism was only part of the answer.  It had its limits.  It was time bound in terms of context and relevance.   The capacity to generate feelings of great psychological and emotional intensity was followed by periods of waning and lethargy.  The revival had itself to be revived by collective acts of anamnesis.  Hence the periodical rituals of Olcott Day and Dharmapala Day, and so on.

We must go deeper into our subject.  A community may also will itself to become a nation on the basis of ideas and concepts that transcend time, and are part of its genesis – always a moment of deep sacral importance.  The notion of the *Dhammadvipa* in Sri Lankan Buddhism is in this context of critical importance.

The dying Buddha admonishes Sakka, the ruler of the Gods, that Vijaya, the son of Sinhabahu has set out to Lanka from the country of Lata.  He urges Sakka to specially protect Vijaya and his followers because in Lanka, "Oh Lord of gods, will my religion be established."  If tradition is to be believed, the special interest the Buddha evinced in Lanka

induced him to visit the island on three occasions. During these visits the Buddha consecrated certain sacral locations. Moreover to please Mahasumana the chief of the devas in Sri Lanka, the Buddha parted with a fistful of his hair which together with the collar bone relic of the Buddha, were later enshrined. In time, other relics flowed into the island (including the tooth relic) thereby powerfully contributing to the notion that there was in the island a surrogate presence of the Buddha himself. Above all, there was the notion that whatever might be the fate of the *Dhamma* elsewhere, in Sri Lanka it was destined to survive and that its survival was associated with the descendants of Vijaya. A conscious historical tradition had begun.[23]

Sri Lanka became sacral space. The fact that with the vicissitudes of power the kingdom could spatially shrink had conceptually little bearing on the integrity of the *Dhammadvipa* or the titular claims of its ruler. The *Dhamma,* the people, the ruler and the *derane* were bound in close symbiosis.

The notion of the *Dhammadvipa* and its ideological associations have within the last two decades been the subject of intense scrutiny. The ethnic crisis (especially the events of 1983) had a dramatic effect on the prevailing configurations of Sri Lankan historiography. Implied in the proliferation of the new writings was the assumption that the intransigence of the Sinhalese and their unwillingness to adopt positions of conciliation and accommodation to the Tamils, sprang from deep seated historical attitudes, especially the facile assumption of hegemony. History was clearly culpable, at any rate Sinhala perceptions of their own history. The *Mahavamsa* became the particular focus of attention. Scholars and others attacked the validity of the *Mahavamsa* as an objective historical work. A great deal of it was mythical and it was difficult to get to the inner kernel or core of fact and event in the narrative because of the heavy overlayers of the mythical. The criticism was also made that there was no synchronicity between the spatial notion of the *Dhammadvipa* and the actualities of Sri Lanka's political history, which saw the progressive diminution of the great Rajarata kingdom.

None of these strictures is new and may be found stated with sobriety in past issues of *University of Ceylon Review*. But in the altered climate of the 1980s they were restated with bias and partisan passion. Historical truth became a casualty a second time. This time at the hands of self proclaimed myth-busters, determined to save us all form the *Mahavamsa* and the *Mahavamsa* modalities of thinking.

More recently, a scholarly critique of the *Dhammadvipa* idea and what it portends comes from the pen of S J Tambiah. Avoiding the narrow issues of historical facticity and validity and focussing on the functional aspect of the *Dhammadvipa* idea, Tambiah argues that it leads to positions of Sinhala Buddhist exclusivism and intolerance of the other. In *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy,* he refers to crystallised frameworks and inflexibilities which inhibits "adaptive transformation in changing contexts that pose

new challenges and tasks." This was to Tambiah the dark side of the Buddhist religious complex.[24] In *Buddhism Betrayed* the point is reiterated. Referring to the continuum of Sinhala Buddhist consciousness, Tambiah says that it implies an existentially relevant sense of antagonism to the Tamils as aliens or outsiders – a menacing Sinhala identity and sovereignty that is exclusionist, separatist and boundary making."[25]

One cannot of course quarrel with ill intentioned sentiments. What Tambiah says with such artistry and sophistication resonates the belief that Sri Lanka, a religiously plural and polyethnic society, should become a secular state in which case the fatal nexus between religion and polity is sundered and harmony prevails. Whether of course this felicitous consequence will automatically follow cannot be readily assumed especially when we, consider the unresolved tensions on this very point in the USA and in (if I may resort to oxymoron) Nehru's Hindu India.[26]

## V

We must at this point shift our ground – put aside tracing the continuum of Buddhist consciousness to move to the terrain of historiography. For in Sri Lanka history does not happen. It is made by historians and has been so since the days of Mahanama to our own times and the writings of the Peradeniya *nikaya*. Consequently issues of epistemology and methodology become germane.

In a sense, Tambiah's work for all its poise and subtle seigneurial authority is part of a trend in historiography which becomes evident especially since 1983. We see the emergence of a new genre of historians and social scientists who have been called revisionists, although the term has been challenged by Tambiah in meditating in the Gunawardana-Dharmadasa controversy. Sometimes they call themselves "concerned scholars." At other times, they seem to be affiliated to an organisation which describes itself as the Committee for Rational Development.

I prefer to call them repentant historians. They are mostly Sinhalese and Buddhists and may be described as such for census purposes. Unifying these works was a sense of guilt and remorse at the excesses committed by the Sinhalese against the Tamils. It was felt that a false perception of history was at the bottom of Sinhala attitudes, and it was the bounden moral duty of the new scholars to set matters straight. The de-constructionist exercises were targeted at the *Mahavamsa the Dipavamsa* and the *Pujavaliya* in particular. W I Siriweera probably spoke for all when he declares that "a scientific understanding" of the early history of the Sinhalese and Tamils, divested of myth, would lead to a closer dialogue.[27] Senake Bandaranayake would willingly slay the dragons of myth and distortion to usher in "a polyethnic modern society."[28] Jehan Perera set about single-handedly curing the Sinhalese of their "Mahavamsa mentality." R A L H Gunawardana cast aside all the old horoscopes and declared that the Sinhalese child was born in the thirteenth century, and not a day sooner.[29] Gananath Obeyesekere surpasses all. Describing himself as a Sinhalese

and as Buddhist, in a mood of self-chastisement angrily asked what happened to the moral conscience of his Sri Lanka professional colleagues.

Ten years later it is hard to assess the cumulative impact of these revisionist writings. Interestingly there was no corresponding deconstructing exercise on the Tamil side. The counter viewpoint seen in the writings of C S Navaratnam, K Navaratnam, Nadesan Satyendra, Satchi Ponnambalam *et.al.,* have survived without amendment. One can almost see why because being the victims of Sinhala hegemony, Tamil writers were unburdened by repentant historiography.

Consequently the debate continued unabated focussing on three classic issues very much to do with historical perceptions (a) the hen or the egg question, who came first the Tamils or the Sinhalese (b) the foundation myth of the Sinhalese and the notion of the *Dhammadvipa,* and (c) the issue of traditional Tamil homelands. What Satchi Ponnambalam has to say is fairly typical.

> The Sri Lankan Tamils of today are the lineal descendants of the original inhabitants of the island. To this ancient ancestry, the latter-day invasions by the armies of the south Indian Tamils Pandyan, Chola and Chera kings, and those raised by the usurping Sinhalese kings, made successive additions. In the proto-historic period of the island, the early totemistic Tamil tribes migrated form their homelands in south India and settled in the north, in the south-west around Kelaniya and in the south-east around the river Walawe Ganga.... The ancient Tamil name of the island was Tamaraparani. From those ancient times of the Naga Dipa kingdom, the Tamils have occupied the north-eastern littoral, which is their exclusive homeland.
>
> At the time of the introduction of Buddhism (Third Century BC),Tamil kingly rule was centred in Anuradhapura, the ancient capital which the Tamil kings founded. Devanampriya Theesan, the Tamil king at that time, was followed by Senan and Kuddikan (177-155 BC) and by Ellalan (145-101 BC). With the defeat of Ellalan by the Sinhalese prince Dutugemunu in 101 BC, which is a historical fact, Anuradhapura became the seat of the Sinhalese dynasty. The popularised Sinhalese version of Sri Lanka history, however, represents Devanampriya Theesan as a Sinhalese king (which is wrong, for, as was earlier contended, Sinhalese emerged subsequent to the introduction of Buddhism).[30]

Perceptions are subjective and are necessarily so. Yet the principles underlying particular methodologies and epistemologies must stand objective scrutiny. The revisionist work especially that of Tambiah shows a painful oscillation between a desire to avoid normative judgement and the need to consider social phenomena in terms of function and structure. The latter approach would ensure objectivity and empathy without the imposition of extraneous values. In his work on Thailand, especially in his work *World Renouncer, World Conqueror,* Tambiah explains the complex ideologies linking the Buddhist polity, the *Sasana,* and the *Dhamma* with beautiful sensitivity and insight. Yet

where conceptually the selfsame paradigm holds true for Sri Lanka, a different modality of thinking comes into play.

Perhaps the explanation partly lies in an in-house problem in our historiography. Coexisting side by side in mutual incomprehension are two sorts of Sri Lankan historiography. By historiography almost by automatic reflex we think of the work of anglicised Sri Lankan social scientists and writers, trained abroad, an reflecting western modalities of thoughts. We do little to relate to a second strand in our historiography which is indigenous, the linear heir to the great *Vamsa* tradition, and reflecting a mature integrative view of society where man, society, polity and *Dhamma* form a working harmonious whole. It is this latter historiography with different modalities of rationality that help us to understand the long continuum of Buddhist consciousness, its resilience and capacity to survive. Until we learn to fuse the two traditions, our researches will show structural imbalances, and worse, distortion where none were intended.

## VI

The foregoing ties up with a larger issue. However carefully executed, the writing of history is unavoidably a distortion. In the final analysis it is an artificial construct born in the mind of the historian, who writes in the belief that he is objective, or that he is privilegedly privy to a corpus of indisputable facts. The illusion sustains the historian as he confronts the rigors of his task. The problem, so much part of the very warp and woof of historical writing, is compounded when the historian is compelled to write history in times of social tension and chronic political upheaval. One or other of the protagonists in the conflict appeals to history to legitimise particular positions and policies. The historian (till this point an uninvolved onlooker), is in spite of himself, drawn to the fray, outraged at the way historical truth is manipulated, and is anxious to set the record straight. In the process however, the historian himself becomes part of the debate. Small wonder then that long years ago Lord Acton, the Regius Professor of History in Cambridge University should have startled the graduating class (all eager to make their mark as historians) by begging them to refrain from writing history. The caveat may well be applied universally to include social scientists, in general.

In Sri Lanka with the escalation of the ethnic crisis both sides appealed to history. Occupying a professedly neutral middle ground were a third force – a group of academicians who were determined to lay bare the history of Sri Lanka above the raucous clamour of partisan debate. The formation of organisations like the Committee for Rational Development, and the Social Scientists' Association, together with a growing interest in Sri Lanka abroad, provided ample opportunities for the diffusion of their views. The genre of Sri Lankan scholars – whom we have designated revisionists earlier on in the paper – shared a common belief that what really provided the force and momentum for the ethnic conflict was a false Sinhalese view of their own history. The task of the revisionist historian – an ethical and moral one – was to scientifically strip the island's history of its heavy overlayers of myth. The case for demythologisation was succinctly put by Walter

Schwarz, who is quoted approvingly by Satchi Ponnambalam in *Sri Lanka: National Conflicts and the Tamil Liberation Struggle*. "The most important effect of early history on the minority problem of today is not in the facts but in the myths that surround them, particularly on the Sinhalese side."[31]

In the rush to judgement however, the complexities of demythologisation were underestimated. There were two choices confronting the scholars. The first was to boldly throw aside the traditional history of the island because it was so heavily weighed down by myth and start *de novo*. It was however tantamount to throwing away the baby with the bath water, and would inevitably create an immense yawning lacuna because history of early and medieval Sri Lanka was powerfully influenced by the *vamsa* tradition. A tradition of history independent of the *vamsa* tradition had simply not evolved. Its absence to the day is significant in Sri Lanka's historiography, and remains unaccounted for.

The alternative was to sift fact from myth – a task which was evidently taken in hand with breezy confidence. The underlying assumptions were themselves flawed. For one thing the separation of mythic elements from fact was necessarily done on a subjective bias, the historian being the sole judge of what or was not fact. The approach was idiosyncratic. In the plethora of published revisionist literature we are not made privy to the methodologies and criteria on which the decisions were made. Rationality may well have been an implied criterion. Can this or that mythical story be rationally accepted as a fact? Here too we run into difficulties. Much would for example depend on one's own notions on what constituted rationality. We may well ask besides whether modern notions of rationality are the best ways of understanding ancient modalities of thought which are embedded in what we so carelessly call myths.

The above would be a dangerous way of reconstructing Sri Lanka's history, the potentialities of a third way of doing things has regrettably been comparatively neglected because it involves long patient research with little immediate visibility and is therefore of little value to either party. This was to question the "silence" of the *vamsa* tradition. Not so much to focus on what it says (and issues of facticity thereof) but rather on what it significantly does not. In this way we may have ultimately in our hands a useful and critical parallel commentary on the *vamsa* tradition.

Instead in recent Sri Lankan historiography there has been almost obsessive preoccupation with demythologisation and kindred issues. Much has been written on the use of myth for the legitimation of power and the perpetuation of a sacrally biased socio-religio *status quo*. Either explicitly or implicitly Malinowski's view of myth as social and political charter recurs in writings about Sri Lanka.[32] Indeed one does not have to go too far. The public pronouncements of heads of state and ministers of state since the 1980s (Gamini Dissanayake, Cyril Matthew, Premadasa, Jayewardene *et.al.*) are pregnant with illustrations of the use of myth to serve contemporary needs and situations in a country

proverbially characterised by the surreal presence of the past. Yet such theories do not "explain" the myth but tell us about its function and use.

The more intriguing question remains unanswered. Why are the Sri Lankan myths so ubiquitous, so pervasive, and why are they capable of generating great emotional and psychological power? Ironically the recent scholarship (demythologising) has accomplished little to diminish their force. For example, we are told that Tamils fought in the armies of Dutugemunu and that his objective of politically unifying the island was made difficult not only by the opposition of the Tamils in the Rajarata but by Sinhalese principalities which feared the end of their own independence. Such information is valuable and adds significantly to our somewhat meagre knowledge of this period. But overall they do not necessarily abbreviate the traditional perceptions of Dutugemunu the great hero king who in spite of tremendous odds defeated the Tamils, unified the island, and worked so tirelessly for the "glory of the Sasana."

Nor will it come as a startling revelation to Sri Lankan Buddhists that Dutugemunu had embedded in his spear a sacred relic or that numerous Buddhist monks rode out with him to do battle with Elara. They (the Buddhists) would be amused at the view that all this was suggestive of the gap between Buddhist precept and practice.[33]

By and large the Buddhists of Sri Lanka – and this was little to do with the theology of Buddhism or its doctrine – do not regard the myths in their history in isolation. The myths are part of an overarching cosmic perception to do with the supramundane and the mundane and in its galactic sweep encompasses the Buddha, the Dharma (or the order of the cosmos) the gods, the earthly state, its ruler, society, the people, their Saradharma, the *Sasana* and a view of history which is part of a wider unifying world view. To say that the dying Buddha entrusted the guardianship of Sri Lanka to Vishnu mindful that in that land the Dharma would flourish, or that the great Cetiya Swarnamali which the hero king constructed, was literally made out of blueprint designed in heaven, are parts of a larger scheme of things and are not mere issues of fact or fiction. Indeed by themselves they matter little but acquire significance within the totality of an immensely wider – and psychologically comforting view of things.

It is the myth that mediates between the mundane and the supramundane, between what is strictly temporal and what transcends the temporal. The myth intervenes to say how things ideally ought to be and therefore is interwoven harmoniously with the narrative of temporal, earthly fact lest men forget the vision of which they are a part.

It is in this light – congruent with the principle that we judge a culture on its own *sui generis* terms and assumptions rather than our own – that the Sri Lankan *vamsa* tradition and the *Mahavamsa* should be understood.

# VII

Logically since we are dealing with concepts, a discussion of how Buddhist nationalism has received institutional expression is not part of this article. The constitution of Sri Lanka virtually makes Buddhism a state religion. The establishment of a Buddha Sasana Affairs Ministry in February 1989, took Buddhism further along the same road committing the state to regard as its statutory concerns, the *sangha*, Buddhist institutions, the education and training of the *sangha*, disseminating Buddhism, Buddhist youth educational and constitutional rights. A recent Presidential order brought the *sangha*, (in common with clergymen of other faiths) within a state sponsored life insurance scheme.

So this must be for the *Buddha Sasana* in Sri Lanka its point of arrival, its long awaited moment of satiation.

And yet there is a perceptible unease, an anxiety, a feeling of being under siege. The enemy is sensed but never clearly seen, or more accurately, seen in changing persona and guises. Is it the brash neo missionaries? Is it the merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces? Is it the probable Balkanisation of Sri Lanka, or is it the tide of Philistinism and crass materialism eroding the *Saradharma*?

## Notes

1.  This article is based on a paper read at the International Conference on Buddhist Societies in Stability and Crisis, held on July 28-30, 1994 at Hotel Topaz in Kandy, Sri Lanka. Some revisions in the original were made for publication.

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2.  Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University, 1983. Subsequently printed in 1987, and 1992.

3.  Gellner, *op.cit.*, p 73 ff. also p 116 ff.

4.  Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, 1993. See introduction, p 6.

5.  *ibid.*, p 3 ff.

6.  K N O Dharmadasa, "The Sinhala-Buddhist and the Nayakkar Dynasty in the Politics of the Kandyan Kingdom, 1739–1815" in Michael Roberts, *Collective Identities, Nationalism, and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka*, Colombo, Marga Institute, 1979.

7.  *ibid.* Also, Kitsiri Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750–1900: A Study of Religious Revival and Change*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976, p 60 ff.

8. Ananda Wickremeratne, *The Roots of Nationalism: Sri Lanka*, Colombo, Karunaratne & Sons Ltd., 1995, p 120 ff.

9. G C Mendis *(ed.)*, *The Colebrooke-Cameron Papers: Documents on British Colonial Policy in Ceylon, 1796–1833*, Vol. II, p 227 ff.

10. K M de Silva, *Social Policy and Missionary Organisations in Ceylon 1840-1855*, London, 1965, p 125 ff.

11. Wickremeratne, *op.cit.*, p 192 ff.

12. *ibid.*, p 43 ff.

13. Arthur Stanley Bishop (ed.), *Ceylon Buddhism: Being the Collected Writings of Daniel John Gogerly*, London, 1918. See introduction.

14. Wickremeratne, *op.cit.*, p 130 ff.

15. Wickremeratne, *op.cit.*, p 179 ff.

16. *ibid.*, p 185 ff.

17. *ibid.*, p 260 ff.

18. T S Dharmabandu, *Pancha Maha Vadaya*, Colombo, 1992.

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20. *ibid.*

21. L A Wickremeratne, "Annie Besant, Theosophism, and Buddhist Nationalism in Sri Lanka," *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*.

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24. S J Tambiah, *Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986, p 126 ff.

25. S J Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p 138.

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27. W I Siriweera, "The Dutthagamani - Elara Episode: A Reassessment" in *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, Social Scientists' Association, 1984.

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30. Satchi Ponnambalam, *Sri Lanka: National Conflict and the Tamil Struggle*, London, 1983, p 28.

31.   *ibid.*, p 16.

32.   Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*, Boston, 1948.

33.   Siriweera, *op.cit.* The writer of the article draws attention to Regina Clifford's study of King Dutugemunu's religious inconsistencies. See Bardwell Smith (ed.), *Religion and the Legitimation of Power.*

# The Emergence of Legal Elites in Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka

## Vijaya Samaraweera

### Judicial Reforms of 1833

The year 1833 saw a series of reform measures being introduced for their colony of Sri Lanka (Ceylon) by its British rulers.[1] The catalysis of these reforms was the work of the Commission of Eastern Enquiry which had investigated the colony in the 1820s and reported upon its investigations to the Colonial Office in 1831-32. The reform measures touched virtually every aspect of governance, and taken together constitute a crucial stage in the evolution of British colonialism in Sri Lanka. Among these were the judicial reforms which were conceived and designed to fundamentally transform the way in which the British had administered justice for the colonial peoples since the inception of their rule.

The judicial reforms were embodied in the Ceylon Charter of Justice of 1833. The Charter was drafted by Charles Hay Cameron who, as a member of the Commission of Eastern Enquiry, had investigated and reported upon the judiciary of the colony.[2] An early convert to Jeremy Bentham's teachings, Cameron had established himself as a leading figure in the Benthamite circles in England by the time he began to work on Sri Lanka. Cameron remained true to Benthamism throughout his public career, and it is not without reason that Sir Leslie Stephen characterised him in the *Dictionary of National Biography* as "the last surviving disciple of Jeremy Bentham."[3]

In his report upon the judiciary Cameron put forth his Benthamite vision for the colony:

> [a] fairer field than the island of Ceylon can never be presented to a legislator
> for the establishment of a system of judicature and procedure, of which the
> sole end is the attainment of cheap and expeditious justice.[4]

Cameron of course recognised that the goal of providing cheap and expeditious justice could not be realised if the judiciary was not easily accessible for the relief of those who suffered injury and the punishment of those who inflicted injury. Moreover, there was the necessity "of guarding with peculiar anxiety against the danger that the judicatures themselves should be employed as the means of perpetuating that injustice which it is the object of their institution to prevent."[5] The reforms Cameron advocated to the Colonial Office were strictly consistent with the vision and imperatives he articulated, and he rejected every measure which did not conform to them, regardless of whether it caused

the weight of the authority of the English tradition or the sanction of indigenous customs. Given this, it is no surprise that Cameron's proposals had no roots in the experience of the colonial peoples. But, then, Cameron was not unduly worried about this, for to him as to other Benthamites, the ideas of happiness were common to all peoples: as James Mill once put it, human nature was "as plain as the road from Charing Cross to St. Paul."[6]

The Ceylon Charter of Justice of 1833 drafted by Cameron at the request of the Colonial Office presented an entirely new, comprehensive and unified system for the administration of justice; it was an elegant, symmetrical and highly rationalised system as it should have been, given its Benthamite genesis. Cameron was given a remarkably freehand in drafting, and the Charter closely followed the reforms he had advocated in his report. Cameron of course was unable to incorporate all his proposals in the instrument, and this in some ways compromised what he sought to achieve. Thus such cherished proposals as abolition of all stamp fees on suits, the payment of witness' expenses out of public funds and requiring court proceedings to be by "oral altercation" between parties rather than by pleadings, all important for the accomplishment for cheap and expeditious justice, were rejected either at the time or did not find favour with the Supreme Court which drafted the rules of procedure for the courts. These failures did not mask the Benthamite character of what Cameron ultimately crafted. His was a considerable achievement, and the opportunity he received of not only proposing reform but also of bringing them into fruition through concrete policy formulations was quite unique in the annals of Benthamism – indeed, the 1833 Ceylon Charter produced the truest judicial reform experiment in its history.

The Charter established throughout the colony uniformly structured original courts of law, named District Courts, and a single appellate body, the Supreme Court. The uniformity in judicial administration, which complemented the unification of the colonial administration in general, resulted in the elimination of the separate judiciaries which had been in place in the Maritime and the Kandyan Provinces. The two judiciaries, fundamentally distinct and consisting of original and appellate courts of varying and unique jurisdictions, had originated at different times and from different legal sources, and with their cumbersome and inefficient structuring and operation were universally acknowledged to have failed to provide justice to the peoples they respectively served. The Supreme Court was given supervisory authority over the courts of original jurisdiction, thereby removing the Governor of the colony, who had possessed formidable judicial authority, from a direct role in the new arrangements; this was an important consideration for Cameron who as a Benthamite staunchly believed in the separate structuring of the judiciary. The District Courts were to function with uniformly adopted procedural rules, and they received exclusive jurisdiction over all civil matters arising within their respective districts and concurrent criminal jurisdiction with the Supreme Court. The status differentiations that had hitherto been maintained in the functioning of the courts, whether on the basis of race, as was the case with the separate jurisdictions provided for Europeans, or on the basis of caste or rank in the traditional society, as was the case, for example, with

"official persons of high rank" who alone served as "assessors" assisting European judges in interpreting the traditional laws in the Kandyan Provinces,[7] were abolished. The Charter focused primarily on the structural arrangement and the broad principles of procedure, and detailed rules of procedure for the courts were largely left to be determined by the judges of the newly created high court.

The 1833 Charter provided the basic framework for the administration of justice in Sri Lanka during the nineteenth century. However, the integrity of the Benthamite structure was not to be maintained for too long after its introduction, and the vision which had guided Cameron in his design of the judiciary and the imperatives he had articulated for its functioning gradually faded away. The Charter was not formally abandoned in the nineteenth century, but what eventually remained was a mere shadow of its original shape and substance. Several different developments contributed towards this transformation. The economic and social developments, largely brought about by the broad based reforms introduced together with the Charter in 1833, were certainly important factors. So was the constant tinkering with Cameron's judicial arrangements by the colonial officials.[8] But, in the ultimate analysis, perhaps most crucial was the emergence of the legal elites who carved out central roles for themselves in the working of the new judiciary.

In 1842 during an extended discussion among officials in London and the colony on the defects of the judicial administration, James Stephen of the Colonial Office declared "this Ceylon Charter was a pure innovation ...based on speculation, chiefly those of Bentham."[9] The fact that the Charter was an innovation is crucial to the understanding of the emergence of the legal elites. In rejecting the existing judiciaries of the Maritime and the Kandyan Provinces in favour of an entirely new system, Cameron had confidently declared that they had not received "in the eyes of the natives anything of the sanctity of religion or of antiquity."[10] Cameron's assessment is questionable, for there certainly functioned, apart from the judicial arrangements introduced by the British after they established their rule in Sri Lanka, certain traditional institutions like the *gamsabha* or village councils which had been significant in the resolution of disputes.[11] Cameron's judiciary was utterly alien to the experience of the colonial population, and for it to have received acceptance by the colonial peoples there necessarily had to emerge intermediaries who had the capacity and ability to facilitate their access to and understanding of the unintelligible system. This was precisely what the legal elites accomplished: they paved the way for the innovation to take root in the new soil. However, in the process they brought about profound changes in the shape, form, and mission of the new judiciary.

The most obvious consequence of the emergence of the legal elites was the distortion of the elegant, symmetrical and rationalised structure crafted by Cameron. The legal elites either did not have a place in Cameron's design or, where they were recognised, enlarged their role so much that, taken together, they had the effect of transforming the careful design. The formal institutions became surrounded by informal arrangements of the legal elites which in turn helped the legal system to radiate outwards from its chosen

centres. This development was vital for the working of the system introduced by the 1833 Charter but it also brought the formal institutions within a different context from the original. Most importantly, the informal arrangements prompted the evolution of a legal culture and norms that proved antithetical to what Cameron believed his arrangements would foster in the colony. The result was an undermining of his vision of cheap and expeditious justice for Sri Lanka.

Legal elites are defined in this paper as those elements who have derived their special status in the colonial society through their association and identification with the working of the legal system. In most cases these elements already possessed a social standing and stature prior to and independent of their involvement with the judiciary. This effectively provided them with a springboard for their entry into the world of the new judiciary, and indeed, the linkages with the old order enabled them to consolidate and enhance their new found roles. Nonetheless, it was their status as legal elites and role as intermediaries between the judiciary and the colonial peoples that crucially mattered.

Three separate and distinct groups of legal elites will be examined in this paper. Lawyers, the more conventionally identifiable legal elite, forms the first. Cameron, in the true Benthamite fashion, viewed lawyers with a great deal of suspicion and his categorical preference was for a judiciary which would function without their intervention. However, he recognised that they would have to be accorded a place, but what he sought for them was a circumscribed one. The lawyers who emerged, however, carved out a much larger role for themselves, and over the years they became identified with the pervasiveness of "frivolous litigation," the phenomenon which at once embodied and symbolised the failure of the new arrangements. "Out-Door Proctors," a term contemporaneously used to collectively describe those who had informally acquired a knowledge of the law and the judicial machinery, form the second group of legal elites. They had no formally ascribed place in the working of the judiciary, but quickly emerged to play an invaluable role in providing access of the average litigant to an unintelligible system. Their mediation between the judiciary and the people for whom it was created was vital for the rooting of Cameron's innovative arrangements in the new soil, but it also had the effect of distorting the structural arrangements and undermining the realisation of cheap and expeditious justice. The third group consisted of Interpreter *Mudaliyars* who provided interpretation between the judges and litigants in courts of law. Again this was not a group for whom a role had been foreseen in Cameron's arrangements. They were found necessary simply because of the refusal of the judges to abide by a cardinal requirement, the acquisition of a competence in the local languages; language competence, above all, was critical to the success of Cameron's expectation that judges would directly intervene in the resolution of issues brought before them by litigants. The Interpreters quickly loomed large in court proceedings and legitimised their position within the judiciary, and there is little doubt that it was their intervention that made the proceedings cumbersome, on the one hand, and justice so remote and impersonal to the average litigant on the other. Yet again, their presence was indispensable in the courts, and the judiciary would have been unworkable

without their services. Finally, these different legal elites helped to defeat a key injunction of Cameron, the equal treatment of the poor and rich alike by the judiciary: as he stated it in his report, "I can conceive no tie which will bind the lower people so strongly to their government as a judicial establishment so contrived as that the very same attention and discrimination should be employed upon their causes as upon those of their affluent neighbours."[12] In practice, equal treatment proved to be an elusive concept; the new status differentiations which were brought to the judiciary by the legal elites were crucial to this.

## Lawyers

Lawyers were formally recognised in the Maritime Provinces by the Charter of Justice of 1801,the first of the prerogative instruments to be formulated by the British for the administration of justice in the colony; no such recognition was accorded to them in the Kandyan Provinces.[13] By the time of the 1833 Charter, the legal profession was well established in the littoral, even though their numbers were small and they had been allowed to practice only in a highly limited number of courts. Nonetheless, their presence was importantly felt in the administration of justice. This fact did not go unnoticed by Cameron. In typical Benthamite fashion Cameron saw lawyers from a jaundiced perspective, and in fact, he had little good to say about them. He believed that lawyers often engaged in collusion with litigants "to commit every species of crime which may conduce to the object the party has in view; and this, too, whether that object itself be just or iniquitous."[14] They were responsible for obfuscation of issues presented to courts, prevarication in proceedings, and he blamed them for the considerable growth in litigation which was widely noted in the colony by the time of his investigation. Cameron certainly did not envisage the barring of lawyers from the courts, but he saw only a minimalist place for them in view of the interventionist role he called for judges: as he stated, a judge should "exercise ...something like a paternal authority" by directly communicating with and listening to those who appeared before him, so that both the parties and the judge himself understood precisely what issue had to be resolved by him.[15]

Despite his consciousness of the need to circumscribe the role of lawyers in courts, the Charter Cameron drafted provided an enhanced framework for lawyers in several important respects. The unification of the judiciary, the removal of the restrictions hitherto imposed as to which courts in which they could practice, and the establishment of a network of courts which gradually reached the important towns, all provided remarkable opportunities for lawyers throughout the colony. Nineteenth century economic developments – which were marked by the opening up of plantations in the interior 1830s – brought about major social and economic changes among the colonial population. Conflicts and disputes which arose within this milieu began to be placed before the courts in increasing numbers. And, there was a development with particularly implications for the courts. In the mid-nineteenth century, in a series of enactments, which are collectively known as the Waste Lands Ordinances, the British rulers laid claim especially in the interior to vast tracts of land on behalf of the Crown on the legal premise that the local inhabitants

had been unable to prove their title to these parcels. These claims of the Crown had major consequences, not the least among which was the recognition by the people of the crucial significance of title to ownership, not only of land but also of property in general. Thus, there were not only court-based challenges to claims advanced by the Crown but also numerous long drawn out law suits, for example, involving "pupiliary succession," the rule under which the mantle of leadership and control of property was inherited by the principal pupil of the chief monk of a Buddhist temple.[16] What had fallen within the province of traditional institutions and mechanisms for resolution were now being placed before the colonial courts: this explains why caucuses of Buddhist monks, who traditionally mediated disputes between claimants to succession of Buddhist temples, had to give way to colonial judges.

Lawyers responded to the new found expanded opportunities with enthusiasm and vigour. Nineteenth century colonial directories and compendia of information reveal fairly rapid expansion of the practice of law by lawyers beyond the capital of Colombo into other cities and towns.[17] Of equal significance was the mobility of lawyers revealed by contemporary documents. This was particularly true of the Advocates who had acquired commanding reputations for their forensic skills. Again and again, the same names appear in law reports on behalf of litigants or defendants in contemporary law reports. Thus, the practice of Richard Morgan, who went on to have one of the most distinguished public careers in the nineteenth century as a colonial law officer, legislator and justice, took him often to the "outstations" – in 1848, for example, he was retained in fourteen of the sixteen criminal cases to be tried in the District Court of Galle – and, if we are to believe his biographer, possessed a reputation which extended even to villages.[18] As a Burgher, Morgan was well placed to develop his practice. Burghers, the community which had provided much of the personnel for the lower level offices in the British administration of the Maritime Provinces, had quickly embraced law as a career when it opened up, and law even became a strong tradition with a striking number of Burgher families. Burghers in fact came to dominate the profession during much of the nineteenth century.[19] There was close cooperation among Burghers as practitioners – it was generally held that Burgher Proctors retained Burgher Advocates on behalf of their clients, a practice which became as "hugging"[20] – and while identity as a member of the community by itself does not explain the success of individual lawyers or Burghers as a group in the profession, there is little doubt that networking within the community played a significant role in the success of Burgher lawyers in general. "Hugging" was not limited to the Burghers; in fact it was quite widespread and indeed, communal, caste and kinship relationships proved to be vital for lawyers in the development of their respective practices: as an English practitioner anonymously wrote, "the Ceylonese proctors naturally prefer placing their cases in the hands of advocates who are their own countrymen, and often of their own kith and kin, so that your business must mainly be that which is entrusted to you by Europeans."[21] Thus, it is no surprise that James Peiris, who was heralded by members of his caste as "Mr. Barrister Peiris" upon his return from a brilliant educational career in England, was sought out by a group of *Karava* villagers from the Southern Province to provide legal

representation to them in a dispute involving a group of *Durava* caste villagers, and Peiris responded to these distantly placed fellow caste members by appearing without a fee before the Supreme Court in 1896.[22]

With the Charter's establishment of the judiciary as a separate branch which fell outside the direct intervention of the executive, a new importance and prestige began to be attached to those who became associated with it. This extended to lawyers as a group as well. The standing of lawyers was further strengthened by virtue of the fact that under the new arrangements the high court became the sole authority for the admission and disciplinary control of lawyers; in the pre-1833 period these responsibilities had been shared between the Supreme Court, which had authority over those who appeared before it, and the Governor, who had authority over those who practiced in the lower courts of law in the Maritime Provinces. Under, the aegis of the Supreme Court a framework for training of lawyers came into being. Categorical requirements for admission to the Bar were laid down, and professional distinctions between Advocates and Proctors, which had existed hitherto but only nominally, were made clear-cut, and a further differentiation between Proctors of the Supreme Court and Proctors of the District Courts was introduced.[23] The efforts of the Supreme Court increasingly institutionalised the practice of law and this, together with the development of the self-identity on the part of the practitioners, resulted in the public recognition of the practice of law as a distinct profession.

Law was one of the three "independent" professions which came to the forefront in nineteenth century Sri Lanka – the other two were divinity and medicine. Of all three, law acquired the greatest prestige for a number of reasons. Divinity had limited appeal and medicine offered only restricted opportunities. Law, on the other hand, proved to be an expanding field, and it was the only career which provided opportunities to earn substantial income independent of the colonial administration.[24] Moreover, while all three professions required the acquisition of an English education, which by itself carried great social worth, it was generally recognised that law demanded most knowledge and skills: as one mid-nineteenth century writer put it, "of all undertakings where brain is capital, this is the best."[25] The practice of law offered not only considerable economic and social rewards, it also provided the best stepping-stone to a public career. Little wonder that the unofficial members of the colonial legislature were invariably lawyers.[26]

If there was a cloud on the high standing occupied by lawyers in the post-1833 era, it was the role which was attributed to them in the growth of "frivolous litigation" in the colony. "Frivolous litigation" denoted claims or causes which intrinsically merited no judicial intervention but which nonetheless were brought before the colonial judiciary by the population. Above all, this development signified in a very concrete fashion the failure of the judiciary to be the distributor of justice. The annually issued official *Administration Reports* not only provided painstakingly collected statistical evidence of "frivolous litigation" but also included laboured official efforts to "scientifically" chart the nature,

extent and causes of the phenomenon. The Solicitor General's estimate in 1892 that more than one-third of the colonial population belonged to what was quaintly described as the "court-going classes" – that is, those who were involved with the courts as parties to litigation or as witnesses – is a good example of this attempt at documentation.[27] The observers had no doubt that at the root of litigation lay the "litigious spirit" of the colonial peoples: thus, the Queen's Advocate wrote in the *Administration Reports* of 1874 that "a mere jostle, snatching a comb from the head, or even an offensive gesture, invariably lead to the charge of assault and goes to swell... [the number of] offenses against the person."[28] Belief was firm about the spirit for litigation but there was also the conviction that if lawyers were not willing to accommodate and intervene on behalf of those who held "frivolous" claims or causes, the judicial system would not have been forced to bear the burden it carried. As Justice Creasey of the Supreme Court declared in 1882,

> [a]n English solicitor enquires into his client's case and assures himself of its strength before he advises the client to bring an action or defend one. My own observation and the information I have received from those on whose experience I can rely, reduces me to believe that most Ceylon Proctors scarcely think of anything of that kind. Thus, the rolls of the Courts are swelled with a number of actions which a suitor properly advised would not undertake.[29]

Numerous cases document the frustration of the courts with the pursuit of "frivolous" causes by lawyers, and there were also a significant number of cases which reported sanctions being imposed upon lawyers by judges for bringing forward or defending actions which had no basis either in law or fact.[30] Despite this evidence, the precise relationship between lawyers and the growth in "frivolous litigation" cannot be easily determined. Nonetheless, what the contemporary assessment of lawyers in litigation as well as the documented growth and expansion of the profession testify to is that the lawyers played a far more significant role in the functioning of the judiciary than that envisaged originally by Cameron and this of course meant that the structure necessarily had to become distorted. Further, the earnings of lawyers, which were widely commented upon – Richard Morgan, for example, reportedly earned between 1,500 and 3,000 pounds annually by 1850[31] – and certainly envied by others, point to another dimension of the intervention of lawyers in litigation, its costs.

## Intermediaries of the Legal System

The emergence of the second group of legal elites the intermediaries who informally functioned as vital channels of access to the formal structure established by the 1833 Charter, constitutes one of the most fascinating developments of the nineteenth century. In contemporary sources these intermediaries are identified by a wide-range of terms – among them "touts," "hawkers," "brokers of proctors," "common barristers" "jungle proctors" and "petty practitioners" – but in general they were collectively identified as "out-door-proctors."

Out-door-proctors can properly be described as informal practitioners of law. They possessed neither a formally acquired legal education or training, nor a formally prescribed place in the judicial structure. The origins of the out-door-proctors could be traced back, on the one hand, to minor offices which carried some legal responsibilities. Thus, as the Lieutenant-Governor of the colony observed in 1877,

> the Notary Public has ...become the village lawyer. He not only attests but proposes all the instruments requiring notorial execution; he brings lender and borrower together when a loan or mortgage is required; his counsel is sought for in matters of legal difficulties and to him are confided the secrets of many families.[32]

On the other hand, there were also those who imbibed in the formal legal culture through their involvement in courts – a "habitual experience," according to one source[33] – and who were then able to parley the knowledge and experience thus acquired into a livelihood as out-door-proctors. They professed the ability to provide "professional advice and assistance," which they indeed did, if we are to judge by the number of occasions in which they were hauled before courts for practising law without a license.[34] They practised their livelihood both in the villages and around the courts. In villages, they were the "expects" who were consulted by those who needed advice or assistance in legal matters – in village society they were identified as *goda perakadoruvas* or "village proctors."[35] At judicial centres, out-door-proctors were able to convince those who came to the courts that their services were formally required and they in fact were often able to usurp the lawyers: as an official inquiry declared in 1884, out-door-proctors "more or less infested the purlieus of every court in Ceylon, great and small," and they thrived on the ignorance of litigants and defrauded them by promising their services and assistance of a professional order.[36] With this kind of perspective on the out-door-proctors, it is no surprise they were also held to be responsible for the promotion of "frivolous litigation": as John Capper expressed it, this "race of harpies of the law ... thrive on the follies of the litigants and ... fan slumbering embers into a blazing flame."[37]

It was obvious that the out-door-proctors were able to function in court complexes and provide services to litigants in courts only through the co-operation of minor court officials. Indeed, the collusion between these two groups was highlighted as the major source of corruption in courts in the last decades of the century. In his poetic attack on corruption and inefficiency of the lower courts, the well-known lawyer J C W Pereira offered this caricature of the outdoor-proctors:

> But who that human form with knavish port,
> Slow pacing at the door of yonder Court,
> With effort, does his bleary-eyed visage raise,
> And surely look at every mortal gaze?
> Ah ! 'tis the cheat that every fraud supports,
> Ah ! 'tis the vulture of the Minor Courts:

Behold in him and in his vacant stare,
The veritable out-door there.
In him there gleans with glance askance and sly,
Beneath a ruffled brow, a bloodshot eye,
While roasted gram or betel serves to elog,
The foul effluvia of the morning grog;
He, sniffs at nooks, and every object spies,
As slyly crawled a Cat in search of mice.[38]

Considerable numbers of out-door-proctors were involved in an additional source of remuneration, acting as "touts" or "brokers" of lawyers[39] – indeed it was this fact that explained their presence in numbers in and around courts; for after all, the great majority of lawyers tended to establish their offices near courts. The typical accusation which was made was that the services of these elements were called upon only by "inferior men in the race for professional distinction."[40]

As a group, the out-door-proctors received their greatest public visibility in 1875 when thirteen of them were charged in Colombo under the "Vagrant's Ordinance" for "not having any visible means of subsistence." They were convicted but the conviction was eventually overturned by the Supreme Court on the ground that the statute could not be applied to them. The publicity which was generated by the case led to calls for legislation to prohibit the out-door-proctors from working near court complexes as well as calls for the legal profession to refrain from employing them in their practices. There was no legislative outcome, but there was "voluntary" action on the part of the lawyers not to work with out-door-proctors which reveals that extent to which the publicity put them on the defensive.[41] The legal action under the Vagrant's Ordinance exemplified the judicial hostility displayed towards the out-door-proctors in general.

Detailed information about the social background of the out-door-proctors is lacking, but there is evidence that at least in village society they were drawn from among those who had reached the office of Notary Public. Notary was an office that dated back to the Dutch times in the littoral, and while the British did not require formal credentials for appointment to this office which principally involved authenticating of legal instruments, it is clear that social standing in society, whether on the basis of caste ranking or family recognition, was a determining factor.[42]

However, much they were condemned in official circles, there is little doubt that out-door-proctors were valuable elements in the judicial administration in nineteenth century Sri Lanka. In combining an official role with an informal one, as the Notaries Public did, or in spreading the knowledge and experience acquired through the formal process, as those with litigation exposure did, these elements added a crucial informal dimension to the system that was introduced by the 1833 Charter. These dimensions greatly altered and extended the shape and form of the judicial structure, in that the formal arena alone was no longer relevant to the wording of the judiciary.

Further, it is arguable that these informal dimensions were crucial in paving the way for the implanting of Cameron's innovative design in colonial soil. To be sure, in the process values which underlay the judiciary were undermined – "frivolous litigation" exemplified this – but that constituted an inevitable and necessary accommodation, given how far removed these values were from the colonial society.

## Interpreter Mudaliyars

The discussion on the third group of legal elites has to be placed within the context of the issue of language competencies of judicial officers. From the very beginning of British rule, officials were formally required to successfully complete language competency examinations. Moreover, both officials and unofficials alike repeatedly made pronouncements over the years about the validity and value of mastering the local languages as rulers: as one mid-nineteenth century writer succinctly put it, language was the "key to the heart of the native."[43] Despite the formal requirements and pronouncements, at no time did the generality of the officials acquire proficiency of Sinhalese and Tamil, the languages of the colonial peoples. Various explanations were offered for this failure – ranging from the difficulty of learning the languages to the burden of regular duties which permitted little time for study[44] – but it is also clear that this was inevitable from a ruling class which rarely placed a value on things indigenous.

With their ignorance of the languages, the British officials began to rely upon interpreters in the administration from the very initial stages. The officials in London were deeply concerned about the dependence established by the colonial officials upon Interpreter *Mudaliyars,* as the interpreters became formally known, but no noteworthy efforts were made in the colony to shed the dependence. This was true of the executive administration as it was of the judiciary. By the time Cameron investigated the judiciary, interpreters were firmly placed in judicial proceedings in the Maritime Provinces; they were far less important in the interior where traditional elements were associated with British judges in dispensing justice and traditional institutions like the *gamsabha* continued to play a role. Cameron did not dwell upon the issue of language competency of judges, but the interventionist role he called for judges in judicial proceedings, demanded from them a competence in the languages of those who appeared before them.

Cameron's "Paternalist Judge" never came into being. More importantly, interpreters inevitably won a central place in the proceedings of the courts established under the 1833 Charter – indeed, with the unification of the judicial administration, the expansion of the number of courts, and the increasing placement of claims and disputes before the courts by the colonial population, the interpreters acquired greater visibility and recognition. The significance of interpreters in the judiciary was well explained by Chief Justice Sir Charles Marshall when he stated in 1839 that

> [t]he important duties which those officers have to perform, and the absolute necessity for their intervention, more or less, in almost every suit instituted in

the Courts of Ceylon, are too obvious to escape notice. And it is not too much to say that on the intelligence, skill, and integrity of the interpreters, must in great measure depend whether the laws be justly or unjustly administered.[45]

In the years after the 1833 Charter was introduced, the Supreme Court not only re-affirmed the position of interpreters in judicial proceedings but also effectively strengthened and enhanced their role. Thus, while interpretation of the proceedings in the courts remained the primary responsibility of the interpreters, the high court allowed judges to consult them on the meaning of words and expressions found in documents written in Sinhalese and Tamil, and further, even permitted judges to consult them as experts on indigenous customs and institutions.[46]

The increasing importance of interpreters in the colonial judiciary did not go unnoticed; in fact, there continued to be public laments about the failings of judges that paved the way for interpreters. Witness the comments of James Alwis in the mid-nineteenth century:

> To the British judge – the guardian over our reputation, property, lives, and liberty – the study of our language cannot be too much recommended. Ignorance of the native languages on his part, renders remonstrances against bad and corrupt interpretations unavailing, and cross-examinations, that excellent test for the ascertainment of truth, useless.[47]

Alwis's point that the lack of proficiency in the languages on the part of judges made protests about poor interpretation ineffectual, is an important one. In fact, evidence shows that the ability and competence of interpreters were taken for granted by judges. As Chief Justice Marshall confessed in 1839, being "wholly unacquainted with the native languages" he could not evaluate the work of the interpreters who served him in the Supreme Court but he was quite confident simply on the basis of his knowledge of the social background of these officials, that they were effective and maintained their integrity.[48] The confidence placed upon interpreters by Marshall is questionable. There certainly is evidence which casts doubt on the language skills of interpreters. The most revealing documentation of a failure in interpretation comes from James Alwis who began his distinguished career as a District Court interpreter in the early 1840s. Writing of his first day in court and highlighting his abject failure in his Sinhalese interpretation, Alwis later wrote with much anguish:

> I could scarcely utter these words before I felt my inability to proceed – prompted me, but the help thus proffered only added to my wild confusion. My tongue was tied, my head was in a whirl and I sat down amidst the laughter of that class of men who generally take pleasure in the failings of their countrymen.[49]

Alwis attributed three reasons for his failure. First, he was not accustomed to speaking in public. Secondly, he was ignorant of the legal terminology: "I had no equivalent for the words 'plaintiff,' 'defendant,' 'intervenient,' 'libel,' 'petition of intervention,' all of which the

judge uttered... [and] of which I had not the slightest knowledge." And, thirdly, Alwis was not "sufficiently acquainted with Sinhalese, so as intelligibly to convey by it, even [those terms] with which I had some acquaintance."[50] This last admission may seem remarkable, but lack of fluency in the mother tongue of those who acquired and valued English education in nineteenth century Sri Lanka was not unusual.

It was generally acknowledged that the "two-fold" interpretation required – from English to Sinhalese or Tamil and then from Sinhalese or Tamil to English again – made the judicial proceedings exceedingly cumbersome and time consuming.[51] There is very little direct evidence to document what this meant in the experience of the average litigant. There is, however, a powerful and vivid presentation of the confrontation of two villagers with the criminal legal proceedings conducted by an English judge with the assistance of an interpreter in Leonard Woolf's novel set in the turn of the nineteenth century:

> It was like a dream. They did not understand what exactly was happening. This was 'a case' and they were 'the accused,' that was all they knew. The judge looked at them and frowned; this increased their fear and confusion. The judge said something to the interpreter, who asked them their names in an angry threatening voice. Silindu had forgotten what his ge name was; the interpreter became still more angry at this, and Silindu still more sullen and confused. From time to time the judge said a few sharp words in English to the interpreter; Silindu and Babun were never quite certain whether he was or was not speaking to them, or whether, when the interpreter spoke to them in Sinhalese, the words were really his own, or whether he was interpreting what the judge had said. [52]

Woolf drew on his experience as a judicial officer in an outlying district to write his *The Village in the Jungle,* a classic of its genre. That Woolf's description did not stray from the reality is confirmed by the scattered comments found in nineteenth century sources. Thus, A M Ferguson, observing "Law Court Oddities" in 1868, commented upon how struck he was by "the terrified expression with which the bewildered witnesses regards the stately interpreter."[53]

There was the occasional suggestion that the judicial proceedings be conducted in the local languages to obviate the problems of interpretation – this had the added advantage of forcing judicial officials to acquire language proficiency – but these suggestions never amounted to serious proposals. There was never a doubt about the wisdom of using English as the language of the law. Thus, Thomas Berwick, the District Judge of Colombo who officially published an extensive discussion of the relative merits of English and Sinhalese as legal languages in 1871 wrote:

> ordinary colloquial Sinhalese, while it abounds in separate words for the various forms of certain familiar material objects ....is singularly deficient in that higher class of *abstract* ideas and distinctions so absolutely necessary for everything beyond the most primitive, not to say rough shod, rendering of justice, either criminal or civil. A man might be hanged or acquitted on the differences of

shade of meaning of a word or the precision or vagueness of a single expression in the testimony of a witness. A language deficient in the conception, and still more in the expression, of abstract ideas and thoughts and distinctions of meaning, wanting in all colloquial precision of grammar in the mouths of a race marvellously indifferent to the vital importance of questions of *time, distance, identity,* and the like, is quite inadequate to the preservation of any parralism between the conduct of the English courts and the progressive advancement of the Country, which indeed is enormously influenced by language.[54]

Berwick's remarks, which epitomised the cultural superiority with which colonial officials treated "things native," ironically was also a powerful testimony to the crucial importance of proper interpretation in judicial proceedings.

During the first decades of British rule, interpreters were recruited from among men of "respectability and integrity"[55] – this essentially meant Burghers and members of the leading families among the higher castes of the Sinhalese and Tamils. Interpreter offices became greatly coveted and those who occupied the positions acquired considerable social standing.[56] But in the later decades of the century, the source of recruitment changed. This was particularly true with the rise of the independent professions. Thus, if inadequacies in the knowledge of the indigenous languages marked the first generation of interpreters – as was highlighted in James Alwis's experience – the second generation of interpreters was found fault with for their deficiencies in the English language.[57]

What the nineteenth century evidence establishes is that interpreters were an indispensable element in the working of the colonial judiciary. The indispensability did not mean that their presence improved administration of justice – indeed the requirement of interpretation certainly made it more cumbersome and time consuming for everyone involved and more expensive for the colonial government. Most crucially, their presence did not make the proceedings conducted in an alien language more intelligible or more meaningful to the average litigants – indeed, if we are to accept the vivid portrayal of Leonard Woolf, the manner in which interpreters performed their duties had the diametrically opposite effect of making justice seem so remote and impersonal.

## Cameron Reforms in Retrospect

In his report to the Colonial Office Cameron grandiloquently declared that

the peculiar circumstances of Ceylon, both physical and moral, seem to point it out to the British Government as the fittest spot in our Eastern dominions in which to plant the germ of European civilisation, whence we may not unreasonably hope that it will hereafter spread over the whole of those vast territories.[58]

To critics of Cameron – they were and they emerged throughout the century – this was precisely what was fundamentally wrong with his approach to the design of the

judiciary for the colony: as James Steuart articulated in 1862, Cameron's mistake was to treat the peoples of the colony as British colonists rather than as a conquered people and this "vain treatment" was responsible for much of the difficulty and problems which arose in the judicial administration.[59] Cameron through his judicial reforms was of course not seeking to simply sow the civilisation he knew and had experienced; as a Benthamite, it was a different artifact that he was implanting, one which had never been sowed before and one which had failed to win acceptance even in the motherland. This was an experimentation on a grand scale, though that is not the way the reforms found acceptance with authorities who had the decision-making powers with respect to implementation or were presented to the colony. In its original shape and form it was inevitable that the experiment would fail; for it to have even a modicum of success, it had to bend to the quality of the new soil and environment. It did so, but in the process what eventually survived bore little resemblance to the original.

## Notes

1. Until 1972 Sri Lanka was formally known as Ceylon but consistent with modern scholarship the country will be identified in this paper as Sri Lanka. The British conquered Sri Lanka in two stages, first the Maritime Provinces from the Dutch in 1796 and then the independent Kingdom of Kandy in the interior in 1815. Throughout the period under discussion the British governed Sri Lanka as a Crown Colony through the Colonial Office in London.

2. The 1833 Charter and Cameron's report are reproduced in Mendis, 1956. For a detailed discussion of the two documents see, Samaraweera, 1974.

3. Quoted in Samaraweera, 1974, p 264.

4. Mendis 1956, I, p 165.

5. *ibid.*, p 164.

6. Quoted in Samaraweera, 1974, p 265.

7. Mendis 1956, I, p 150.

8. On the nineteenth century history of Sri Lanka see generally, De Silva, 1982.

9. Quoted in Samaraweera, 1974, p 275.

10. Mendis, 1956, I, p 164.

11. See, Samaraweera, 1978.

12. Mendis 1956, I, p 141.

13. On the legal profession in nineteenth century Sri Lanka see in general, Nadaraja, 1972.

14. Mendis 1956, I, p 173.

15. *ibid.*

16. See, for example, reports in Grenier, 1872.

17. See, for example, Ferguson 1859.

18. Samaraweera 1987, p 10.

19. On the Burgher lawyers in the nineteenth century see, Samaraweera, 1987.

20. Andradi, 1967, p 123.

21. Anonymous, 1874, p 346.

22. Kemper, 1973, 44ff.

23. Nadaraja, 1972.

24. Andradi, 1967, pp 91-92.

25. Quoted in Samaraweera, 1987, p 7.

26. See, Weinman, 1948.

27. *Administration Reports, 1892.* A7.

28. *Administration Reports, 1880, Part III.* IB.

29. Quoted in Andradi, 1967, p 123.

30. See for example, *Administration Reports, 1871*, p 107.

31. Samaraweera, 1987, p 19.

32. *ibid.*, p 133.

33. *Lakminipahana*, 29 November 1862.

34. *See, Sessional Paper XXIII* of 1884.

35. *Lakminipahana*, 27 December 1862,

36. *Sessional Paper XXIII*, pp 15-16.

37. Capper, 1877, pp 208-209.

38. Pereira, 1882, p 9.

39. Andradi, 1967, p 124.

40. *ibid.*

41. *ibid.*, p 125.

42. *Lakminipahana*, 21 September 1864.

43. Alwis, 1852: v.

44. Mills, 1933, p 88.

45. Marshall, 1839, p 236.

46. *ibid.*, pp 237-239.

47. Alwis, 1852, p ccliii.

48. Marshall, 1839, p 237.

49. Alwis, 1878, p 63.

50. *ibid.*

51. *Administration Reports 1869*, p 189.

52. Woolf,1913, p 190.

53. Ferguson, 1868, p clxxi.

54. *Administration Reports, 1871*, p 282.

55. Marshall, 1839, p 236.

56. Thus, the names of interpreters abound, for example, in the public "Addresses" which were presented to the Governor and high colonial officials at important occasions.

57. *Administration Reports, Part III*, 1875, p 26.

58. Mendis, 1956, I, p 182.

59. Steuart, 1862, p 17.

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# The Determinants of the Growth of Science in Pre-Modern South Asia

S N Arseculeratne

## Introduction

During the Theme Seminar on *"National Self-reliance in Science and Technology"* at the annual sessions of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science in 1980, I presented a brief discussion on "The Basis of our Self-reliance in Science and Technology." Professor Kingsley de Silva read that essay and suggested that I should expand on the theme of my discussion which was that modern science, which is that corpus of knowledge about the natural world which grew explosively with the Scientific Revolution in western Europe over the last three hundred years, and the methodology through which it was achieved, are culturally alien to us. This view is nevertheless mindful of the fact that non-western civilisations, including that of South Asia, contributed to the *roots* of modern science. The task proved to be more extensive than I thought and I am still wading through the voluminous literature which is relevant to this theme as well as peripheral to it. It seemed however a worthwhile exercise because an analysis of the determinants of the growth of South Asian science still awaits the sort of treatment that Joseph Needham applied to science in China. Rahman (1972) despite his own extensive analysis of pre-modern Indian science, and that of other Indian writers, wrote: "Unfortunately, so far only the detailed study of (the) European tradition is available. Needham is working out Chinese, while Indian and West Asian is not worked out."

In this essay, I will expand on what I had earlier written (Arseculeratne, 1980; 1995; 1997). The postulates which I dealt with were (1) (from the existent literature) that while India, amongst the eastern civilisations contributed to the *roots* of modern science, "...the development of modern science occurred in Europe and nowhere else" (Needham, 1969): (2) that there was a large underlay of religiosity and traditionalism in South Asian society which inhibited the growth of its empirical science, especially the natural sciences, into modern science.

This discussion makes no judgement on the 'superiority' (in whatever sense) of the Western stance *vis-à-vis* science or on the merits or demerits of the direction that science in South Asia took. Instead it attempts to identify the reasons for the divergent paths that science in South Asia took in comparison with what happened in post-16th century Europe. The comments relating to India are perhaps applicable as well to Lanka as a cultural derivative of India.

There is apparently no documented data on the technical aspects of our ancient technological achievements, such as steel or hydraulic technology or even that knowledge which is in use today such as Ayurvedic therapeutics, that could indicate that those practices were derived from such an ordered, systematised, codified science in the sense that modern technology is almost entirely the result of the application of scientific principles which in turn emerged from a well-known path to scientific discovery – controlled observations, controlled experimentation, hypothesising, verification or falsification, the formulation of theories and documentation – which are the corner-stones of modern European science. For example, there is perhaps much that is valuable in traditional herbal remedies, but there is a lack of systematic data on the actions, effects, and toxicology of these remedies in contrast to such data in the western pharmacopoeia. Of course this Western knowledge accrued through the reductionist process and the expansion of disciplines in science, and basically through the formulation and consolidation of theoretical principles of science. Thus despite the existence of a highly sophisticated intellectual activity, controlled experimentation does not appear to have been the source of our ancient knowledge concerning Nature, contrasting with European science of the last three hundred years. A relevant comment was made by Needham (1969) of science in China: "Unfortunately, though, there seems no evidence that these highly developed modes of thought had any great effect on scientific speculation or study in China." One example of the lack of experimentation in Indian medicine, specifically the study of human anatomy by dissection, was pointed out by P C Ray (quoted by Chattopadhyaya, 1989), according to whom: "The very touch of a corpse, according to Manu, is enough to bring contamination to the sacred person of (a) Brahmin ...the handling of a lancet was discouraged and Anatomy and Surgery fell into disuse and became to all intents and purposes lost science to the Hindus." On ancient and medieval science in India, Rahman (1972) wrote: "From the points of view of methods and techniques of acquiring scientific knowledge, there was considerable development of observation but at the same time, there was a lack, both of experimentation itself and of a positive attitude towards experimentation." Relevant to the discussion that follows, on religion and the primacy of its influence on the mode of thinking of the South Asian, Chattopadhyaya (1989) considered that: "In our country, however, there eventually developed a situation in which the defence of scriptural knowledge acquired so much of importance that the importance of direct sense-perception was on the whole considered irrelevant or the importance attached to it, some sort of philosophical aberration. This was a positive misfortune specially from the viewpoint of natural science which draws its main nourishment ultimately from direct sense-perception." This overwhelming influence of religion on the thinking of South Asian society is discussed in later sections of this essay. Yet, illustrating the fact that experimentation did, sometimes, have a place in Indian natural science, Chattopadhyaya quoted P C Ray who wrote that: "...the Hindus had a very large hand in the cultivation of the experimental sciences...." and that Yasodhara, the author of a work on chemistry in the 13th or 14th century stated "All the chemical operations described in my book have been performed with my own hands."

On the theme of the alien nature of modern science in South Asia, I discussed on a previous occasion (Arseculeratne, 1995) some corollaries to it including the relatively

unexplored question on the history of modern science – why did not the Scientific Revolution take place in India rather than in Europe? Or as J D Bernal posed the question "Why had the same decisive steps not been taken in other cultures, such as those of India and China, which seemed ready for them at different periods in their history?" Chattopadhyaya (1989) asked the same question, as it pertained to India, more pointedly: "What, then, was it that proved inimical to the development of science, ultimately bringing it to ruin?" The historical time frame of this question is that of the post-16th centuries.

This question is not merely directed towards filling in gaps in the historiography of science, but as I have argued in my essay for UNESCO (Arseculeratne, 1997), a consideration of the roots of modern science which grew in non-European civilisations, would be complementary in science education in these non-European societies; for I deduce from the history of the growth of science in the West that there is an alienness of this Western European endeavour to South Asia and that from this arises a cultural block to our assimilation of modern science. This alienness derives from the introduction of a mode of (scientific) thinking which is basically different from that which prevailed in pre-colonial South Asia. In postulating the existence of such a 'block' in the South Asian to his assimilation of modern science, I do not mean his failure to comprehend, intellectually, the content of modern science. I refer instead to the conflict which arises between the South Asian mode of thinking – conformism to traditional ideas, respect of authority, resistance to change and innovation, and the absence of a motivation for systematic exploration of Nature on the one hand – and the scientific attitude of the creators of the modern science of Europe on the other. Edward W Said (1993) worded this idea of the conflict of cultures and the existence of a cultural resistance in traditional societies, to alien ideas more succinctly: "...there was always some form of active resistance and, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won out." It is that resistance to the entry of alien ideas which creates the cultural block that I speak of. In our traditional societies, to the assimilation of modern science. It was thus the temporal sequence of the growth of systematised knowledge about the external world which led to the Scientific Revolution in Europe followed by the subsequent introduction of modern science and its derivative technology through European colonialism in Asian countries which provided the opportunity for the expression of that alienness.

It is now a trite conclusion that the growth of science is linked to the ethos and dynamics of a given society, and that the development of science, as Alvin Toffler wrote, "is shaped by cultural receptivity to its dominant ideas." Needham's monumental work has provided us with insights on this question as it pertains to China. As Needham thought (1969): "The farther I penetrate into the detailed history of the achievements of Chinese science and technology before the time, when like all other ethnic cultural rivers, they flowed into the sea of modern science, the more convinced I become that the cause for the breakthrough occurring only in Europe was connected with the special social and economic conditions prevailing there at the Renaissance and can never be explained by any deficiencies either of the Chinese mind or of the Chinese intellectual and philosophical traditions." Pervez Hoodbhoy analysed the theological constraints on the systematic

growth of science in the Arabic and Islamic civilisations. The existence of basic concepts in the vein of modern science – atomism, causality, systems of logic, developments in mathematics, the decimal system and the concept of zero, algebra, astronomy, rudiments of biological classification – as well as inventions and technology – steel, textile, agricultural – in ancient and mediaeval India (Alvares, 1991), as in China, must be recognised. I refer here rather to the problem that there was no systematic growth, contrasting with what happened in Europe, of these basic ideas into the organised theoretical system that characterises modern science. As the prolific Indian historian of science Abdul Rahman (1972) wrote of the 18th century Indian Raja Sewai Jai Singh whose astronomical studies are well known: "The need for predicting the appearance of the new moons, or the accurate calendar was felt primarily because of the need of fixing the dates of religious festivals and the needs of administration of (the) empire." In other words, the goals of his astronomy, as perhaps of the diverse technologies of ancient and mediaeval South Asia, were more utilitarian than nomothetic.

On the growth of European science, Hessen (see Bynum *et.al.,* 1983) argued that science was linked to the "technological needs of emerging merchant capitalism and manufacture," while Merton (1973) claimed that capitalist and economic as well as military pre-occupations, and sanctions from Puritan values, influenced its growth. Merton was also concerned with the Puritan ethic which "built a new bridge between the transcendental and human action, thus supplying a motive force for the new science." There were also "the growth of wealth and leisure; the expansion of universities, the invention of printing" (Whitehead, 1985).

My thesis, which is supported by the writings of Indian authors is that other factors, especially religious, and religion-based cultural and educational factors, reflected in a collective traditional ethos, in addition to social aspects such as caste, bear more significantly on this question as it relates to South Asia. Or as Chattopadhyaya (1989) quoting the views of P C Ray, wrote "...the real cause of the decline of the scientific spirit in India was not within the general framework of science itself but outside it, i.e. mainly in the social conditions that developed in this country."

## The Roots of Modern Science

I extended my ideas of 1980 in the K N Seneviratne Memorial Lecture in 1995, in which I said: "There have been some shifts in ideas on modern science; for instance that in its growth there have been more roots than solely Eurocentric ones." Joseph Needham wrote in his introduction to A Rahman's book (1972): "For far too long has it been supposed that science was a product solely of the western or European mind – the facts are far otherwise."

The modern Indian literature (for example, Rahman, 1972; Jain, 1982) continues to add new information on ancient Indian discoveries in science. Aryabhata (b 475 AC) "...asserted that the earth rotates round its axis as well as round the sun," evaluated $\pi$ as

3.1416, the days in a solar year up to the seventh decimal place, and discovered the trigonometric sine. Staal (1993) considered Aryabhata to have been, with Aristarchos and Copernicus, one of the "three great theorists of the heliocentric universe." Kasyapa (Aulukya, Kanada - 6 c, BC) "...propounded an atomic theory known as *Vaiseshika Sutras*. This is the earliest atomic theory that appeared in any part of the world." "In astronomy, for instance, if we accept the statement of Alberuni, in *Kitab-al-Hind*, then we would notice that at least one contemporary astronomer believed in the heliocentric system, but could not express his belief publicly for fear of religious wrath." There is a parallel in the conflict which Galileo had with the orthodox church with his heliocentric theory. Notable Indian mathematicians included Aryabhata (AC 499), Varamihira (AC 505, Brahmagupta (7c AC), Mahavira (9c AC) and Bhaskara (12c AC). "India is richer than China in abstract and theoretical sciences such as mathematics and logic" (Staal, 1993). With the sophisticated modes of abstract thinking which characterised Indian science, especially mathematics and astronomy, and religious philosophy throughout the centuries, it does not seem surprising that the greatest contributions of the Indians to modern science have been in the theoretical areas of mathematics, astrophysics, and physics. It is especially in the natural sciences that the contrast between South Asian science and the nomothetic character of the science of the west, is most pronounced.

"The general flow of techniques before 1500 was from East to West, from China and India to Europe.... By 1500 most of the basic inventions of Asia were well established in the technology of Europe.... During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the Hindu-Arabic numerical and computational system as well as elements of Indian astronomy certainly passed through the Islamic world into Europe, possibly by means of Spanish intermediaries.... Over the previous fifteen hundred years a few inventions fundamental to the evolution of the sailing craft were possibly transmitted to Europe from the East, the sprit sail from India (AD 2nd century), the lanteen sail of the Arabs (8th century), the mariner's compass and the axial sternpost rudder from China (late 12th century), and the principle of making masts from a number of possible Asian sources (15th century)... it is clear that European iatrochemical teachings were derived ultimately from Chinese, Indian, and Arabic practices that had earlier been transmitted to Europe" (Lach, 1977). And they were the 'rivers' which Needham wrote of, which flowed into the sea of modern science, or to change the metaphor, the roots which generated the tree of modern science.

A point of importance which arises from these historical considerations is that the Asians did not lack the intellect and innovative capacity that made the European Scientific Revolution possible. There were groups in pre-modern India which also had the intellectual stance conducive to the development of science – the Lokayatas or Charvakas, the materialists, (Chattopadhyaya, 1989). They were heretics who struggled, in futility, against religious orthodoxy, as did the Mu'tazilites (the 'dissenters') of 13th century Baghdad in the Islamic world. Similar comments could be made of China (see Whitehead, 1985). What then were the factors which prevented the scientific revolution from occurring in South Asia after the 16th century? As Whitehead asked (1985): "Why did the pace suddenly quicken in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries?... Inventions stimulated thought, and thought

quickened physical speculation." But then, India, for example, had many important inventions; why did not scientific thinking, in the Western mode, follow? Why is it, as Rahman (1972) also asked, that in India an "empiricism of the trial and error type" prevailed?

It seems to me that the answers are to be based on the different directions which the growth of science took in Europe and in South Asia. This leads to a consideration of the goal of scientific activity in South Asia – was it solely for utilitarian purposes or for the derivation and establishment of the theoretical principles of science? In Europe, "To the mechanics and artisans of the 16th century technology remained, as it had to their forbears, the empirical attempt to use nature without the guidance of the orderly body of knowledge called science" (Lach, 1977). So it probably was to the mechanics and artisans of South Asia at that time, but the problem remains as to how and why the 'science' in Asia remained empirical and utilitarian during the later centuries while an ordered and systematised body of knowledge called science grew in Europe to culminate in the Scientific Revolution.

It would appear that the point of divergence between the Asian approach to science and that of the West was that in Asia the immediate goals of empirical science remained, on the one hand utilitarian while, on the other its ultimate significance lay in religious philosophy. The west proceeded with the study of Nature for its own sake towards the establishment of scientific principles and theories. "The great traditions of Eurasia are basically similar but there are differences between them in character and emphasis. West Eurasian science is characterised by an emphasis on nature and punctuated increases and decreases in theoretical and empirical sophistication.... Indian science by formal analysis and an emphasis on human theory"; on the time scale, "All Eurasian sciences reached similar levels until the 16th century after which the European members of the family spiralled ahead" (Staal, 1993). An analysis of the reasons for this divergence could contribute to an answer to the question raised at the beginning of this essay on the reasons for the failure of the sprouting of the Scientific Revolution in South Asia.

## Traditionalism

A factor which appeared to be indispensable to the growth of modern science was flexibility of thought which allowed of the modification of earlier-held views on Nature in the face of new evidence and the formulation of new hypotheses and theories. It also appears that a conservative ethos was inimical to that effort.

Indian culture, many centuries old, may be characterised as one of conservatism, which according to Michels is "largely a reasoned or unreasoned resistance to any change" or as Rohden (1968) stated; "it denies the existence of men as such and looks upon the individual as a link in the chain of generations." There is "reverence to antiquity and grandeur" and "hostility for innovations in social and moral order," and a "love of traditional aesthetic values." This state contrasts with what characterised the European Renaissance and the Enlightenment – the radical assertion of the place of the individual, Humanism, the

rejection of intellectual and moral authority, and the growth of new ideas about the natural world. The rise of modern science occurred *pari passu* with these movements. If the Scientific Revolution resulted from such a mental stance, did traditionalism (to use a word frowned upon by contemporary sociologists) or conservatism in Asian societies inhibit scepticism which, with empiricism, propelled the growth of modern science in Europe?

This implies that, despite the basic intelligence and competence at innovation of the South Asian, and his use of empirical science for utilitarian purposes, there was no growth of that rudimentary science on nomothetic lines, which characterised the growth of European science. What, I believe, characterised the South Asian in his approach to Nature was as Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan (quoted by Francis 1992) wrote: "Reverence for the past is a national trait. There is a certain doggedness of temperament, a stubborn loyalty to lose nothing in the long march of the ages. When confronted with new culture or sudden extensions of knowledge, the Indian does not yield to the temptation of the hour, but holds fast to his traditional faith, importing as much as possible of the new into the old." This firm anchorage to tradition, especially religious tradition, is one factor which probably held him back from the sort of experimentation on Nature which could have led, as it did in Europe, to a radically new view of it, through the enterprise of modern science. This factor was compounded by the South Asians religious conditioning which took him, and still holds him, to the divine interpretation of Nature. And it is in that process of attempting to assimilate modern science that was introduced to Asia through western colonialism that we have not completely succeeded, because it involves the attempt to graft a radically different (European) ethos onto another that is so firmly consolidated by centuries of traditional thought.

## Religion

Religion is an aspect of South Asian society where conservatism is most evident. Said Kushwant Singh (1982) of India: "We spend more time in the pursuit of religion than any other people in the world." The priests, whether the Brahmins of India or the powerful *ulama* in the 13th century Islamic world, (or the Catholic clergy in mediaeval Europe), controlled the perceptions and thinking of society. The South Asian with his religious and philosophical traditions was, and is yet, more concerned with the human spiritual condition rather than with empirical and objective and systematic analysis of Nature which the post-Renaissance European man of science was engaged in. The Asian internalised his view of the world while the European externalised it. Leonardo da Vinci made detailed and accurate anatomical drawings of the human body as an objective investigation of Nature. The Asian, as Ananda Coomaraswamy (1956) wrote, transformed Nature in art, according to the dictates and traditions of religion; "...modern European art endeavours to represent things as entities in themselves. Asiatic and Chinese art to represent things more nearly as they are in God, or nearer to their source." To the Asian there was no priority in the analysis of the natural world as an end in itself, which is the concern of materialistic science; he was more concerned with the philosophical, religious and symbolic significance of what Nature

represented. The forms in life they portrayed were "by no means empirically determined, but designed as far as possible according to metaphysical tradition..." (Coomaraswamy).

The incompatibility of the traditional Indian religious ethos with the orientations of modern science is implied in the commentaries of Indian authors on science. Rahman (1972) wrote: "This (modern scientific) process cannot be applied to vedantic philosophy, which is centred round the studies of the sacred texts. The nature of these studies is essentially limited to a commentary on the text. This means that one could only give a new explanation but not add to, modify, or change the central thesis, which is timeless. How could one, therefore, think of incorporating vedanta in science.?" P C Ray (quoted by Chattopadhyaya, 1989) was of a similar opinion: "The Vedanta philosophy, as modified and expanded by Samkara which teaches the unreality of the material world, is also to a large extent responsible for bringing the study of physical science into disrepute." A Western commentator Maxwell Fry (1974) also concluded that: "Hinduism, assuming its dominant Aryan composition a thousand or more years before the coming of Christ, revealed an obsession for speculation on the meaning of life that led to the idea of the soul's absorption into the Universal Being, and by contrast, to the comparative worthlessness of the realities of day-to-day life."

The ancient Indian medical texts of Charaka and Susruta have varied emphases on religious and superstitious views: "...the form in which the Susruta Samhita reaches us is not free from priestly bias," although "...in many passages of the Susruta Samhita the view-point of science is least tainted by superstition" while "In many passages of the Caraka Samhita, science remains completely submerged under superstition (Chattopadhyaya, 1979). Yet there were phases of a secular treatment of medical science in ancient India: "During its creative period – the period of its transition from magico-religious to rationalistic therapeutics – the basic requirements of complete secularisation of their discipline lead the physicians to create a methodology of their own. Discarding scripture-orientation, they insist on the supreme importance of direct observation of natural phenomena and on the technique of a rational processing of the empirical data. They go even to the extent of claiming that the truth of any conclusion thus arrived at is to be tested ultimately by the criterion of practice" (Chattopadhyaya, 1979) thus forestalling the hypothetico-deductive approach of later Western science.

"The separation between science and religion, as it happened in the West, never took place in India. The aim of knowledge, as it was acquired, continued to be in the context of religion to which a scholar or a scientist belonged. Consequently, in spite of considerable information being available in diverse fields, no laws of nature, to systematise knowledge in a conceptual and theoretical framework, could be developed" (Rahman, 1972). Rahman's comments underscore my view that there seems to have been no nomothetic basis of Asian science, and that Nature was seen through a religious perspective, though its empirical science was directed towards utilitarian ends.

For this advance towards the beginnings of modern science in the West, "....a third factor was also required – the formulation of theories verifiable by the method of experiment. This the old Chinese lacked, for they were never able to pass beyond the relatively primitive and unquantifiable theories of the Five Elements and the Two Forces" (Ronan, 1980). The situation in ancient and medieval India was apparently similar.

Buddhism was widespread in India but not for long though, when Hinduism displaced it. There was on the one hand, the Buddhist injunction against idle speculation on the inexplicable phenomena of the world and of the universe and the idea (according to some commentators) of the illusory nature of sense-based experience, both of which are apparently contradictory to the stance of modern science. On the other hand Buddhism had highly developed analytical modes of thought, argument, and logic with the oft-quoted injunction to the Kalamas; "Be not led by the authority of religious texts..." In discussing 'Influences of Buddhism on Chinese science and scientific thought,' Ronan (1980) commented: "...behind all these points of tentative contact between Buddhist ideas and the developing interest in the sciences of Nature is the fact that Buddhism introduced into China a wealth of highly sophisticated discussions about logic and theory and nature of knowledge. Buddhism, and other Indian theoretical systems that accompanied it, were often at least as subtle as any of the great philosophies of Europe, and some not least of those concerned with dialectical logic, reinforced similar thinking already present in Taoist and Mohist schools." On the other hand "...it (*Buddhism)* never lost its basic attitude of refusing to answer any questions which concerned matters that were considered unknowable (*and metaphysical*), questions such as whether or not the universe is eternal, whether or not it is finite, whether or not the vital principle is the same as the body.... Perhaps this refusal to speculate was another feature that made Buddhism inimical to carrying out scientific research" (Ronan, 1980). Other (Chinese) Buddhist concepts were also considered in a negative light: "Shapes, feelings, aggregates that sum up an individual's mental and physical existence were only illusions.... It was this most of all that made Buddhism irreconcilable with Taoism and Confucianism and tragically played a part in strangling the development of Chinese science" (Ronan, 1980). This Buddhist view which is of importance in a secular, materialistic view of Nature, was interpreted by P D Premasiri (1999, personal communication) as implying: "....an illusion to believe that there is an enduring substance in either physical or mental phenomena" but added that "The Buddha accepts as valid, sense perception as it is the only way with which we can construct a practical notion about the world."

## Caste

One must also consider the social, political and economic factors which were identified by Needham as having been constraints in China. Buddhism is again relevant to our question also in respect of another factor in Indian society – caste – as an inhibitory factor in the growth of science. "A social organisation based on caste or hierarchy or authority is neither conducive to scientific and technological growth nor the utilisation of knowledge" (Rahman, 1972).

If the Scientific Revolution was accompanied by a change from a feudal to a capitalist society in Europe, Indian caste and feudalism would have inhibited social mobility and the translation of individual creativity into technology and economic advance. The degradation of the status of technicians and craftsmen and hence the lack of their symbiotic contributions to the growth of technology with a scientific basis has also to be recognised. In Europe on the contrary, as J D Bernal stated, "...the Renaissance healed though only partially, the breach between aristocratic theory and plebeian practice." It was Edgar Zilsel's thesis (see Bynum *et.al.*, 1983) that lowering of the barriers of class in Europe allowed of the synergy between the artisans, who were the repository of experimental and observational techniques and causal thinking, and the scholars and the humanists. "The invention of the clay-plaster in bone-setting is due to the Indian potter, just as plastic surgery to restore noses mutilated in war or by disease was a discovery of the rather despised barber. Both were practised extensively in the 18th century; the low caste status of the practitioners and contempt for science on the part of their betters prevented full development as in the West" (Kosambi, 1986). The "contempt for science" and the "low caste status" which prevented the development of such technology into science-based technology are the underpinnings of this essay.

It is incidentally interesting that in the analysis of the question of the non-growth of ancient Indian science, P C Ray, as noted by Chattopadhyaya (1989), antedated Edgar Zilsel, in the view that: "The main cause of the decline of the scientific spirit in India was the entrenchment of caste society, with its disastrous degradation of the social status of the technicians, craftsmen and other manual workers... when the Brahmins reasserted their supremacy on the decline and expulsion of Buddhism."

Similar social stratification was also regarded by Gillian Juleff (1999, personal communication) as a plausible explanation of the non-documentation of the important steel technology in 7-11th century Lanka: "....pondering the lack of documentary evidence and trying to come up with an explanation... my only eventual conclusion involved caste.... Those responsible for documenting events would be of sufficiently high status that they may have been reluctant to admit a knowledge of the work of people far lower in social status"

Whatever characteristics Buddhism may have had which were compatible with independent thought as an ingredient of the scientific attitude, and its disavowal of caste-based divisions of society which might have allowed of a greater interaction between the intellectuals and the artisans, its influence in the mediaeval period with which we are concerned was probably minimal for "Its decline was gradual but certain and towards the 13th century became rapid" (Thapar, 1966).

## The Visual Arts

In expanding the idea that a religious rather than a secular ethos determined the South Asian's view of Nature, I consider it relevant to discuss the basis of South Asian art as an expression of the 'transformation of Nature' which was referred to earlier. I include a

consideration of art forms in this discussion on science not only because it was, with science, a concern of the creative Renaissance in Europe, but also because Nature has submitted itself to artistic expression as much as to scientific exploration.

Art in South Asian society was symbolic and metaphorical with no literal representations, no realism. "In common with the artistic expression of all early civilisations, Indian art evolved to satisfy spiritual needs...." (Mulk Raj Anand, 1974). The emergence of realism and individualism on the part of the artist in South Asian art, occurred only during the last 150 years. Secularism was late in its expression, and when it did emerge, as in secular court paintings in the Moghul miniature style, it was secretively done to avoid sanctions from religious clerics.

The theme and content based on the traditional Indian philosophical canons of art, rather than expressions, as in western art, of the artist's individualistic perceptions and not the identity of the artist, were of central importance in mediaeval South Asian art. Realism in Europe came in the post-Renaissance period with the Age of Reason, and was co-temporaneous with the growth of scientific ideas. There was thus that essential ingredient, naturalism, which underlay the growth of modern science in Europe. Natural objects and events were studied as entities in themselves, and not, as for the Asian, as representation of the divine. "The rise of Naturalism in the later Middle Ages was the entry into the European mind of the final ingredient necessary for the rise of science. It was the rise of interest in natural objects and in natural occurrences, for their own sakes" (Whitehead, 1985). Thus when European art entered India, for example, through the Jesuits in the Moghul court, "...clouds, trees, houses, became more realistic, less stylised; and human beings became individualised when compared with the stereotypes of earlier Indian art" (Mulk Raj Anand ,1974).

In post-Renaissance western art there were shifts in modes of expression – the Baroque, the Classical, the Romantic, the Impressionist, Expressionist, Cubist, Modernist, and Post-Modernist movements. And with the Renaissance came experimentation even in art – the perceptual effects of light and shade, colours, forms and perspective. But the paradigm of Indian and South Asian art remained, for long, traditional and conservative. It was the "shift of paradigms," in Kuhn's terms, in modern (western) science that characterised its exponential growth. Was the Asian constrained in his total ethos by his religious conservatism which was the antithesis of the flexibility needed for the growth of new ideas so characteristic of the growth of modern science?

## The Scientific Attitude

Deviating from the conventional views on how science advances, Bauer (1994) thought: "If modern science owes its success to application of the scientific method, then one has to regard the 17th century as a time when people, specifically in Western Europe, first became really adept at drawing conclusions from observations, at testing hypotheses, at learning about the world from actual experience. Such an explanation is simply not

tenable... Human beings knew about empiricism and skepticism and were capable of logic long before the 17th century, and not only in western Europe."

Thus there were beginnings in ancient India, of natural philosophy, as science was earlier termed, with the secular materialists – the Charvakas (see Chattopadhyaya, 1989). The concern of the Charvakas was with natural things and phenomena for their own sake, and explanations for them, which, as for the observers in post-Renaissance Europe, were the mainsprings of the development of natural science. But the Charvakas had, as had the Mu'tazilites of the 13th century Islamic world, conflict with religious orthodoxy; they shared a similar fate with the consequent abortion of the promise of the progress of scientific inquiry, "....all things great and small are conceivable as exemplifications of general principles which reign throughout the natural order" (Whitehead, 1985); but ultimately, to the orthodox Asian, they remained largely exemplifications of the divine.

But how did Europe wean itself from that religious obscurantism which overwhelmed analytical empiricism, while Asia remained sodden with it? Following the Catholic religious orthodoxy in Europe which persecuted Galileo for his heliocentric theory, there was the curious twist through which the new views of the world put forward were regarded by the Protestants, as Newton was, as emphasising the greatness and mysteriousness of the creator God. The Puritan ethic added zest to the investigation of Nature as a legitimate activity in understanding the handiwork of God.

The Western ethos related to science differed from the South Asian. In Europe, "Tension between the secular and the Christian had long existed in many speculative fields of scholarship and was exacerbated in all branches of learning by the Reformation and its aftermath. Over the course of the centuries the knowledge of both the classical and religious authorities was challenged and sometimes openly derided as inadequate or inaccurate by the proponents of a newer learning which upheld the primacy of empirical observation and demanded, though unavailingly, new syntheses of universal dimension and applicability" (Lach, 1977). "The sixteenth century of our era saw the disruption of Western Christianity and the rise of modern science" (Whitehead, 1985). The divergence of different schools of Asian religion were not substantial enough, as the Reformation in Europe was, to weaken the stranglehold of religious orthodoxy in India. Moreover, the post-Reformation Christian view in Europe provided a link with, and indeed a motivation (the Puritan ethic) for, the systematic investigation of Nature. On the other hand, while there were sporadic movements away from orthodox religious tradition in India with the Charvakas ("the uncompromising materialists" – Chattopadhyaya, 1989), the orthodox religious tradition ultimately held sway. "Most of the surviving ancient Indian documents are overwhelmingly religious and ritualistic" (Kosambi, 1986). "The priests are interested in supernaturalism and mystification of nature" especially in the Brahmana tradition (Chattopadhaya, 1979). What was missing in the mediaeval South Asian activity was the "...complete secularisation of their discipline..." (Chattopadhyaya, 1979).

It is of interest to note that a vibrant debate was made on this essential ingredient of the growth of modern science – the scientific attitude – in the Indian national newspapers of the early 1980s on the topic of 'the scientific temper,' a phrase used by Jawaharlal Nehru as synonymous with 'the scientific attitude.'

## Documentation in Science

There was yet another factor which nourished the growth of modern science in Europe – the free communication of the results of scientific exploration within the community of scientists, pithily worded in the statement that "science is public." Several writers, Asian and Western (Rahman, 1972; Bronowski, 1979; Whitehead, 1985) have commented on this fact. Free publication of the results of scientific investigation and the formulation of hypotheses and theories allow of what philosophers of modern science call 'inter-subjective testability' in the validation of scientific theories. Bauer (1994) further explains that: "If modern science is recognised to be an inescapably co-operative social activity, it becomes plain enough what was crucial in 17th-century western Europe: viable scientific societies were formed and scientific journals were established." These devices allowed of independent verification or falsification of hypotheses, of recruiting other workers for work in a given area, and helped complete or at least extend, the 'jigsaw' of Nature. Apparently scientific societies and journals were also not established in pre-modern Asia.

It is noteworthy that advanced technologies were in use in both pre-modern India (steel, cotton and textile weaving, agriculture – see Alvares 1991) and  Lanka (steel – Juleff, 1996).  Of ancient hydraulic technology in this country Devendra (1965) wrote; "What was lacking is not scientific knowledge but treatises written in methods of western people." As with the absence of documentation of our hydraulic technology, so, apparently was the case with the advanced steel-manufacturing techniques in the 7th through the 11th centuries in Lanka described by Juleff (1996): "I did not find any reference to steel making technology in any documentary sources.  I was puzzled that there was no reference to what was not only technologically important but also, in my interpretation of the field evidence, economically a very important commodity" (Gillian Juleff, 1996, personal communication).  On the other hand it is known that iconometry was well developed in the later Anuradhapura period and that its documentation was made on ola leaves (R H de Silva, 1999, personal communication). But the absence of documentation of the hydraulic technologies of the same period raises the possibility that either iconometric writings were made on the primacy of religion, and  because they related to religious architecture while hydraulic and steel technologies were secular and hence not documented. It could also be that the iconometric writings, being of a religious nature, were considered more valuable and therefore preserved (R H de Silva, 1999, personal communication).  Indeed the chronicles of Lanka were written by monks.

In pre-modern South Asia it is thought, on the one hand, that the transmission of secular knowledge, as opposed to matters related to religion was by the oral tradition and sometimes secretly from father to son. "Ancient Indian civilisation was an oral tradition

and the oral transmission of the tradition became the first object of scientific inquiry" (Staal, 1993). On the other hand, Rahman (1972) has documented the existence of over ten thousand Indian manuscripts in Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit, from the 8th to the 19th centuries, on topics including agriculture, astronomy, botany, chemistry, geology, mathematics, medicine, physics, zoology, in addition to dictionaries and encyclopaedias. It remains to be studied whether such documents, as with our traditional medicine writings on ola leaves, were handed down within the family or from master craftsmen to their pupils, or whether they were available to the scientific community, through scientific societies for example, for validation.

## Language

The structure of language and its flexibility in communicating subtle concepts such as are found in science, are perhaps other complementary areas which are concerned in the propagation of scientific ideas.

The Indian situation over the ancient and medieval periods was more complicated by the successive waves of invaders with non-Indian languages–Arabic, Turkish, and Persian, although Rahman points out that translations of manuscripts were made between Sanskrit, the pristine Indian language and Arabic and Persian. The importance of language in writings in science is illustrated by the Chinese situation. "The pruning of sounds in Chinese has left the language with too few for use, at least as far as developing a Chinese scientific terminology is concerned.... This gives in theory a total of 30 meanings to each sound... it does mean that there has been little leeway for the development of new scientific terms..." (Ronan, 1980). Singer (1962) commented on the change in the structure of language in Europe with the onset of the scientific revolution, with terms becoming more precise to accommodate the emergent scientific terminology and its meanings. In India, however, "...the Indian languages did not develop precise expressions and vocabularies to express new ideas... they remained medieval in outlook, overloaded with mystical and ambiguous vocabulary that was emotional in its appeal" (Rahman, 1972).

The problem was compounded in colonial times when education in science was done through a language – English – which was alien to the average Indian or Lankan. Thus excluded from a contact with modern science were the artisans and craftsmen.

## Education

The process of education is a determinant of the establishment of a spirit of scientific inquiry, especially in the young. In contemporary times as much as in the remote past, the heavy overlay of rote learning, the neglect of critical and creative thinking, and the lack of boldness in challenging or deviating from conventional thought, are important constraints to the establishment of a scientific mode of thinking and of a scientific attitude.

In education, the ancient Indian tradition of the ideological subservience of the pupil to his teacher and obedience to authority, might have also stifled the individual's exploration of new ideas. Hoodbhoy cites a similar constraint in pre-modern Islamic society; India with three hundred years of Moghul rule could have been further burdened by that tradition. "The inability of the traditional system of education to respond adequately to a changing world may well have been the most critical factor which denied to Muslims the chance of spearheading the Scientific Revolution" (Hoodbhoy, 1992).

## Colonialism

Colonialism is not relevant to my original question (on the non-growth of science in Asia) because it was with the growth of science in Europe, and its derivative technology that western domination of the colonies began. "Europe's technological preparation, scientific attitude, and control of energy yielded the productivity, organisational skill, and naval and military superiority that made possible its successful overseas expansion" (Lach, 1977). Ironically it was the west that brought modern science to Asia through colonialism.

"There is no authentic indigenous science in the Third World. What goes in the name of science is largely a more or less imaginative imitation of what has already been done in the North" (Prasad, 1991). The earliest institutes of scientific research in Ceylon, the Rubber, Tea and Coconut Research Institutes, were set up by the British in colonial times, purely for the support of their economic interests from these plantations, and not for the education of the natives in modern science. As much was the goal of medical training, which was to produce subordinates to attend to the health of the plantation workers. Thus: "Consequently, it *(science)* never acquired the revolutionary character which it had in the West, in terms of challenging the prevalent outlooks and intellectual attitudes, and the values generated by them" (Rahman, 1972). The colonial experience was thus a grafting of an alien tradition of modern science and scientific thinking, on to a basically different South Asian tradition of the acquisition of knowledge about the external world and hence my view that modern science which was established in Europe, was alien to us in Asia, although it is important to emphasise that Asia contributed roots to the enterprise of modern science.

On the other hand, colonialism suppressed whatever indigenous technologies there were; Alvares (1991) cites the case, among many others, of medieval Indian steel which was regarded, at that time, as the best in the world. And so was the case with the indigenous Indian textile industry.

## Conclusions

The question then is, despite the native intelligence and conceptual innovativeness of sporadic pre-modern Asian thinkers, and the technological competence and innovativeness of the artisans and technicians drawn from the populace at large, could their widely pervasive and dominant religious or traditional ethos, which appears to have characteristics which were antithetical to those of modern science, have contributed to the non-growth of

their rudimentary ideas into a corpus of science such as that which flourished in post-Renaissance Europe to culminate in what is termed the Scientific Revolution? V S Naipaul saw of "India, the Wounded Civilisation": "Its past was too much with it, was still being lived out in the ritual, the laws, the magic – the complex instinctive life that muffles response and buries even the idea of inquiry." To repeat in other words, was it the absence of a secular view of Nature and the preponderance of a religious one, that basically prevented the South Asian from pursuing materialistic science and establishing its nomothetic base?

Of course these ideas that I have broached will provoke many questions and controversies. But there is one implication to be considered. If modern science which grew in the West is culturally alien to us Asians, what should be our response to modern science and technology? There appear to be three options – firstly, the acceptance of an extreme Eurocentricity implying a universal dominance or hegemony of modern science prescribed by such commentators as Moravcsic and Ziman. Secondly, at the other extreme, there is the rejection, as prescribed by Ashis Nandy, of modern science and technology in the face of the limits to science and failures of science based technology. It is a synthesis, and not a cultural dualism (of traditional indigenous knowledge and modern science), to which I subscribe. I have discussed this synthesis in education in science and technology, in my essay for UNESCO (1997). This synthesis is at the level of practicality for coping with modern science and technology as well as for the development of those habits of mind which make scientific inquiry possible.

Other implications of the views embodied in this essay are (1) of what relevance is the establishment of a 'scientific temper' or scientific attitude in Asian populations, (2) how should our education in science be re-oriented to establish such an underlay, (3) is not the history of indigenous science in Asia an important component of our education in science? A discussion of the roots of modern science to which Asia contributed, might lessen the alienness which modern science has to Asians.

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# The Hindu-Muslim Question in India: Confrontation and Co-Existence

## Partha S Ghosh

"The inescapable truth seems to be that Hindu India cannot escape the consequences of its medieval defeat, however much it might try, and Indian Islam cannot overcome the consequences of the failure of its mission of conquest in India whatever it might do. The result has been on both sides frustration, hatred, and apparent powerlessness to alter the situation."

Gopal Krishna in his "Communalism Revisited," *Times of India,* New Delhi, 23, 24 July 1974.

"It is one thing to assert, in a separatist disposition, that Hinduism and Islam are two different religious systems parallel to each other, not likely to meet anywhere; and it is quite another to see in the historical background that religions, however different from each other, are hardly a hindrance to the attainment of common objectives, objectives that pertain to national and political life, and even social life. The example of the 1857 Revolt will always remain a beacon light."

Ram Gopal, author of *Indian Muslims: A Political History* (1959) in his foreword to Raghuraj Gupta's *Hindu-Muslim Relations* (1976), p viii.

## Introduction

In the above two quotations I have tried to encapsulate the essential thrust of this essay on the Hindu-Muslim question in India which I consider as an ongoing saga of conflict and co-operation. Both the forces are equally strong in the plural society of India and depending upon circumstances one overpowers the other. While 1857 symbolised their unity of purpose, 1947 underlined the undercurrents of mutual distrust. The present is a blending of both which cannot be harmonious for it would be a contradiction in terms.

In the creation, determination and assertion of an individual's identity religion is important in India.[1] No wonder that in spite of the state's emphasis on secularism as state policy people continue to identify themselves, as well as others, as Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, etc. besides other ethnic and caste credentials. Quite naturally religion is considered as one of the exploitable political commodities. Dhurjati Prasad Mukherji, one of the founding fathers of the discipline of sociology in India, wrote about half-a-century ago: "Our material conditions, our political subjection, our nationalism conspire in the currency of the story started by the West for its own purposes that Indians, by and large, are...

addicts to religion, that both the body and the soul of Indian culture are annexed and possessed by the Divinity." He felt that those "progressives" in India who dismissed religion as the opium of the people not only ignored social facts but also "the historical process by which these have assumed the attached social values."[2] It is, therefore, inadvisable to "turn a blind eye to the conflicts between religious communities which have for so long caused untold suffering to innocent people everywhere" but rather understand them as "unrealised promise of cultural pluralism." "The history of India," to quote Madan, "is the history of syncretism among religious traditions as well as conflict between religious communities, and should have a great deal to tell us about both processes. It is therefore important that we read history carefully, for while the clash between obscurantist-revivalist ideologies has turned out to be not only barren but also bloody, secularism (in the Enlightenment sense of the term) has nowhere – not even in Europe – succeeded in providing a comprehensive alternative to the religious worldview."[3]

## Religion and Politics

The question of Hindu-Muslim relationship must necessarily be studied within the overall framework of the age-old controversy in respect of religion's role in politics. In ancient times when neither religion nor politics was structured their respective roles were amorphous. But howsoever undefined they were the mutual relationship between religion and politics was the most critical factor influencing societal developments. With the passage of time as both religious and political organisations crystallised, their connections became manifest and formal. The State and the Church developed one form of mechanism or the other to share political power so as to ensure social order. In Europe Charlemagne's coronation in 800 AD was probably the first formal recognition of this partnership. Ever since, through centuries of conflicts, more so in the wake of the Renaissance, Reformation and the Industrial Revolution, the Church has gradually given in to the State. But the loss of clout for the Church has not meant the same for religion *per se*. As man's most ancient ideology it continues to influence his thoughts and cultural patterns which is the staple on which politics lives.

In the developing societies where the process of nation-building has not followed the European pattern and where state formation has preceded nation formation this phenomenon is visibly more pronounced. The ethno-religious plurality of these societies coupled with the existential nature of politics there where in most cases there is yet to be a general consensus over the rules of the political game religion works as an intoxicant influencing the political culture. For the purposes of mobilisation religion is always a handy tool for political parties. Although India has a better record of political development than most of the developing countries it too is a victim of this process.

## The History

The Hindu-Muslim interactions on the Indian soil date back to the early years of Islam when Arab traders brought with them their new-found faith and codes of conduct. But since

their social interactions were limited they left little imprint. Even the conquest of Sind by Muhammad bin Qasim in 712 AD was also of limited social import as the Arabs could neither consolidate their victory nor could they make any further push eastward due to the resistance offered by the Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas. It was only after the raids of Mahmud of Ghazni in the early years of the eleventh century that the process of Muslim conquest of India commenced which culminated in the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in 1206. After three centuries came the Mughals (1526) who ruled, until the advent of the British in the latter half of the eighteenth century, almost the entire length and breadth of the Indian subcontinent and beyond comprising the present-day Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

These seven-and-a-half centuries of Muslim domination over some parts or the other of India resulted in experiences of both conflict and coexistence between the majority Hindus and the minority Muslims whose numbers kept on increasing with new conversions. While the conflicts were generally of a political nature confined to the elite circles the co-existential intercourse was at the societal level and hence broad based. On account of the caste-ridden social structure, to which not only the Hindus but also the Muslims subscribed,[4] the elite conflicts rarely percolated down the social hierarchy. The Hindu low castes which were even otherwise deprived of any political role had little to lose under the Muslim domination. The self-sufficient structure of the village economy further insulated them from the macro political upheavals. Since the conversions to Islam at the village level were mostly from the low caste Hindus they hardly disturbed the social fabric. For dominant Hindus who almost invariably belonged to the upper castes a low-caste Hindu or a converted Muslim was one and the same for neither really mattered for them for both were virtually untouchable.

No wonder, therefore, that while there were many wars between Hindu and Muslim kings and that there were many avowedly orthodox and intolerant Muslim rulers such as Alauddin Khilji and Aurangzeb, Hindu-Muslim riots as such were conspicuous by their absence. For more than 700 years beginning with Mahmud of Ghazni's victory over Jayapala in 1000 AD there was no evidence of a single Hindu-Muslim riot.[5] The first Hindu-Muslim riot is known to have taken place in as late as 1730 in Ahmedabad. It started over an incident of lighting the Holi fire by a Hindu against the wishes of his Muslim neighbour who retaliated by slaughtering a cow. In the resultant riots several people from both the communities were killed and properties extensively damaged.[6]

The co-existential nature of Hindu-Muslim relationship at the folk level was evident from the popularity of such poets and mystics like Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khana, Raskhan, Kabir, Dadu, the Baul singers of Bengal, Guru Nanak, Chaitanya, and so on. One of Kabir's verses declared: "Kabir is the child of Allah and of Ram. He is my Guru, he is my Pir."[7] Guru Nanak in his perambulations was accompanied by his Muslim companion, Mardana, and the Punjabi Muslims have sung for centuries: "Baba Nanak Sant Faqir, Hindu ka guru, Muslim ka pir."[8] There was also a widespread tradition of Hindu temples and Muslim mosques and darghas frequented and revered by devotees belonging to both the

communities.[9] In Bengal the growth of Muslim *sufism* and the Hindu *sahajiya* or folksy *vaisnavism* had resulted in an efflorescence of the Bengali language and a dilution of religious distinction between the Bengali Muslims and the Bengali Hindus. The *Bhagawata Gita* was translated from Sanskrit into Bengali with the encouragement of Muslim rulers who patronised men of letters irrespective of their faith. Actually, had the British imperial interests not intervened, during the 16th-18th centuries a secular Bengali ethnic unit was on the verge of attaining nationhood.[10]

## Parting of Ways under the British

With the arrival of the British the Hindu-Muslim co-existential texture of relationship started undergoing a change. There were two phases in this development, one prior to the revolt of 1857 and the other following the revolt. During the first phase, on the one hand there was a tendency on the part of the British East India Company, both under pressure from Christian missionaries as well as from progressive English-educated Bengalis, to interfere with the Hindu religious matters, and on the other to patronise the Hindus *vis-à-vis* the Muslims for the latter had been identified as potential challengers to the Company's political interests. The banning of *sati* (1829) and the permission for widow remarriage (1856), though progressive steps, were not appreciated by orthodox Hindus. Similarly, the introduction of English and secular education was not liked by the orthodox Muslims. The East India Company, therefore, alienated itself from the traditionalists of both the Hindu and the Muslim communities who were any way the dominant sections of the society having roots among the masses. As a result, in spite of the fact that the Hindus took advantage of the British educational system at the cost of the Muslims, on the whole, the Company's policies contributed to Hindu-Muslim unity which found its expression in the revolt of 1857 which had considerable mass appeal.

This phase, however, came to an end in 1857. The post-revolt period witnessed certain developments which stoked suspicions between the two communities. It would not be entirely correct to put the blame for this on the British for it was actually rooted in the circumstances of India which was then in the process of building its nationalist philosophy. Following the 1857 revolt when the British government stepped into the shoes of the Company one of the first decisions that it took was not to interfere with the organised religions of India as it was argued that the Company's religious policy had contributed to the revolt. Probably, the Indian concept of secularism had its origin in this development. The British government was not interested in promoting social reform or modernisation. Its policy was to adopt, *vis-à-vis* organised religion, an attitude of live-and-let-live.[11]

## Nationalism and Hindu-Muslim Cleavage

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries as the Indian society started modernising with greater participation in education, administration and professions based more on competition than on birth a growing number of Hindus and Muslims came to consider the competition in communal terms. The British government which received different sets of

demands from the two communities were all too willing to exploit this cleavage to their political advantage. It was, therefore, inherent in the circumstances that the rift between the Hindus and the Muslims would accentuate.

The growing inferiority complex of the Muslims *vis-à-vis* the British had culminated in the failure of 1857. The destruction of Muslim pride was complete when Bahadur Shah Zafar, who was the emperor of India (though only in name), was exiled in distant Rangoon. "The crisis that now faced the Muslims was that of Hindu political ascendancy *via* the introduction of modern (Western), liberal political ideas and institutions. All shades of Muslim public opinion – ranging from the conservative *ulema* of Deoband, whose call to Indian Muslims was to be the people of the practice of the Prophet and of community, to the modernists of Aligarh – perceived a new crisis.[12] As a result, unlike the Hindus, who wanted to wrest their rights through a political struggle with the British, the Muslims chose to re-empower themselves by aligning with the British. This dichotomy became clear after the establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885.[13] Even Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-98), the father of Muslim modernisation in India, subscribed to this line of argument.[14] One of his followers wrote in 1893 "India is like a balance whose two pans are of unequal weight, and to equalise them a compensating weight is required to make the lighter pan equal to the heavier. This compensating weight will always be a foreign nation; and it is an occasion of congratulation that God has entrusted the British nation with this duty, who are generous and free people."[15]

As the competition grew both the communities increasingly emphasised their religious and traditional identities. For the Hindus the emphasis was on their ancient cultural achievements and the martial exploits of their kings like Shivaji and Ranjit Singh who had valiantly fought the "foreign" domination. They treated the Muslims as aliens who were not entitled to the privileges enjoyed by the native Hindus, or, for that matter, other communities who had their origin on the Indian soil, namely, the Buddhists, the Jains and the Sikhs. Similarly, the Muslims, dwelling upon their past glory, attributed their decline to Hindu influences which included such retrograde practices as the caste system. Emphasis was, therefore, laid on religious orthodoxy and community solidarity.

Broadly speaking, in the United Province which was the hot bed of Hindu-Muslim communal politics the Hindus asked for the use of Hindi in Devnagri script for administrative and educational purposes, the banning of cow slaughter, open competition for education and jobs, and the majority rule. As opposed to this, the demands of the Muslims were the use of Urdu in Persian script,[16] the protection of their customs which included beef-eating and cow sacrificing,[17] and the introduction of weightage system for jobs and education as the community was relatively weak.

It was against this background that in 1906 the Muslim League was formed one of the major demands of which was separate electorates for the Muslim community. To meet the political challenge posed by the Muslim League the Hindu nationalistic Arya Samaj retaliated by floating the Punjab Hindu Sabhas (1907-09). They were critical of the British

government for its transparent pro-Muslim policies as reflected in its decision to favour the demand for separate Muslim electorates. They were also critical of the Indian National Congress for its failure to grapple with the gravity of the situation. Lal Chand, an Arya Samajist, the author of "Self Abnegation in Politics" (1909), which may be considered as the ideological charter of the Hindu Sabhas, wrote that "patriotism ought to be communal and not merely geographical... The idea is to love every thing owned by the community. It may be religion, it may be a tract of country, or it may be a phase of civilization."[18] The dye was cast and the Hindu-Muslim antagonism became a permanent fixture in the politics of the Indian subcontinent.

By the first decade of the 20th century, therefore, the ferment had been created for a political showdown between the Hindus and the Muslims. Their respective standpoints were articulated on the one hand by the Hindu Sabhas and on the other by the Muslim League. In between stood the Congress which was not a Hindu communal forum yet included members for whom Indian nationalism and Hindu nationalism were one and the same thing. Moreover, for the purposes of political mobilisation it often became necessary for the party to identify itself with both the Hindu and the Muslim cultural traditions.

## Enter the Mahatma

After the entry of Mohandas Gandhi on the Indian political scene in 1915 this equi-proximity communal strategy of the Congress became even more pronounced which actually threatened the Hindu communalists more than the Muslim. In the political idioms he used to build an Indian national consciousness not only both the Hindus and the Muslims were given equal role but even the untouchable castes were not to be ignored. This angered the orthodox Hindus.[19]

Communalism as a political strategy which was steadily gaining in currency was for the first time formalised when the Congress and the Muslim League signed the Lucknow Pact in 1916. The signing of the pact and the subsequent joint participation of both the parties in the Khilafat movement in 1919-21 did indeed marginalise the Hindu communalists for the time being but they legitimised communalism and made it politically respectable. Following this, the 'two nation theory,' so far merely a mental construct, became a politically achievable goal. Although the Kaliph was a distant object to the Indian Muslims this movement percolated the Khilafat ideal down to the remote villages.[20] Unfortunately, however, Gandhi did not realise it, at least he did not admit it. Rothermund writes that Gandhi had made mistakes, "even Himalayan ones," but it was he only who admitted them which makes the task of his biographers so much easier, "but this can be deceptive, because Gandhi also made mistakes which he did not see as such and therefore did not admit. One of these was his plunge into the Khilafat movement about which he knew so little."[21] It may be underlined here that Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the Father of Pakistan, who is considered as the villain of the piece in India in the context of its independence and integrity, was unhappy to see politics being "intertwined with religion."[22]

## Hindu Nationalist Ideology

The Khilafat bonhomie was short-lived. The outbreak of anti-Hindu riots in the Malabar coast in south India in the summer of 1921 (Moplah rebellion) put the clock back to zero. It revitalised the Hindu communalists. The Hindu Sabhas, which had entered into some kind of a federation during the First World War, formally launched the Hindu Mahasabha in 1922 to operate as a pressure group within the Congress. In 1923, B S Moonje, the leader of the Central Provinces Hindu Sabha, prepared a report on the Malabar riots and lamented the docility of the Hindus in comparison to the Muslims. He felt that the Hindus lacked a pulpit through which they could mobilise themselves in an organised fashion.

When these developments were taking place there was another pan-Hindu movement gaining ascendancy which was eventually to overshadow the Hindu Mahasabha. Influenced by the Hindu Mahasabha leader V D Savarkar's theory of *Hindutva*[23] Keshav D Hedgewar established the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) in 1925 with the express mission to organise the Hindus on nationalistic lines. In the organisation emphasis was laid on two practices: (1) the Prayer and (2) the Pledge. While the Prayer was a salutation to the Hindu Rashtra (nation) the Pledge was an oath of uncritical loyalty to the RSS and the Hindu community. As the communal situation deteriorated resulting in more Hindu-Muslim clashes the RSS came in a big way to render humanitarian service to the Hindu and Sikh victims.[24]

## The Congress-League Dichotomy

By the end of the 1930s the conflict between the Congress and the Muslim League had reached a stage of no return. As both the parties realised that independence was round the corner they felt the added urgency to sharpen their swords. In the 1937 provincial elections which were held according to the 1935 constitution the Congress gained a massive victory while the Muslim League faired badly. The Congress which won absolute majority in five provinces, near absolute majority in one, and simple majority in three was eventually able to form ministries in nine of the eleven provinces. As against this the Muslim League could participate in the government only in two provinces – Bengal and Sind. Overall it could poll only 5% of the Muslim votes. The results of the polls confirmed the Congress belief that it had the authority to speak for all Indians irrespective of their communal affiliations. It was this feeling which led the party to commit the political mistake of not honouring the tacit understanding it had arrived with the League to share power in the United Provinces after the polls. This betrayal of faith gave the League a propaganda advantage to register new support among the Muslim masses.

The conflicting nationalist strategies of the two parties widened the gap. Congress was in favour of a rapid transfer of power while the League demanded constitutional protection for the Muslims first. The 1932 Communal Award had given separate electorates to the Muslims; it wanted further safeguards. This dichotomy between the

Congress and the Muslim League was reflected in the exchange of letters between Nehru and Jinnah in 1938. These letters constitute a clear testimony to the irreconcilability between Indian nationalism as represented by the Congress and the Muslim separatism as represented by the League.[25] The latter's demand for Pakistan was the logical conclusion of this ideology.

## The Partition and the Pogrom -

In the history of Hindu-Muslim relations no other event has left so deep a scar on the respective communal psyches as the partition of India. The unprecedented violence that followed the decision rendered hundreds of thousands dead or maimed, properties worth billions destroyed or looted, and millions homeless. Insecurity was so pervasive that for years the human flow across the borders continued which estimatedly accounted for 20 million migrations. These migrants brought with them tales of atrocities perpetrated against them by the "other" community which contributed to the perpetuation of communal politics in both India and Pakistan.

Mercifully, however, in spite of this acrimonious ferment the matters did not go beyond control. The progressive leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru and the continuation of the Congress party in power prevented the Hindu fanatics from raising their heads although the political climate was so favourable to them. The fact that a very large proportion of the pre-partition Muslim community chose to remain in India and that the Congress could still boast of a host of Muslim leaders among its ranks came in the way of success of the Hindu nationalists. With regard to Muslims the party's emphasis that India was one single nation in which they were as much partners in national progress as their Hindu counterparts was indeed reassuring.

## Post-Independence Record

Hindu-Muslim relations during the last half-a-century that India is independent have seen many ups and downs. While there has been a clear visibility of Muslims in all important walks of life including incumbencies of highest political and judicial positions, as well as in the fields of sports, performing arts, defence research, organised crime, terrorism, etc., there is a dismal record of their representation in professions and jobs in general. All social indicators point to their disadvantaged position *vis-à-vis* the majority Hindus.[26] Despite the community forming about 13% of the country's population[27] its children account for just 4% of those doing matriculation. In the prestigious Indian Administrative Service (IAS) the Muslim representation is a bare 3%. The community has not proportionately benefited from governmental schemes either. It has secured only 2% of industrial licences and 3.7% of financial assistance.[28]

In the police services which are often blamed for their pro-Hindu bias during the Hindu-Muslim riots the Muslim representation is small. In the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the Rapid Action Force

(RAF) their representation is only 4, 5.5 and 6% respectively.[29] The Gopal Singh Committee which was set up in the early eighties to look into the condition of the Muslims and whose report was released only after V P Singh became Prime Minister in 1989 after six years of its submission noted that in fact some employment exchanges even refused to register Muslims.[30]

It has been alleged that even in a state like West Bengal which is ruled by the progressive Left Front and which is known for its secular credentials the prejudices against Muslims in public employment is prevalent. According to one such complaint the Muslims who account for more than 21% of the state's population accounted for only 4.29% of the jobs given through the Employment Exchange during the five year period from 1989 to 1993. During the same period the percentage of Muslims in the New Registrations declined from 10.5% in 1989 to 6.54% in 1993. It has been alleged that it was "mainly due to the fact that frustrated unemployed Muslims are gradually losing faith and confidence in the Employment Policy of the Left Front Government in West Bengal."[31]

The above facts though revealing do not, however, tell the whole story. It may be pointed out that the under representation of the Muslims in jobs is also attributable to two other factors. In the first place, after the partition a large number of educated Muslims, from the United Province and Bihar in particular, migrated to Pakistan leaving behind the less educated and less enterprising ones who were not equal to their Hindu counterparts in open competitions. This can easily be testified by the fact that prior to the partition the Muslim representation in the United Province Government services was far in excess of their actual proportion in the population. On 11 January 1939, the then Prime Minister of the United Province Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant reported the following to the state's Press Consultative Committee:

> The Muslims form about 14% of the population. Generally the Muslim representation in services is far in excess of what it should be on the population basis. Take for example some important services. In the Provincial Executive Service the Hindus are 52.5% and Muslims 39.6; among the tahsildars Hindus 54.9% and Muslims 43.6; among naib tahsildars Hindus 55.9 and Muslims 41.4; in the Provincial Judicial Service Hindus 72 and Muslims 25; among Deputy Superintendents of Police Hindus 56 and Muslims 28; among Police Inspectors Hindus 54.2 and Muslims 43.8; among Head Constables Hindus 35.3 and Muslims 64.4; in the U.P. Agricultural Service, Class I, Hindus 64 and Muslims 21; in the U.P. Agricultural Service, Class II, Hindus 72 and Muslims 25; in the Subordinate Agricultural Service Hindus 73 and Muslims 25; among Veterinary Inspectors Hindus 24 and Muslims 52; among Veterinary Assistant Surgeons Hindus 35 and Muslims 58; among Gazetted Officers of the Cooperative Department Hindus 62.5 and Muslims 37.5; in the UP Forest Service Hindus 57 and Muslims 19; among Forest Rangers Hindus 80.5 and Muslims 18.5 and among Deputy Rangers Hindus 74.4 and Muslims 25; among Assistant Excise Commissioners Hindus 57 and Muslims 34; and among Excise Inspectors Hindus 65 and Muslims 31; in the U.P. Educational Service, Class I, out of 15

posts four are held by Muslims... I can claim that what we have done is not only just but even generous.[32]

Secondly, on account of the traditional outlook of majority of Muslims they are still less educated than their Hindu counterparts. Kerala which has 22% Muslims in its population, one of the highest in the country, and which boasts of over half-a-century of affirmative action, and which has the highest literacy rate in the country, and which has a strong Muslim political presence in the form of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), provides the best example. Studies have revealed that the drop-out rate after matriculation is highest among the Muslims. According to K T Mohammad Ali of Kerala University's Department of Islamic Studies, the poor literacy levels in the state's northern Malabar region are directly attributable to the fact that nearly 43% of the population in the four districts is Muslim.[33]

The Muslims have not taken full advantage of scientific and technical education and governmental schemes as a result of which no Muslim entrepreneurial class has emerged. Of course the primary reason for this is that the economic base of the overwhelming majority of Muslims is very weak. Still, it is also true that government assistance and encouragement for promoting business or industrial enterprise does not discriminate between the Hindus and the Muslims. But to take advantage of these schemes there must be necessary awareness and willingness which is unfortunately not forthcoming from the Muslims. "A backward community continues to remain backward not because of any apparent misfortune but solely because it cannot channelise its abundant energy in the right direction and also because it has no sense of direction." Those sections of the community which have responded to the situation pragmatically, namely, the Bohras, the Khojas and the Memons, have been extremely successful economically.[34]

The fact, however, remains that the Muslims are a depressed lot in independent India. But despite this reality a popular opinion has been gaining currency largely on account of a massive propaganda organised by fanatic Hindu organisations that the Muslims are a pampered lot. Knowing well that all social indicators would tell the opposite story these groups highlight only those aspects of governmental policy which are seemingly pro-Muslim such as the continuation of Muslim Personal Law in defiance of the suggestion made by the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Indian Constitution to introduce a Uniform Civil Code for all of India. They seldom care to educate the people about the inherent sociological and legalistic difficulties in abolishing the existing personal laws in India.[35]

The whole question of Hindu-Muslim relations has been caught in the snarled web of day to day politics of India in which the leaders of both the communities, often self-styled, have taken the full advantage of the undercurrents of inter-communal distrust. It is not possible in this short essay to recapitulate this phenomenon in detail. Still to put the matter in perspective a brief narrative is attempted below. The post-independent phase of India can be divided broadly into two distinct phases – one Nehruvian and the other post-Nehruvian – with their distinctive marks on the nature of politics in which communal politics was an integral part.

## Nehruvian Secularism

One of the biggest challenges that Nehru had to face after becoming the Prime Minister was the problem of deteriorating Hindu-Muslim relationship resulting out of partition and the violence that followed. The Hindu nationalists were up in arms not to allow any concession to the Muslims which could amount to their being treated as second class citizens. This was an anathema to the Nehruvian model of nation building. The Constitution of India that was drafted during this time (1946-50) reflected his concept of Indian nationalism and it stood for the ideal of a modern polity based on the principle of separation of religion and politics. It may, however, be underlined that the word "secular" did not figure in the Indian constitution then. (It was added to the constitution as late as in 1976 through an amendment during the regime of Indira Gandhi.) Twice the term was debated in the Constituent Assembly and on both the occasions it was rejected. Nehru who was so much committed to the cause of secularism – to the extent of calling himself an agnostic – was not too sure of its efficacy in the Indian context. Later, in defence of his use of the word he said that it was closest to what it should mean in the Indian milieu, that is, politics and religion should be two different domains.[36]

Still, it may be argued that had Patel not died in December 1950 it would not probably have been so easy for Nehru to project India's secular ideals so unequivocally, constitutional commitments to that effect notwithstanding. Incidentally, at the grassroots levels many Congressmen subscribed to the concept of Hindu nationalism and were communal-minded. Nehru had once bemoaned that although "the Congress stood for a secular society, the workers were slipping away from the principles of secularism and becoming more and more communal minded."[37]

The Nehruvian strategy of dealing with the problem of communalism and nation building was based on identifying the Congress with both the Hindu and Muslim interests in terms of two communities which may be termed as bi-communalism. This found its expression in the way the Somnath temple and the Babri mosque issues were handled. Considering that there was a widespread Hindu sentiment in favour of rebuilding the Somnath temple, ransacked and destroyed towards the end of the Mughal rule by Muslim plunderers from outside India, a trust was created through the good offices of the government to reconstruct the temple. Funds of course were raised from the public but once the temple was ready it was inaugurated by the President of India.

With regard to the Babri mosque the government's policy was to contain its potential to disturb inter-communal harmony. In December 1949, Hindu-Muslim riots had broken out in Ayodhya following the clandestine installation of an idol of Lord Ram in the mosque. Nehru took personal initiative in the matter and under his express orders the mosque was sealed and police guard posted. Litigation over rights of entry to the mosque continued without adjudication till as late as 1985.

The Congress also saw to it that important Muslim leaders were elected to the parliament. For example, in case a predominantly Hindu constituency did not elect him, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad was always fielded from constituencies with a significant number of Muslim voters – either urban Rampur or rural Mewat.[38] The party's high profile anti-Israel and pro-Arab stance was also to some extent influenced by the Muslim factor. There was a broad foreign policy rationale to follow such a policy but much of its diplomacy in West Asia was geared to play to the domestic Muslim gallery. Starting from the days of Mahatma Gandhi Congress was conscious of the extra-territorial emotional bonds of the Muslims and considered it politically prudent to advertise its respect for that sentiment.

The other aspects of the policy included non-interference with Muslim religious and customary beliefs and practices. In this respect the Muslim Personal Law figured prominently. Although the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution of India had specifically mentioned that the state should endeavour to introduce a Uniform Civil Code for all Indians no steps were taken in that direction lest it might not be taken favourably by the majority of the Muslims. In doing so Congress was always influenced by the orthodox sections of the Muslims who indeed dominated the mainstream Muslim opinion.

This policy which the Congress branded as secularism was not actually what the term really means, that is, the state is aloof of matters pertaining to religion. In practical parlance it connoted that the state would show equal respect to all religions and people's religious beliefs even if they came in the way of civil legislations meant for all citizens. In a way it reflected the post-1857 British wisdom not to meddle with matters religious for the sake of political stability. It may be argued that such a policy though ensures societal stability in the short run it prevents the building of a civil society which should be the goal of any modern state. Moreover, it tends to pamper the traditionalists at the cost of the progressives to the detriment of social development.

## The Strategic Shift

After the death of Nehru, and more so after the Congress split of 1969, the Congress strategy registered a shift. During Nehru's time the party had stolen the Hindu nationalistic platform at the micro levels. But during Indira Gandhi's time the same was done at the macro level. By projecting India as a great power particularly *vis-à-vis* Pakistan and by aligning with all kinds of communal forces she tried to ensure the safety of her regime by sheer *realpolitik*. In the Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir, she identified herself fully with the Hindu sentiments of the people of Jammu. The Muslim-dominated National Conference of Farooq Abdullah of course retaliated in kind and won the election but nationally Indira Gandhi was the gainer. It did not only result in the total eclipse of the BJP in Jammu, Congress emerged as an overt champion of the Hindu cause.

In the Punjab she first propped up the extremist Sikh leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale as a countervailing force to tackle the growing popularity of the Akali Dal but

when he turned into a Frankenstein he was crushed. Immediately after the Blue Star operation which killed Bhindranwale Indira Gandhi openly said in Garhwal (in UP) that Hindu *dharma* (religion) was under attack and made an impassioned appeal to defend the Hindu *Sanskriti* (culture) from the Sikhs, the Muslims, etc. Couched in the language of "the nation in danger" it was meant to provoke the gullible Hindu middle classes.[39]

Rajiv Gandhi inherited the political strategy left behind by Indira Gandhi. He fanned the Hindu fear about the possible disintegration of the country to his electoral advantage. In the election of 1984 which was held soon after Indira Gandhi's assassination by her Sikh bodyguards which had led to a Hindu backlash killing thousands of Sikhs in Delhi and other parts of the country his party won handsomely. At the back of the mind of majority of the Hindus was the spectre of further disintegration of India by non-Hindu forces. The stealing of the Hindu nationalistic platform was now complete – Congress won an unprecedented four-fifths majority in the parliament while the BJP was reduced to a non-entity with only two seats.

The identification of the Congress with the Hindu sentiments went hand in glove with a growing public exposition of anti-Muslim feelings at the mass level. The incident of Meenakshipuram conversions of two hundred Harijans into Islam (1982) was blown out of proportion by Hindu organisations who raised the bogey of "Hinduism in danger." Although the enquiry committee report on the incident revealed that the converts had done so to get rid of social discriminations perpetrated by caste Hindus the Hindu zealots had already extracted the maximum political mileage out of it. The theme of the VHP-sponsored *Ekatmata Yagna* (1983) was the same: "Hinduism is in danger and India cannot be kept united without uniting the Hindus." It was increasingly becoming clear that a Hindu vote bank comparable to the proverbial Muslim vote bank was crystallising and whosoever could grab it was sure to make it to power. The obvious contenders were the BJP and the Congress.

## The Boomerang Effect

The policy of bi-communalism of Congress was doomed to failure because of its inherent contradictions. The idea of political mobilisation in the name of religion may be a legitimate exercise for the purposes of invoking nationalistic consciousness *vis-à-vis* an alien rule but it is surely fraught with risk in a competitive plural society. It is bound to degenerate into cut throat competitions among the parties resulting in sectarian violence in which the minorities would inevitably be on the receiving end.

In this competition for the Hindu votes the handicap of the Congress was clearly noticeable. Being the ruling party as well as one traditionally committed to protect both the Hindu and Muslim communal interests it could not match the BJP's no-holds-barred pro-Hindu rhetorics. The BJP took full advantage of this predicament of Congress and used the Babri mosque Ram Janmabhoomi and the Shah Bano alimony issues to embarrass it as much

as possible. By building its case upon the ideology of *Hindutva* the BJP and its ideological cousins like the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS, the VHP, the Bajrang Dal, etc., all of which together came to be known as the *Sangh Parivar,* hit out at the Congress for its "pseudo secularism." Trying to project itself as even more progressive the BJP promised a "genuine secularism" in India – a Hindu state cannot be anything but secular because Hindus are essentially secular. The party is not against minorities but against "minorityism," claimed its ideologues.[40]

As its action plan BJP demanded a uniform civil code for India thus doing away with the Muslim personal law, abolition of Article 370 of the constitution which gives special status to the Muslim-majority state of Jammu and Kashmir, rewriting of the history text books for school children which, according to it, had an unhistorical pro-Muslim bias as they had been written by "pseudo secular" historians, and above all construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya.[41] Another point which the BJP constantly dinned into the willing Hindu ears was that the population of Muslims in India was increasing at a much faster rate compared to that of the Hindus thereby disturbing the demographic balance. They attributed this to the Muslim resistance to family planning and the continuous illegal immigration of hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis. There was indeed truth in both the allegations but the facts were blown out of proportion.[42]

## The Communal Ferment

Hindu-Muslim relations in India, as noted above, deteriorated after the demise of Nehru. During the first fourteen years of the Indian republic there were 341 communal incidents. But during the next six years (1964-70) the corresponding figure rose to 1,329, an average of 221 per annum. The process continued unabated and between 1971 and 1991 the figure touched 6,498, an average of 310 per annum. What is noticeable is that the riots often became more violent. In the immediate aftermath of Nehru (1964-68) 289 communal incidents resulted in 2,513 deaths; the corresponding figures during Nehru's premiership were 341 and 389 respectively. During the eighties the casualty rates fell – 4,322 incidents accounted for 3,952 deaths[43] – but there was a tendency towards prolonged rioting in certain urban centres in which Aligarh, Ahmedabad, Bhagalpur, Bhiwandi, Bhopal, Bombay, Delhi, Hyderabad, Jamshedpur, Kanpur, Meerut, Moradabad and Vadodara figured more prominently.

## The Urban Connection

That the urban centres were more prone to Hindu-Muslim riots was evident from the record of riots that took place after the Babri mosque demolition (6 December 1992). Several Indian towns, namely, Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Bhopal, Bombay, Calcutta, Hyderabad, Kanpur, Mysore and Surat witnessed violence resulting in 1,110 deaths and 3,378 injuries. Social Scientists were unanimous in echoing the opinion of historian K N Panikkar that in urban areas "people live under high tension and communal issues often become vents for pent-up anger." And since in cities the rioters have relative anonymity as compared to

villages where every one knows the other commission of crime is easy. Then there was the economic factor as well. It was reported that in Ahmedabad builders set fire to slums to grab the land. In Calcutta the real estate dealers instigated the destruction of a lower middle class Hindu colony in order to raise a shopping complex there. In Kanpur the Superintendent of Police found that landlords were setting fire to their houses during the disturbance to get rid of their old tenants who were paying only small sums as rent.[44]

As a result of frequent riots the cities are increasingly becoming divided between Hindu areas and Muslim areas. Historically, Hindu and Muslim localities were distinct but this was on account of sociological reasons. A mosque, an *idgah* and such other communal requirements could be easily used if the Muslims were concentrated in a locality close to them. Same was true of the Hindus as well as other religious groups.[45] But lately it is due to the compulsions of security that the minorities are concentrating in localities considered to be safe. Jaipur, for instance did not have Muslim localities. But following some recent riots Muslims are rushing to ghettoes. For the same reason in Hyderabad Muslims are more and more going to live in the old town areas and the Hindus are moving out from there. As more Muslim ghettoes are coming up one is hearing of allegations from Hindu fanatics that the Muslims are creating "mini Pakistans" all over India.[46]

## Erosion of Secular Temper

Lately, there has been a visible erosion of secular temper in the country and what is more worrying is that the law and order machinery of the state has failed to project itself as impartial arbiter in communal matters. With the growing communalisation of Indian politics there has been increasing allegations against the police for its partisan role during the riots. Although the 1981 Police Commission Report only briefly touched upon the subject still it said that "several instances have been cited where police officers and men appear to have shown unmistakable bias against a particular community while dealing with communal situations. Serious allegations of highhandedness and other atrocities, including such criminal activities as arson and looting, molestation of women, etc. have been levelled against the police deployed to protect the citizens."[47]

In all major riots like those in Meerut (1987), Bhagalpur (1989) and Bombay (1992) such allegations against the police have been levelled. Even during the curfews the police is often partial to Hindu curfew violators than their Muslim counterparts which has been characterised by one scholar as "comparative curfew."[48] During the latest riots in Bombay in the aftermath of the demolition of the Babri mosque it was evident that the police did not do their job. On the contrary, they themselves indulged in the crime. A Muslim teacher reportedly said that this was not a Hindu-Muslim riot but a police-Muslim riot. The *Economic Times* claimed that in the police firing alone 98 Muslim lives were lost in Bombay.[49] The *New York Times* reported: "Transcripts of conversations between the police control room and officers on the streets, taken from the regular police radio band and made available to the *New York Times* by an Indian reporter, show that the officers at

police head-quarters repeatedly told constables in the field to allow Muslim homes to burn and to prevent aid from reaching victims."[50]

It is not the police alone, even political leaderships seemed to connive with the Hindu fanatics. Let alone the BJP government in UP even the Narasimha Rao government at the centre did precious little to prevent the orgy of 6 December 1992 leading to the demolition of the Babri mosque. Rao did dismiss the BJP governments in three states (the BJP government in UP had already resigned) but did nothing to bring the culprits to book when criminal charges could easily have been framed against them. But the same Rao government showed so much promptitude to bring to book the master-minds of the Bombay blasts only a few months later. Aijaz Ahmad was pained to reflect on these and ask in anger as to "why did the government machinery make such determined efforts to apprehend the perpetrators of the blast?" The answer was simple: "They were Muslims." Then comes the poetic justice: "The alacrity of the search for the blast culprits led to absurd ends: two of them, smugglers and 'hawala' operators, were traced to the homes and patronage of a Congress minister and a BJP MLA who was also a known criminal: between varieties of criminality and varieties of saffron. the circle was closed."[51]

## The Muslim Responsibility

Are Hindus alone to blame for the conflicts between the Hindus and the Muslims? We have noted that during the nationalist movement there was a gradual growth of communal politics and largely it was inherent in the circumstances of political development. We have also noted the part played by the Hindu nationalistic organisations in creating an anti-Muslim sentiment in the country. These groups remained active even after independence and due to the overall decline of value-based politics in the country they fished in the troubled waters.

But these developments were not *sui generis*; there was also a reactive component. It must not be forgotten that it was the Muslim League which was established first. The Hindu Sabhas which formed the nucleus of the Hindu Mahasabha came later. Then, it was the Muslim League which had asked for the partition of India and developed the theory that since the Muslims constituted a separate nation they could not coexist with the Hindus. After independence it was on account of the influence of the traditionalists among the Muslims that a Uniform Civil Code could not be introduced otherwise there were many a progressive Muslim leader like justice Mohammad Carim Chagla who had strongly pleaded for it. In the early 1970s under the leadership of Hamid Dalwai, a creative writer in Marathi, and his Muslim *Satyasodhak Samaj*, a group of forward-looking Muslims, articulated the grievances and demands of the weaker sections of the Muslim community. They were the first in the Muslim world to organise a Muslim Women's Conference at Pune in December 1971 which demanded the introduction of a Uniform Civil Code as prescribed by the Directive Principles of the constitution.[52]

Even in the Babri mosque controversy things would not have come to such a pass had the Muslim leadership shown a bit of pragmatism which people like Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, cine actor Dilip Kumar (Yusuf Khan), and others had pleaded for. Instead the Babri Masjid Action Committee (BMAC) assumed an inflexible position the result of which is now history. Rasheeddin Khan writes:

> Let us be clear that the Babri Masjid was built not as an act of piety, but as a symbol of emergent Mughal power. The motives of its construction were political rather than religious. A mosque built by political power, could only remain if that power is available to protect it. For over forty years since 1949, it was an operational, even though a surreptitious, temple within the structure of a historic mosque. Foresight should have persuaded (sic) those who were speaking on behalf of the Muslims, to gracefully withdraw their otherwise legitimate claims, from such a structure of dispute and discord.... How can anyone pray in peace and with the necessary spiritual concentration if a mosque is routinely protected by a police-force, under conditions of tension? ...The names of Ram, Krishna, Gautam Buddha and Guru Nanak have always evoked deep respect and reverence among the common Muslims of India. The poet Iqbal echoed the enlightened Muslim tradition when in his beautiful poem on Ram, he wrote: 'Hindustan is proud of the personality of Ram / Persons of vision, recognize him as the Imam of Hind.'

A tragic flaw in the assumption of the so-called Muslim leaders is to treat the Muslims not only as a separate entity in society, culture and politics, but as an entity, which is necessarily counter-posed to others, especially Hindus in their basic interests, problems and quest for a democratic future. This is untrue and unrealistic, and it lands the misguided Muslims in a situation in which they are made to provoke others by their isolationist and separatist politics producing suspicion, fear, misperception and reservation in the minds of other compatriots. This is exploited by leaders of Hindu communalism, which anyhow enjoys support of a huge majority, to further widen the gulf between the two communities.[53]

## Towards a Synthesis

It is probably a mistake to treat the Muslims as a separate category. Since we tend to treat them separately we naturally measure the violence against them only in communal terms. Social violence in India is all pervasive – inter-caste, inter-class, inter-provincial, inter-ethnic, inter-linguistic, inter-generational (student violence) – and communal violence is one of its various expressions. As the Muslims are treated as a category both by Hindus as well as Muslims, they become a political commodity to be exploited like so many of the caste and ethnic groups. Imtiaz Ahmad correctly writes that "the communal problem requires to be viewed comparatively along with other forms of group conflict which have characterised Indian society." This would "shift the focus of attention from the *sui generis* character of religious solidarity to other forms of identities and thereby highlight the dynamics of communalism as a manifestation of group conflict." In support of his thesis he cites the example of the city of Lucknow in UP. In Lucknow there are 60% Hindus and 30% Muslims

but the city is chronically known for Shia-Sunni, and not Hindu-Muslim, riots.[54]  Since the Indian society is pluralistic it is through political bargainings alone can the societal balance be maintained.  Of late there seems to a realisation among the Muslims that it is not through their communal leaders but it is through participation in the mainstream politics as a social group can they make their grievances appreciated.  Their current political alliance with the secular forces most notably the *dalits* (the Scheduled Castes) and the Other Backward Castes (OBCs) and their demand for reservations in jobs on the ground of their being backward tend to indicate this emerging trend.  Whether in this process Islam is getting indegenised and its followers are increasingly becoming yet another caste group of India is a moot sociological point.  No wonder that the Hindu chauvinists are so much disturbed by this trend and are vehemently opposing reservations for both the Muslims and *the dalit* Christians.[55]

After the Ayodhya incident, Muslim politics got polarised between the traditionalists and the modernists.  In February 1993, a meeting of about 600 Muslim intellectuals took place in Delhi.  Imtiaz Ahmad who was one of the leaders of the group observed: "The group hoped to become some kind of conduit for lobbying on behalf of interests that affected Muslims and to work for common civic spaces."[56]  This was followed in September by two conclaves – the Javeed Habeeb meet, comprising the modernists, and the Bukhari meet, comprising the traditionalists.  Although there were significant difference between the two on points of emphasis with regard to Muslims as a religious community both felt the need of aligning with the secularist forces.

Muslim politics at present is at the crossroads.  There is a keen competition between the modernists and the traditionalists to influence the mass Muslim opinion.  Although the traditionalists still have the upper hand since they have grass-root links with the people the modernists are also on their job to educate the masses to take up the challenge of modernisation pragmatically.[57]  While delivering his presidential address at the second convention of the Indian Association of Muslim Social Scientists held in Hyderabad on 13 October 1995 Mohammad Manzoor Alam said: "The fast changing national and global scenario due to technology and communication, calls for participation in developmental processes.  Indian Muslims have to find their place in Indian open system of economy and polity."  He highlighted the existing gaps between the Ulema and Muslim Social Scientists on the one hand and Muslims educated elites and the masses on the other.  He stressed the need to bridge these gaps.  The 18 resolutions passed at the convention included the following:

*   Districts with substantial Muslim population must have Residential Schools, Polytechnics, Art and Craft Training Centres and professional and vocational training institutions.

*   Ulemas of the Madarsas should be requested and persuaded to introduce social science, technical and professional courses in their institutions.  .

\* Taking into consideration the changing economic scenario, liberalisation, globalisation and market economy, it is most pertinent and essential that members of the community, capable of establishing industrial and commercial enterprises, must come forward and work to mobilise resources to have due share in industries and commerce and emerging market in the country.[58]

## Conclusion

To an outsider the Hindu-Muslim relations in India are full of tensions. What they generally come to know are the facts about the riots between the two communities or whatever happens in the Muslim-majority Kashmir in the name of Islam and the Indian state's response thereto. Seldom do they appreciate that millions of Hindus and Muslims in hundreds of thousands of Indian villages and towns are everyday working shoulder to shoulder to build an India of the future, an India which is democratic, an India which is plural. The rise of the BJP sometimes blurs the picture but the fact is that even BJP has started realising the futility of its ideology. It will take some more time for it to confess this in public but confess it would have to for the very circumstances of India.

In this article I have tried to trace the growth of Hindu-Muslim relations in India and in that context I have used the objective and critical assessments of scholars and analysts. In doing so, as far as possible, I have deliberately made use of Hindu scholars' criticisms of Hindu communalism and Muslim scholars' criticism of Muslim communalism. In my reckoning therein lies the strength of the Indian society which would eventually result in a civil society where there would be no discrimination between one Indian and another on the basis of his or her faith. *Amen!*

## Notes

1. A recent study has shown that after caste it is the communal consciousness which is most dominant in India. See Ghanshyam Shah, "Identity, Communal Consciousness and Politics," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Bombay, 29(19), 7 May 1994, pp 1134-1135.

2. Dhurjati Prasad Mukherji, *Modern Indian Culture*, Bombay Hind Kitabs, 1948, pp 6-7. Quoted by T N Madan, "Religion in India," *Daedalus*, Cambridge, MA, 118 (4), Fall 1989, p 116.

3. *ibid.*, p 117.

4. Although theoretically caste is an anathema to Islam it developed in India on ethnic lines. Families of foreign extraction, such as the descendants of Arabs, Turks, Afghans, and Persians, formed the highest caste and were called *Ashraf* (meaning honourable in Arabic). Next in order of status came the upper-caste Hindu converts, such as the Muslim Rajputs. Occupational classes formed the two final castes and were divided into 'clean' and 'unclean' castes. The former included the artisans and other professional people and the latter were the scavengers and those associated with unclean work. The roots of this system go back to the period of the Sultanate. Romila Thapar, *A History of India,* Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966, pp 300-301.

5. Intra-Muslim (Shia-Sunni) conflicts, however, had taken place. One such sectarian conflict took place during Queen Razyya's reign (1236-40) which seriously threatened the Sultanate itself.

6. N C Saxena, "The Nature and Origin of Communal Riots in India" in Asghar Ali Engineer (ed.), *Communal Riots in Post Independent India*, Hyderabad, Sangam Books, 1984, p 51.

7. *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*, translated by Rabindranath Tagore, London, Macmillan, 1915, Verse LXIX. Cited in Amartya Sen, "The Threats to Secular India," *Social Scientist*, Tiruvananthapuram, 21(3&4), March-April 1993, p 16.

8. Rasheeduddin Khan, *Bewildered India: Identity, Pluralism and Discord*, Delhi, Har-Anand Publications, 1994, pp 273-274.

9. A few years ago, under the aegis of the Doordarshan (Indian national TV network), Saeed Naqvi, an Indian journalist, produced a serial highlighting this secular dimension of Hindu-Muslim faith. It showed how in almost every part of India there were temples and mosques traditionally respected by the other community. Hazrat Nuruddin of Kashmir who translated the Holy Quran into Kashmiri and spread Islam in the valley is also respected by the Kashmiri Hindus at Nand Rishi. Unfortunately, his famous wooden *dargha* at Charar-e-Sharif got burnt down in 1995 in the cross-fire between the secessionist militants and the Indian security forces.

10. Ramakrishna Mukherjee, "Nation-building in Bangladesh," Rajni Kothari (ed.), *State and Nation Building*, Bombay, Allied Publishers, 1976, p 289.

11. A B Shah, *Religion and Society in India*, Bombay, Somaiya Publications, 1981, p 38.

12. T N Madan, "Fundamentalism," *Seminar*, No. 394, June 1992, p 24.

13. Bipan Chandra, *et.al.*, *India's Struggle for Independence, 1857-1947*, New Delhi, Penguin, 1991, pp 414-417.

14. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) on the one hand encouraged the Muslims to come out of their ghetto mentality and embrace Western education and modern ideas while on the other pleaded with the British that the Muslims had reconciled themselves to the British rule and as such their role in the mutiny of 1857 must no longer be interpreted as their disloyalty to the British. To emphasise the point he launched a paper called the *Loyal Mohammedans*.

15. This was Haji Muhammed Ismail Khan of Aligarh, quoted by John R McLane (ed.), *The Political Awakening in India*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice Hall, 1970, p 98.

16. In 1937, English replaced Persian as the official language. In the provinces local languages were recognised as court and official languages. In north India it was Urdu in Persian script and not Hindi in Devnagri script that was chosen as the official language. This was resisted by the Hindus. Eventually, in 1900, the British agreed to give Hindi equal status with Urdu in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh. See Raghuraj Gupta, *Hindu-Muslim Relations*, Lucknow, Bharati, 1976, reprint 1996, pp 33-34.

17. While the Muslims considered it religiously important to sacrifice cows on the Bakr-Id festival, Hindus looked upon these sacrifices as deicides. The "Note on the Agitation Against Cows" in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh prepared on 9 August 1893 by a British officer said: "The Cow-protection Societies employ paid agents to itinerant and lecture on behalf of the movement and collect subscriptions.... These men expatiate on the glories of the Hindu regime in the past when no kine-slaughter was permitted, and appeal to Hindus to protect the cow." For the full text of the Note, see McLane, *The Political Awakening in India*, pp 109-13.

18. Quoted in Christophe Jaffrelot, "Hindu Nationalism: Strategic Syncretism in Ideology Building," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Bombay, 20-27 March 1993, pp 519-20.

19. Incidentally, his convocation address at the Banaras Hindu University in February 1916 was so radical that it even shocked another radical of those days, Annie Besant. So much so that she threatened to leave the hall. As a result Gandhi could not conclude his speech. See Dietmar Rothermund, *Mahatma Gandhi: An Essay in Political Biography*, New Delhi, Manohar, 1991, p 27. Recently, a controversy sparked off over the statement of Mayavati, a leader of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), a party of lower castes, that Gandhi had actually fooled the untouchables and the real liberator was Babasaheb Ambedkar, a nationalist leader belonging to the lower caste.

20. Bidyut Chakrabarty, "India's Secularism Tolerance and Coercion," Bidyut Chakrabarty (ed.), *Secularism and Indian Polity*, New Delhi, Segment Book, 1990, p 95.

21. Rothermund, *Mahathma Gandhi*, p 3. Keshav Hedgewar, who subsequently formed the RSS, met Gandhi in 1924 in Wardha to express his disagreement with the Khilafat strategy of the Congress which according to him created a separatist tendency among the Muslims. Appaji Joshi, perhaps Hedgewar's closest friend, wrote this in *Tarun Bharat*, Pune, 4-5 May 1970. Cited by Walter Anderson, "The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: Early Concerns," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Bombay, 11 March 1972, pp 592, 596.

22. Kuldip Nayar, "Birth of Muslim League," *Mainstream*, New Delhi, 27 September 1996, p 8.

23. It was in 1923 that the first edition of Savarkar's book *Hindutva* was brought out. It was published by one V V Kelkar, a Nagpur-based advocate. As Savarkar was then in prison his name was not used. The book appeared under the nom de plume "A Mahratha." See V D Savarkar, *Hindutva*, Poona, S P Gokhale, 1949, Fourth Edition. The literal meaning *Hindutva* is Hinduness. Politically it connotes that India being a Hindu majority nation its nationalism must find its essential sustenance from Hindu social, religious and racial ideology. Elsewhere, I have analysed this racial dimension of Savarkar's *Hindutva*. See Partha S Ghosh, "Hindutva: Thus Spake Savarkar," *Politics India*, New Delhi, 1(1), July 1996, pp 51-53.

24. B R Purohit, *Hindu Revivalism and Indian Nationalism*, Sagar, Sathi Prakashan, 1965, p 148. Anderson, "The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh," p 593. There is considerable amount of controversy about the role of the RSS in the Indian national movement. Those interested in the subject may refer to Walter K Anderson and Shridhar D Damle, *Tile Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Renaissance*, New Delhi, Vistaar, 1987; and Tapan Basu and Sumit Sarkar, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Right*, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1993.

25. For the text of the letters, see McLane, *The Political Awakening in India*, pp 128-40.

26. For various kinds of statistics in this regard, see H Y Siddiqui, "Quest for a Secular Society – Challenge and Response," Chakrabarty (ed.), *Secularism*, p 240.

27. The 1991 census recorded the Muslim population as 101,596,057 which accounted for 12.12% of the total. This did not include the figures of the Muslim majority state of Jammu and Kashmir where the census was not held due to disturbed conditions.

28. *India Today*, 31 January 1993, p 31.

29. *ibid.*, p 36.

30. *ibid.*, p 31. For other details, see Shaheen Akhtar, *The State of Muslims in India*, Islamabad, Institute of Regional Studies, 1996, pp 11-27.

31. Sudip Bandyopadhyay's letter to the C.M. of West Bengal on Minorities Representation in Public Employment, 17 June 1994, in *Muslim India*, New Delhi, No. 141, September 1994, p 414.

32. Quoted in *ibid.*, p 413. So many educated Muslims migrated to Pakistan that for years they dominated the politics and economy of Pakistan. For details, see Partha S Ghosh, *Coopeation and Conflict in South Asia*, New Delhi, Manohar, 1989, pp 16-18.

33. *India Today*, 30 November 1994, p 85.

34. See Munawar Ali Khan Lodi, "Development of Muslim Industrial Entrepreneurship in India: 1947-1981," *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, London, 6(1), January 1985, pp 71- 87.

35. It has been argued that even after the introduction of a Uniform Civil Code it is possible that some aspects of the personal laws may still have to be retained. For example, the adoption of the Hindu Code did not touch endowments, and although it affected the Hindu Undivided Family it did not abolish it. For a dispassionate discussion on the subject whether India should go for a Uniform Civil Code, see John H Mansfield, "The Personal Laws or a Uniform Civil Code?," Robert D Baird (ed.), *Religion and Law in Independent India*, New Delhi, Manohar, 1993, pp 139-77. For the historical background of the controversy, see Partha S Ghosh, "Uniform Civil Code: History of a Controversy," *Mainstream*, New Delhi, 33(33), 8 July 1995, pp 17-19; Imtiaz Ahmad, "Uniform Civil Code: The Career of a Debate," an unpublished paper, 1995.

36. See M C Setalvad, *Secularism*, (Patel Memorial Lectures, 1965), New Delhi, Government of India Publications Division, January 1967, pp 17-21.

37. *Congress Bulletin*, New Delhi, 5 May 1958.

38. Bidyut Chakrabarty, "India's Secularism: Tolerance and Coercion?," Chakrabarty (ed.), *Secularism and Indian Polity*, p 99. Probably the party was not wrong in its political calculations. During the elections of 1962 and 1967, Congress found it difficult to get its Muslim nominees elected in northern India. Correspondingly the Jana Sangh votes increased in the region. See Mohit Bhattacharya, "Secularism and State Building in India," *ibid.*, pp 181-82; B D Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: The Origins and Development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p 265.

39. Rajni Kothari, *State Against Democracy: In Search of Humane Governance*, New Delhi, 1988, pp 247-48.

40. See interview of K N Govindacharya (all India general secretary of BJP), *Statesman*, New Delhi, 10 April 1993.

41. For details, see Partha S Ghosh, "Rise of Political Hinduism: Genesis, Prognosis and Implications," *SWP Monograph*, Ebenhausen, Germany, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, December 1995, pp 33-35.

42. Some relevant literature in this context are: Nafis Ahmad Siddiqui, *Population Geography of Muslims of India*, New Delhi, S Chand, 1976; Ashish Bose, *From Population to People*, New Delhi, B R Publishing, 1988, pp 363-77; R B N Sinha, "Attitudes of Hindus and Muslims to Family Planning," *The Journal of Family Welfare*, Bombay, 37(2), June 1991, pp 47-49; Malika B Mistry, "Hindu-Muslim Fertility Differentials in India," *New Quest*, Pune, No. 94, July-August 1992, p 236; Pravin Visaria and Leela Visaria, "Demographic Transition: Accelerating Fertility Decline in 1980s," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Bombay, 17-24 December 1994, p 3286.

43. Khan, *Bewildered India*, p 223.

44. *India Today*, 31 January 1993, pp 28-29. Economic explanations, however, fail to rationalise as to "why riots erupt only at certain times and places." To understand the deeper sociological dynamics of riots, see Pravin J Patel, "Communal Riots in Contemporary India: Towards a Sociological Explanation," Upendra Baxi and Bhikhu Parekh (ed.), *Crisis and Change in Contemporary India*, New Delhi, Sage, 1995, pp 370-399. It may be noted that the Muslims are

concentrated more in urban areas. While the 1991 census put their percentage at 12.12 of the total population, in the urban areas they constituted 16.7% of the total urban population.

45. Ram Gopal, "Foreword," Gupta, *Hindu Muslim Relations*, p xi.

46. *India Today*, 31 January 1993, p 29.

47. Quoted by Nirmal Mukarji, "Who Will Guard the Guards?" *Seminar*, New Delhi, No. 374, October 1990, p 14.

48. Ashish Banerjee, "'Comparative Curfew': Changing Dimensions of Communal Politics in India," Veena Das (ed.), *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, OUP, 1990, pp 37-68. See also, Asghar Ali Engineer, "Communal Violence and Role of Police," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29(15), 9 April 1994, pp 835-840.

49. Cameron Barr, "Indian Report Sees Police Role in Violence," *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 December 1992, p 6. It is feared that the increasing use of the army in social violence control may also vertically divide the army on communal lines. See Ajay K Mehra, "Soldiers' Home Sickness," *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, 10 July 1994.

50. Edward Gargan's despatch from Bombay, *New York Times*, 4 February 1993, p AI.

51. Aijaz Ahmad, "In the Eye of the Storm: The Left Chooses," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31(22), 1 June 1996, p 1331.

52. Shah, *Religion and Society in India*, p 114.

53. Khan, *Bewildered India*, pp 273-274.

54. See Imtiaz Ahmad, "Perspectives on the Communal Problem," Engineer, *Communal Conflicts*, pp 130-155.

55. Elsewhere, I have developed the point that India is fast moving towards a horizontal social federation which I have called multi-communalism and that is a positive trend though apparently it does not so suggest. See Partha S Ghosh, "Hindu Nationalism, the Politics of Nation-Building and Implications for Legitimacy of the State," Subrata K Mitra and Dietmar Rothermund (eds), *Legitimacy and Conflict in South Asia*, Delhi, Manohar, 1997, pp 50-68. Traditionally the Muslim politics in India has tried to see the Hindu society in its segmented form and view the threat to their interests emanating primarily from the dominant castes. It may be recalled that in the twenties and thirties when Muslim separatism was crystallising the Muslim elites were not only asking for separate electorates for themselves but they were also demanding for separate electorates for the depressed Hindu castes. Gupta, *Hindu-Muslim Relations*, p 41.

56. *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, 4 February 1993.

57. For details, see Hassan Abdullah, "The Changing Agenda of Indian Muslims," *The Hindu*, New Delhi, 23 April 1996.

58. See the Report of the Second Convention of IAMSS, "Indian Muslims Towards the Twenty-first Century," Hyderabad, October 1995, mimeo.

# India in the Aftermath of Ayodhya

## Robert Eric Frykenberg

When forces of constitutionalism, democracy and ethnicity in India work in compatible and dynamic relationship with each other, the climate for political stability and, hence, for development remains viable. India, however, possesses such an intricate and delicate fabric of structured relationships that when such forces are not in accord and when problems surrounding them are serious, that viability becomes problematic. For this reason it has never been possible for any large, all-embracing sub-continental institution, such as the "Indian Union" or the Government of India, to take any of its constituent elements for granted. More serious yet, for this reason, throughout history there has been an inverse ratio between the size of a political structure and its long-term durability.

Events within the past year have brought the structural stability and inner strength of this entire institutional system into question. In the light of disturbing events which culminated in the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, on 6 December 1992, not to mention the disturbing events which have been occurring in the aftermath of that momentous climacteric, it is especially important to look more closely at those elements which "constitute" the body politic of India and to do so within the context of deeper historical understandings. Under the Mauryan rulers, especially under Ashoka; under the Mughals, especially under Akbar; under the British, especially under the Company's Raj; and under the Congress, especially under the regime of Nehru "dynasty," vast and overarching systems of power were constructed and then reconstructed. All of these regimes, however, have rested, in some measure, upon the constituting and incorporating of older, more deeply rooted socio-political elements and forces. This essay will examine the legacies of previous systems of power, as epitomised in the kinds of logic used for putting together truly large, continent-wide political structures.

But, before doing so, a word should be said about constitutional stability with reference to its most basic underlying principle, the Rule of Law. Law – that is to say: structures of law, contracts, customs, and legal institutions, both substantive and procedural – functions as a neutral arbiter between various kinds of contending interest. Law, in this procedural sense, is a mechanism for assuring a sense of security and a meeting of minimal needs and aspirations. This has been so within what we know as India, among all "minorities," large and small alike; moreover, since no "majority" community exists, this is even more important. In historic terms, Law has always been essential, for assuring the health, prosperity and strength of any body politic, whatever its size, or number of separate parts. The larger that body, the more essential has been the functional necessity of Law. Moreover, processes undergirding political structures within such a body politic have been those which have

assured the proper construction and the regular maintenance of some minimal instruments for assuring consensus. In India, this building up of consensus, and of substructures of confidence, has rested upon instruments of consent and consensus built up within governments, in their executive, legislative, and judicial functions. This building of support has also rested upon those much more invisible, but no less important, climates of reputation which are essential for the generating of silent support from those elements of the population that have always been less vocal, or even voiceless. All of these elemental features supporting the Rule of Law in India, one can argue, are now at risk.

## Primal "Constitutions" and the Fragmentation of Power

It is sometimes good to remind ourselves of some basics. What is a "constitution"? In its most elemental sense, a "constitution" is that combination of internal elements, or ingredients, which go into the making of anything. In this sense, all things which exist in this world can be seen as "*constituted.*" That is to say: things which exist are compositions of more basic or "constituent" elements. Moreover, all things in this world, within their innermost "constitutions" have components which are "natural" – which is to say that, both within their most basic elements and even within their structures, they have elements which are not "constructed" by human agency. Even the most basic elements which "constitute" more complex, or "highly developed" or elaborate structures are themselves "constituted," or are made from combinations of sub-elements or sub-particles. Particles, in relation to one another, we learn in any introductory course of chemistry or physics, hold properties in relationship to each other which can either be described as stable or unstable. Pieces of material put together and ways in which such pieces are put together – say, for the building of a bridge or house – structural engineers will tell us, either give that construction stability or instability. These simple home truths are so obvious that they seem banal or vapid. Yet, yawns of boredom notwithstanding, simple truisms are apparently forgotten when people come to grips with the complexities of human relationships.

Things political, as also things religious or social, are no different from anything else. They are "constituted." Societies and states, quite obviously, have "constitutions": they consist of their most basic constituent elements. Whether these elements are seen as "natural" or "constructed" (meaning, "manmade") there is no denying that, together, they "constitute" something. Thus, political constructions, in one way or another, invariably possess "constitutions." Conflicts of perspective and philosophy have generated intense arguments over whether such constitutions are natural, "unnatural" (i.e. "constructed"), or both; and, over exactly where boundaries and differences lie between various kinds of elements and in what proportions the various elements ought to be put together. Such conflicts are, at root, arguments over the intrinsic elements of "human nature" and over whether or not the preponderance of these elements occur "naturally" and whether or not they are intrinsically benevolent or malevolent to mankind. Whatever the outcome of such arguments, societies and states are, in fact, human efforts to find the right proportions of various elements, particles, and sub-particles out of which their essential political relationships are to be constituted and by which the longevity of such relationships can be assured. Formal

"constitutions," however, go beyond informal constitutions. They are self-conscious attempts to define and to direct, by law, exactly where and how, within a body politic, elements or functions should be separated or "limited."

Even in something as elemental as the state of matrimony, as we in the West are sadly rediscovering, the issue of "constitutional" stability, is latent or manifest. Marriage as an institution, at least in the West, is crumbling because its constituent particles were either themselves not solid enough or because those constituent pieces were not properly (or enduringly) put together. Even the birth of offspring, a by-product of a blood-bonding between mates which often in the past served to strengthen marriage and empower the dynastic power of a family, now often fails to hold this most elemental of political structures together.[1] Something more is required: such as accumulated property or possessions or other forms of empowerment. If complications, such as poverty and lack of possessions or principles, can undermine the structural stability of a marriage, how much more can such complications threaten the stability of larger political structures. While larger political institutions, encompassing more constituent elements than those contained within any one simple dynastic establishment, can outlast those which are small, weak or poor, what has fascinated political theorists is the question of which ingredients, or which combinations of elements, have enabled such institutions to last for more than the usual stereotyped "three generations" of rags to rags; and what combinations have enabled some dynasties to endure for many centuries. Among the most enduring of all has been that of Ancient Rome.

Within the subcontinent of India, the most basic and enduring of political institutions larger than certain family lineages (*vaṃsa*) have been myriads of ethnic "small hard pieces": individual and separate micro-units bound by ties of common blood and land. Some of these "blood-bonded" constructions have, for centuries if not millennia, acquired remarkable strength. This is attested by *sati* stones which commemorate widows who demonstrated how "true" they were to the birthright and blood-bonds of family by immolating themselves for the sake of their own families. From the perspective of basic and primary "small hard pieces" of political loyalty, while larger kingdoms and empires come and go, small constitutions have outlasted all other institutions. The root perspectives of such units have always been, quite clearly and unequivocally, ethnic. Such "ethnic groups," as we now sometimes call them, have existed, side by side and often in close proximity, for untold millennia. No one really knows how many such distinct and separate "birth communities," or "castes," there really are. Yet, in their "natural" and uncontrolled state, relations between such groups are seen as reflecting what Hobbes described as the "state of nature." They have existed and functioned in twilight zones of what can only be described as states of perpetual tension. Never-ending situations of non-war/non-peace, of all against all or "everyman against everyman," have made life "nasty, brutish, and short." Entities not strong enough no longer exist, or have had to submit in order to survive.

## Classical Concepts and the Logic of Power

The ancient and classical term for the logic of such relationships, when they consist of nothing more than the exercise of uncontrolled and unrestrained raw power, is "*matsya-nyāya.*" It is the "logic of the fish": big fish smaller fish eat, and small fish still smaller fish eat, and so ad infinitum. This is what we today still call the "law of the jungle." In simplistic of terms, relations of raw power rely upon nothing more than the exercise of brute force, the substitution deception for brute force, or some combination of force and guile. Even elemental or "natural" laws, as the "principle of self-preservation," are but forms of this logic. By this kind of law, it is *daṇḍa* that prevails. When all other kinds of "law and order" have broken down to essentials, it is this law which, in the end, has remained.

More often than not, in the long term, ways in which "birth" communities (*jātis*) have had to relate to each other, especially within confines of close proximity and within enduring relationships of functional interdependence, have emerged from relationships of dominance and subordination, which themselves had been imposed by raw force. Those with the clout, with the *daṇḍa*, have been able to enforce "agreement," in the form of submission. The more the force they have been able to command (whether physical, spiritual, cultural, or something else), the more steeply sloped have been the structures of power and submission. The more steeply the slopes of political inequality been slanted, the less have resorts of other forms of persuasion been useful. Out of preference, the powerful have obliged others to submit; or else, to suffer consequences, of expulsion or worse. Some, preferring death to slavery, have died. Others, settling for soil-servitude or lesser forms of submission, have lived with the consequences. As Benoy Kumar Sarkar wrote, over fifty years ago, "a swordless state is a contradiction in terms." His aphorism is true, whether or not the "state" holds only one blade and the kingdom contains only two people – the ruler and the ruled – and whether or not the state rules over hundreds of millions by means of an elaborate constitutional system.[2]

Political relationships in the past, evolving over millennia, have stressed purity of birth over indiscriminate mixing and pollution. This stress has emphasised the most basic and elemental of human needs: self-preservation as manifest in identity. Identity, in this context, is that need to be "recognised" as someone having worth. Within the subcontinent, perhaps more than anywhere else on earth, this stress has led to extreme expressions of social differentiation and distinctness, as reflected in rituals of social discrimination. No place else is there anything to compare with the complexity of such intricate structuring of power. Relationships of power, reinforcing norms of purity, are carried to such degrees that, as already indicated above, members from uncounted hundreds if not thousands of separate "communities of common birth" do not, as a rule, intermarry nor interdine outside their own "castes," or "*jātis.*" Such extreme forms of social segmentation and separation, evolving over the ages, have produced apartheid between communities more strict than is known anywhere else on earth. This is enforced, at levels closest to each locality, both by raw force and subtle persuasion. Such separation is enforced within the iron frameworks of family, caste, and village governance.

Coming from ancient Sanskritic usage, however, is another, altogether different, kind of classical concept. This is the polar opposite of "*matsya*" or "*matsya nyāya*." It is the concept of "*maṇḍala*" or "*maṇḍala nyāya*." "*Maṇḍala nyāya*" means "the logic of spheres" (circles: or wheels *chakra*). It describes an ordered method of "constituting" the elements of power in relationships which exist between different peoples of different "birth." It is a rationality for applying, under certain circumstances, more than some crude power. By means of reason, in the form of evolving local custom or "law," it is an ordered way of dealing with "others," especially those not of one's own blood. Whatever the size of any particular institution, whether a simple family, dynastic kingdom, or a far-flung empire, this way of functioning is profoundly different from the "law of the fish." In intricate and convoluted patterns, those controlling one "sphere of power" arrange agreements with those who control other "spheres" in sets of relationships which can also be described as "artificial," "constructed," or "contractual." In combination with or in defiance of "natural," "organic," and predatory impulses, techniques of innovation and reason are developed. This kind of political relationship has consisted in the constructing of "circles" or "spheres" (*maṇḍalas*) or "wheels" (*chhakras*) of corporate obligation and power. The logic of "spheres" or "wheels" has called for voluntary commitments of confidence, good faith, and mutual obligation. These could either be between entities of equal size and strength (in resources, territory, wealth, cultural acumen, ritual power, etc.) or between of entities of unequal (or even extremely unequal) size and strength.

Contractual obligations, in short, became both the mode and means for "constituting" larger structures of power. They served to describe "civilised" and "ordered" (*dharmic*) political relationships: between men and men; women and women; men and women; elders and juniors; parents and children; "blood-bound" kin of different ages, sizes, and strengths; communities having common bonds of "birth" (*jāt*) or lineal "descent" (*vaṃsa*) and "earth" (*bhūmi*) and/or resources; and between individuals or communities not sharing any ties of sacred blood and sacred soil.

These two kinds of political logic have always contradicted each other. Instances of the mutual co-existence of contradictions within political cultures are, of course, hardly unique. As polarities of opposites, such phenomena can be compared with other kinds of inherently incompatible behaviour. The very metaphors by which these two logics are described, are incompatible: one being naturalistic or organic; and the other is artificial, mechanical, or synthetic. They are as easily blended as oil and water. The one describes the exercise of ruthless force. This turns upon those political consequences of social isolation and segmentation which are based upon birth. Efforts to preserve genetic purity and prevent genetic pollution are reinforced by rituals and ideologies of ethnic separation and stratification. The other describes contractual arrangements. These are often difficult to construct, even in the face of compelling necessity. Building bonds between peoples of different genetic composition in order to construct political systems, using manifold genetic elements as building materials even while these elements remain ethnically distinct from each other, calls for appeal to many kinds of pragmatic alliance. These must not only be mutually acceptable, but beneficial to all concerned. Such arrangements, in the form of contractual networks,

involving two or more parties of varying resources and bargaining power, have served as foundations for the building of much more extensive political structures than would have otherwise have been possible.

The latter kind of arrangement, within even larger grids of contracting parties, could lead to the "constituting" of much larger and more elaborately constructed *chhakras*. Such "wheels of power" bound together many more communities and spread over much wider territories (and resources). The largest "wheel" constructions, however short their duration, have been those which were imperial in their dimensions. The metaphor for such contractual, or mechanical constructions, elaborated upon the concepts of the circle (*maṇḍala*) and the wheel (*chhakra*). This elaboration became the "Great Wheel" (*Mahāchakra*), or "Great Parasol" (*Mahācatra*). Both terms convey notions of elaborations of elements within a large wheel: consisting of spokes (each spoke, in turn, containing a smaller *maṇḍala*), which connect one small central hub dynastic (another smaller *maṇḍala*) to a surrounding rim (an iron-bound frame linking a peripheral chain of little *maṇḍalas*). All of what constituted such a structure became the metaphor for the deliberate accumulating of power: a metaphor for Empire. As such, this metaphor can be seen as a theoretical representation. What was required for such a construction was a gathering together and bonding of many disparate constituent social elements. In order to provide manpower sufficient for the building maintaining such a multi-communal, or multi-ethnic polity, something larger than could be controlled by manpower of any one ethnic community was needed. Whatever the eventual size of such a "constructed" polity, in all of its constituent parts, whether it was a large village or a vast empire, the logic for the necessity of binding many smaller communities together into something larger and more durable, remained essentially the same.

## Communal Loyalty and the Consolidation of Power

The single most difficult and profound problem which has faced any would-be power, in its attempts to "constitute" any truly large or truly enduring polity within the subcontinent has always revolved around shortages of loyal manpower. No single would-be large power, especially one with pretensions to universal sway, could find enough manpower for achieving such purposes by resorting only to those who were of the same birth and the same earth. No single homogenous community has ever been large enough or strong enough, from this perspective, to do more than so much. Then, having reached the limits of manpower born of the same blood, it has faced problems inherent to what were perceived to be the "natural" limits of political loyalty. The amount of raw power commanded by any one single community of common birth (*jāti*) has, therefore, always been severely inhibited by "natural" constraints. As already mentioned, in a land where thousands of birth communities have co-existed, each of them ritually distinct and each determined to preserve its own ethnic identity, purity, and interest, there could never be enough people within that one community to build and sustain a large political structure.

Thus, within all political systems of the subcontinent, there has always been a need to reach beyond the bonds of primary loyalty. Yet, once this has been done, loyalty given by

those who have been ruled over; loyalty given by those who have submitted to persons or institutions of greater power has always been most severely circumscribed. Relationships of obligation to any institution or structure of "higher authority" have required the finding some way to "square the circle" of contradictions between inherently conflicting forms of loyalty. This feature, as seen at its deepest level, concerns conflicts over those basic cultural, ethical, and religious convictions which pertain to the very nature of reality; and, thereby, about what demands those who hold such differing convictions about reality can be expected to make.

Since the ultimate test of loyalty and its limits rested in bonds of birth and blood, community and custom (as the embodiment of law, both divine and domestic), on one hand; and, in the bonds of contract, on the other, tensions between these two forms of loyalty have sometimes become so extreme that they have undermined the political structures. However much the nature of primary loyalty in relation to political institutions may have changed over the past three centuries, one basic principle remains largely unbroken: bonds of blood and bonds of belief, bonds of contract and bonds of other kinds, between individuals and families and communities which have long maintained both their own cultural and ethnic distinctiveness, have often been at odds. In other words, bonds of community and bonds of custom and contract have never been such that they could be casually ignored by those who seek to construct large and durable political structures. Such bonds have remained so strong that to take basic loyalty for granted is dangerous.

The never-ending and perennial task of those commanding large corporate structures of power in India has been to find exactly what ways will best attract and hold the loyalties of groups who come from many different communities without permanently offending and alienating any one of them. Within the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-ideological, multi-political, multi-social, and multi-religious environment, this has never been easy. Especially in times of great upheaval and realignment, nothing has been more crucial to the stability of regime than its ability to simultaneously maintain the loyalty of *all*, or at least *most* of its retainers, servants and various tributary supporters who come from many communities. This is a peculiarity as distinctive and prevalent today, within political processes of the subcontinent, as it was when Alexander marched into the Punjab in 326 B.C.E.

Out of bits of information extracted from the great epics (*kathās*), the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana*, echoing relationships which existed a thousand years before Alexander or out of principles of political practice perfected by Kautilya during the Maurya imperium (c.300-150 B.C.E.), as appended during the Gupta ascendancy (c.300-500 C.E.) or that of Harshavardhana, we can learn something about how larger political structures were constituted. Certainly in the *Arthasāstra*, in the *Danda-nīti*, in the rock edicts and "wheel" symbols of Ashoka, as also in the ornately elaborate Great Wheel sculpture at Konark, one finds hints about how a balancing wheel of power, perhaps reinforced by something resembling "rule of law", provided foundations for truly large political systems and their smaller constituent elements. It would certainly be far-fetched to read too much into these sources of information. Still there can be no doubt that, from what these ancient regimes have left us, we can learn something about how they constructed empires. In all probability,

they learned how to do this from the Persians. Empire, after all, was almost a Persian invention; and "India" was one of the furthest satrapies of that invention, one which the intrepid Alexander was determined to possess.

In essence, all larger political systems require elaborate contractual arrangements. All such arrangements, moreover, have had to rest upon "mutual confidence" and "good faith." Without a mosaic of good faith relationships, no longer-term political systems of any kind could have survived. During the time of the Indo-Islamicate in India, but especially during the rule of the Mughals, various contractual bonds were certainly essential. Turkish rulers quickly learned that they, like their predecessors in India, simply could not command enough loyal military and administrative manpower to rule permanently over the vast lands which their military forces had conquered. The Ghaznavids and Ghurids did not even attempt to rule. They simply took their enormous amounts of booty back to Central Asia. But their pastoral successors sought to tend peoples on the plains of Hindustan just the way they had tended flocks and herds of the steppes. This they could not do, however, without coming to terms with local rulers. Their Exalted Encampments (*Urdu-i-mu'alla*), either in tents of canvas moving across the land or in tents of stone fixed in Agra, Delhi, or Lahore, also became the moving hub of an increasingly vast imperial wheel (*mahāchakra*). From this hub they too were obliged to form practical alliances and arrangements in order to recruit various forms of elite manpower. They not only drew Arabs, Afghans, Persians, Turks, Armenians, and other communities from abroad into India, but also utilised the skills and strengths of various groups of Jat, Rajput, Thakur, Kayastha, Khatri, Brahman and other "Hindu" elites of Hindustan.

In essence, the loyalty of such constituent elements as those which served the Mughal Empire had to rest upon more than bonds of Mughal birth. Rather, it was good faith – and bonds of credit, confidence, and trust which inspired such faith which personally bound members of different communities to the realm. One common concept or metaphor which epitomised all such bonds was *namak-hallal.* To be "true to the salt," was to be predictable, reliable, and responsible. On the other hand, to accuse any person, whether prince or peasant, of "*namak-haram!!*" was to question that person's integrity and sense of worth. To do such a thing "publicly" – that is to say, in the presence of others, especially in the presence of notables – was to inflict insult, disgrace, and shame ("loss of face") of mortal import, not only upon an individual but also upon his entire family, caste, or religion. Yet, conversely, to acclaim any person or community as possessing and practising "*namak-hallal!*" was to offer praise and tribute, if not worship, to truth, integrity, and loyalty. The building of intricate structures of personal loyalty was a feature of the pre-modern constitutional system of Mughal India without which such a vast power in India could never have become concentrated.

Structures on a scale such as that erected by the Mughals could not have occurred without bonds of mutual obligation between communities *not* linked by common birth and earth. This kind of structure was symbolised by the huge red-stone wheel erected by Akbar. There on a platform within the Hall of Disputation at Fatehpur Sikri, he would sit at the hub

and give a balanced hearing to ideas expressed by individuals, each of whom sat facing him from the end of each spoke or from around the rim-like curve of the outer wall. With each important elite in each locality, arrangements of mutual benefit were made. Each of these was usually "secured" both by both matrimonial and patrimonial bonds: by taking a wife and by placing one of her brothers into imperial service as a *mansabdar*. By taking a daughter from each important noble and raja, from far and near, Akbar made himself the "Personal Lord" or "Presence" (*Huzur*) of each elite community surrounding his throne. By personal bonds, he held each Mughal *beg*, each Persian *amir* or *wazir*, each Arab *malik* or *mullah*, each Rajput *raja* or Thakur *sahib*, each notable Kayastha *diwan* or *vakil*, each Khattri *manshi* or Brahman *pandit*. Influential persons of many other elites he also bound to himself. Putting himself at the axis of a centralising and expanding Wheel-of-Power (*chakra*), he managed to preserve a balancing equilibrium between contending forces which might otherwise have torn his real apart. The cementing personal relationships between himself and a person from each local elite community whose support was crucial was often solemnised in a formal ceremony. At such an event, the person being honoured would attend a durbar. After slowly and ceremonially approaching the Throne (*Masnād*), he would then receive a tunic (*khilāt* achkan or sherwani). This would be but a part of an array of garments reaching from "head-to-foot" (*sar-o-pa*). At the same ceremony, the personal bond between ruler and ruled would also be sealed by the bestowal of a formal certificate or contract of engagement. This was a parchment document. In writing of gold on gold-flecked material, words would indicate precisely what it was that expected on both sides. This document had the force of a deed, grant, or "treaty" (*farmān* or *sanad*). All such stylised formalities emphasised the importance of the bond being entered into by the Padshah and his servant. Symbolically and theoretically, as also in fact, the eyes of the ever-sleepless and watchful Grand Mughal – Akbar, Jehangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb – never closed. The likes of imperial realm so "constituted" had not been seen in India for at least a thousand years.

## Constitutional Development and the Limitation of Power

But more formal, self-conscious, thorough, and also more impersonal, constitutional developments in India began with the English. These, from their very inception, consisted of two parallel and intertwining sub-processes of constitutional construction: one, Anglo-Saxon and European (*Farangi*); and the other combining indigenous or Indian (Hindu and/or Mughal) elements. The whole combined process began on 31 December 1599 (or 1600), with Queen Elizabeth's Charter to the "Governor and Company of Merchants of London trading with the East Indies" and with Jehangir Padshah's Royal *Farmān* to Sir Thomas Roe in 1618. Thereafter followed a succession of charters by James I, Cromwell, Charles II, and William III, on one side, and of *farmāns* and *sanads*, some local and some imperial from various petty and great potentates in India.

Not until 1639, with the founding of Madras (Fort St. George), did English merchants of the East India Company enter seriously into the arena of subcontinental politics. Few as they were, they pledged a bond of fealty to Sri Ranga Raya III, the Vijayanagara pretender who still sat at Vellore. From him they received a contract (*sasanan*) engraved upon a plate of gold.

They also pledged and received bonds (*namak-hallal*) between themselves and local merchant-bankers, notables and rajas. These solemn bonds promised mutual alliance, assistance, obligation and service. Such a seemingly small event within the larger scale of events taking place in India started a gradual process of political and constitutional progress and consolidation which did not cease until the British finally left India on 14 August 1947. Such events as the sacking of Delhi in 1739, the battle at Panipat in 1761, the fall of Srirangapatnam (Seringapatam) in 1799, and the final defeat of the Marathas in 1818, paralleled the path to constitutional consolidation. By small and gradual steps, the Company's *raj* waxed more and more until it eventually held sway over the entire subcontinent. By means of an ever proliferating network of local alliances, bonds, and contracts, an all-encompassing Indian Empire ultimately emerged. This establishment, however, could not have occurred, much less been anything like as vast nor as pervasive as it eventually became had it not been for the intermeshing and synchronising of these two parallel processes. Woven into the warp and woof of India's entire fabric, therefore, were elements which were politically integrative (super-communal or national) and elements which were legally integrative (or "Constitutional" in the more formal and textual sense that this word is now used to define the Institutionality of a particular State).

First, what is especially noteworthy in the rise of the Company to paramount power in India, is the extreme care with which it took pains to involve local communities, from notables and grandees to humbler peoples, in every stage of its "constitutional" development. Several examples of this can be seen, just in the way one of the Company's Presidencies slowly and unobtrusively put together a network of support among various communities of South India. On auspicious days throughout the year, parades through Madras would be led by the Pedda Nayak, on his white horse, followed by ranks of uniformed local "pawns" and "sepoys" recruited from the warrior peoples from nearby villages. Behind this military display would come Town Councillors in their scarlet silk gowns – a mixture of notables drawn from every leading local community (Armenian, Hindu, Muslim, Luso-Indian, and others). After these came the palanquins of leading Europeans (the English Governor and his Council) and Native dignitaries. These would be followed by swirling troupe of temple dancers (*devadāsis*), accompanied by beat of kettle-drums (*nowbuts*) and the sounds of horns and trumpet.

A second example was symbolised in the small gold coin which immediately became the official "*sicca*" for Madras. Variously called the "pagoda" or "*hān*," this came straight from a mint within the inner precincts of the great Temple at Tirupati, 80 miles away. There it was ceremonially and ritually stamped with the likeness (*murthi*) of the titular deity, Sri Venkateswara. The coin served a dual purpose: it was both the formal medium of exchange in commercial transactions; and it was the religious image (*murthi*) before which any local banker could do *pūja*. Similar tokens of homage, accompanied by munificent offering, were paid by Company officials to all of the local deities in their great temples within the larger Madras area (e.g. Sri Parthasarathi Svami, Sri Kapileshwara, etc.). Anyone who examines such Sanskrit documents as the *Sarva Deva Vilāsa*, written in the late 18th century, will quickly discover that local "deities" of Madras were so delighted with prosperity of the area and so pleased with the benefits brought to them therefrom that they were credited with having brought the

entire "auspicious" regime into existence. Moreover, due to the beneficence of the gods, the wealth of Madras had attracted the most famous artists, courtesans, dancers, dramatists, poets and sages of the world. In the name of the gods, these notables were being paid to make great ritual celebrations. The gold coin, in short, was much more than gold.

During the 1st century of its existence, the combination of European and Native agency served also served to protect the entire settlement from depredation and plundering. Local Native agents of Madras (*dubashes*, *mānshis*, and *vakils*, continually worked with English merchants to this end. As a result, combining bluff, bravado, bribes, and cunning, these local notables were highly successful in their diplomatic efforts. They managed, thereby, to prevent marauding armies led by such renowned figures as Mir Jumla and Sivaji from sacking and pillaging the villages and the town. Even-handedness and openness in dealings with various ethnic and religious communities within Madras domains, permitting each to exercise its own customs and to freely enjoy of its own practices, arbitrating conflicts and disputes, heading off destructive communal riots, and providing a common defense from predatory external attack or internal violence brought respect to the Company. This pattern, the adroit means by which the Company's fledgling power became established in the Madras area, was replicated elsewhere. With minor variations, it formed the basis for later developments in Bombay and Calcutta.[4] In each area, the Company's local legitimacy and territorial power was authenticated by auspicious agreements, contracts and treaties. In each area, many "small, hard pieces" of ethnicity were gradually cemented together into a growing "Wheel of State." By means of local agreements, compacts, contracts, deeds, grants, treaties and other indigenous instruments (*darkhasts, kauls, farmāns, sanads*), much of this remarkable process of gradual growth became possible. Such were the means by which the Company established its Raj and built the foundations of its reputation.

By the middle of the 18th century, when other empires of India began to crumble, and threats mounted against the security of its own holdings, the Company was in an ideal position to react to such rapidly changing conditions. It already possessed inner resources. It already enjoyed local prestige and reputation. It had already gained local respect by skilfully propitiating local deities and cleverly mixing force and guile to defend itself from great marauding warlords as Shivaji and Mir Jumla. It had already accumulated, the necessary kinds of cultural and political resources: reputation, local allies, indigenous manpower, and borrowing credit with local backers. It had already begun to enlist into its ranks the younger, more venturesome sons of the village lords for its police, military and administrative machinery. Most important of all, it had already manifested a special genius founding its newly emerging political structure upon a viable internal "constitution." That is to say, it had begun to exhibit those skills necessary for most, at least most notables, to gain a relatively impartial and open access to, and exercise of, Rule of Law. This, when combined with a substantive incorporation of hallowed mores, customs, and values of each important community, often in the form of contracts and treaties, and a procedural machinery for dealing with conflicts and violations, both civil and criminal, is what is meant by possessing a "Constitution."

Under Warren Hastings (1773-84), the Government of India became established; and, under such successors as Cornwallis, Wellesley, and Bentinck, constitutionalism became enshrined. Under this constitutionalism, Rule of Law, took a quantum leap forward. This Rule of Law, as it slowly developed, included both substantive and procedural elements. Thus, first in substantive terms, each community's own law became enshrined as part of the Law. Hindu Law, drawn from Sanskritic texts as translated and interpreted by Brahman pandits, became an ever expanding body of norms and standards; Islamic Law, drawn from Arabic and Persian texts as translated and interpreted by Muslim mullahs and hakims (*ulema*), set norms and standards for Muslims. At least theoretically, each community, whether Animist, Buddhist, Christian, Jain, Sikh, or Zoroastrian and whether "pure" or "twice-born" or "polluted" or "untouchable," including each tribal community, however primitive, was left alone and allowed to practice its own customs without let or limit. Practically, and procedurally, at least initially and until reform movements spread a climate of outrage against what were deemed to be "inhuman practices," what was tacitly permitted included debt-bondage, head-hunting, human-sacrifice, infanticide, child marriage, widow-burning, and much more, all for the very reason that the "constitutional system" on which the entire imperial structure stood, was itself founded upon the inherently conservative pragmatism of making sure that, in principle, what existed was hallowed by the very fact of its existence. The very idea of interfering, of tampering, was intrinsically alien to the inner logic of this kind of system. Moreover, in practical terms, the manpower base of the empire required a failure observance of this kind of logic.

Perhaps the greatest contribution to constitutionalism and to that kind of Rule of Law which was necessary to make the Indian Empire viable and to hold it together came in the area of procedural developments. An entire elaborate machinery, both civil and criminal, was developed for "determining" what had happened, for "trying the facts," and for making sure that the incredibly complex and multiple fabrics which made up the substance of Law, would be properly handled. No expense was spared to make sure that this was so. Impartiality, neutrality, non-interference, and tolerance became but a few of the operating principles, by which every tribunal was meant to operate. The District Magistrate, occasionally called the District Collector or District Commissioner, was meant to become the personal embodiment of procedural principles. Like Akbar, he became the "Lord-High-Everything," the Ma-Bap, the Personal Mother and Father of each community.

Beyond the Codes of Substantive Law and the Procedures of Law, however, another body of law developed which was inherently, and quite strictly, political. This, as had been the case from the very beginning, contained both European (British) and Indian (Hindu, Muslim, Native and/or Princely) elements. On the European side, just as initial Charters had come from the English Throne, beginning with Queen Elizabeth, a later body of Charter (Renewal) Acts had enhanced and perfected the internal machinery of the Company itself, and of both its newly established Government of India and its various Local Governments (known as Presidencies). These, with the exception of Pitt's India Act of 1784, came at regular intervals of twenty years from 1773 onwards (1793, 1813, 1833, and 1853). Each of these Acts, as part of a long-term process of constitutional development, aimed at curbing the arbitrary powers

of government in India and of reforming and perfecting its institutions, so as to make it more "incorruptible" and "responsible." Thus, for example, under Lord Cornwallis, principles which aimed at curbing any and all excesses of power, were brought into play. Most prominent among these was the idea "separation of powers" between executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, so that sword, purse, and scales would always be held by separate hands. Auxiliaries of this principle were such procedures as "independent auditing of books," "open records," "freedom of expression [press and speech]," and "appointment on merit" (rather than by personal patronage or privilege). But behind and underneath all of these principles was one profoundly important procedural principle: namely, that "conflict of interest" would always not only undermine good government but endanger the very structures of any political system. Cornwallis, who deeply believed in and practised these principles, established that "Heaven Born" body of mandarins called the Indian Civil Service. These, at least in theory, were supposed to be above temptation or corruptibility.

Yet another body of constitutional developments which, from the beginning, had always been inherently political. This, existing on an entirely different level from the strictly judicial Codes of Substantive and Procedural (Civil and Criminal) Law within British India, was that form of law which we can call "The Settlements." The term "settlement," as used in the 18th century, meant "agreement" or "contract." This body of law consisted of all the agreements, bonds, contracts, deeds, engagements, covenants, promises, and treaties which had ever been officially entered into by servants of the East India Company and, later, by those who served in the same capacity under the British Crown. This eventually included and incorporated every prince and principality within the subcontinent. It even extended to principalities throughout the Indian Ocean (Arabian Sea, Red Sea, Persian Gulf, Gulf of Bengal) and surrounding the basin of that ocean. It was Lord Wellesley, with his imperious eye, who brought about and constructed the "system of subsidiary alliances." Under this system, every prince however great and small was obliged to submit, once and for all, to a permanent and perpetual treaty of subordination and, coming under the "paramountcy" of the Company, to become another cog in the Great Wheel or *Mahāchakra* of the Indian Empire.[5]

Within British India itself, under various local governments, the great land "Settlements" comprehended not only all of the great landholders (zamindars whose domains were often as large as those of princes outside of the boundaries of British India), but also eventually included contracts concluded with each and every "brotherhood" of village lords ("*mahalwars*": "palace kinsmen") and, beyond that, even went so far as to eventually include an annual revenue agreement made with each and every cultivator.[6]

Finally, also to be counted within this body of "Settlements" was something rarely if ever mentioned. This was a "Silent Settlement" by which each and every "tax free" charitable or temple endowment, privileged grant, or land-pension became part of an over-arching arrangement by which the Indian Empire obtained and held onto support from each and every "high-born" local elite, no matter how or where that elite had originally obtained its position of privilege. The Inam Regulations, which embodied most of these privileged tenures, has never been as carefully or as closely studied as it should have been. This kind of settlement

has remained largely a mystery. Yet, we do know that as much as ten to fifteen percent of all land revenues remained hidden within Inams, and hence from taxation. This Settlement, in short, was a kind of political "pay off" which, for more than a century and a half, kept many communities politically quiet and contented. They knew all too well what the penalty for "breaking faith" or "kicking up their heels" would be. The forfeiture of tax-exempt "hereditary" landholdings were privileges too dear to be risked so recklessly.

A third and final body of laws which were more strictly political in purpose was that body of legislation which began to develop in the late 19th century. This body of laws was a process which became part of what, for want of something better, we can call the "democratising" or "liberalising" (even "liberating") march toward responsible and representative "self-government." It began with the enactments providing for the election of District Boards and Municipal Councils; for the expansion of the size of all Executive Councils (District, Municipal, Provincial, and eventually even Imperial) from appointed or nominated majorities to elected majorities; and, finally, with the expansion of Executive Councils into full Legislative Councils with the power to make and unmake laws. All of these developments, beginning in the 1870s, came to fruition in the Government of India Acts of 1909 (Morley-Minto); 1919 (Montagu-Chelmsford); and finally, of 1935. The Government of India Act of 1935, as a formal and written document, comprehended all of the actions, bonds, contracts, deeds, and engagements of all the years prior to its passing. As a compendium of laws, they became, in many ways, both the model and the substance of what ultimately became the Constitution of India in 1950. This, with all its precedents, remains the largest and modest detailed written constitution in the world.

## Constitutionalism and the Destruction of India

But what have all these events of the past had to do with the aftermath of Ayodhya? And how has the Ram Janmabhumi Campaign of the *Sangh Parivar* affected the patterns of constitutional development? The answer is, quite simply, this: no huge polity with the size and complexity of India could have been constructed, nor can it continue to remain glued together without the voluntary consent and participation of many "small hard pieces" of ethnic communities, both "pure" and "impure." Moreover, no such polity can stay together without the implicit or silent and tacit consensus of untold of many more communities, however "dalit," "tribal," or "untouchable." All of these "pieces" must somehow be allowed to find some respectable niche, and allow themselves to be fitted into the mosaic of such pieces. More than that, when viewed in historical perspective, it is important to realise that it took an enormous amount of adroit, arduous and careful effort, by hosts of gifted individuals and groups, both Indian and European, to put together and hold together the huge structure which India had become by 1947; and it has taken much more of the same to bring India to what it has become since 1947. The process was, and is, slow and painstaking. This is so, especially because, in order to give the structure stability, it has been necessary to reconcile the interests of as many distinct and separate communities and peoples, customs and religious traditions as possible. Anxieties and fears have had to be assuaged. Various kinds of "vested interests" have had to be given "a place of their own," "a place of safety and satisfaction"

within the system. For such a large system to work at all, it always has been necessary for as many of these interests, involving as many separate peoples as possible, to be fitted into what is "constituted." The best safeguard for this has been Rule of Law, as embodied and made to function through the Constitution of India. Future stability is not to be safeguarded by the contradictions of the *Dharma Samsad* or the *Sangh Parivar*.

The story of the breaking down of constitutional safeguards is also part of the story of political developments during the past century and a half. There have always been individuals and groups who have felt threatened, and who have remained fearful. These have constituted a ready-made constituency for resorts to "counter-constitutional" or "extra-constitutional" forms of activity which could only be viewed, both by those who govern and those who are governed, as "illegal." Hence, by operating outside the law and beyond the pale of constitutional "due process," these kinds of forces have tended to revert to those exercises of raw force which were directly confrontational and violent. Such groups in India, when acting as "outlaws" often took to brigandry, covert operations, or rebellion. But, since the Empire, with its enormous resources could virtually monopolise the use of force, so that it could readily deploy contingents from its standing army of some 300,000 sepoys to deal with any uprising or war within the entire Indian Ocean Basin, older ways of taking apart an empire were not very effective. Something altogether different has been called for.

Some of the answers to this problem came, like the impetus for the Empire itself, out of the West. From the West came cultural, ideological, and religious movements. Calling for "radical conversion" or total transformation, these appealed both to the individual and to the community into which he had been born. In addition to the substance of radically new ideals coming out of the West, came new technologies of social communication and social mobilisation by which ideas could be spread and made to transform old ways. What came from the West, through the Company, were more than the political principles of Constitutionalism by which the empire had first been constructed and then progressively transformed. What came from the West was more than the Evangelicalism of Christian Pietism or the Enlightenment ideals of Secular Humanism. All of this was disturbing enough to the old order (*sanāthana dharm*); but what was especially disturbing was the arrival of the principles of Democracy and Equalitarianism. The combined principles of Constitutionalism, Democracy, and Equality which gradually gained ascendancy in the latter days of the Indian Empire, however important for the continued consolidation of the political system, were profoundly unsettling to some within "twice born" communities. These saw that entire fabric of status ascribed by sacred purity of birth and the entire system of social ranking and communal apartheid, with its steeply sloped hierarchy of power and privilege, would begin to disintegrate.

As a consequence, Indian movements reflecting a combination of rising social consciousness and socio-political reaction began to appear in the 1820s. These efforts, starting with agitations, petitions and protests, grew in size and intensity throughout the 19th century. Nativistic and religious in expression and mobilised by more conservative and traditionalistic members of the same "high-born" communities which had helped to shape the Indian Empire

in the first place, these movements were reactionary parts of that same complex process of "Hinduization" which had accompanied the construction of that empire. Essentially these were reactions against anything which might interfere with the ancient and hallowed purity, privileges, and powers of "twice-born" communities. Resistance to radical changes, especially to changes brought about by radical conversion, was hardly surprising. Anything which touched long entrenched customs and interests was bound to be profoundly disturbing.

But here was an irony. Despite those changes which had enhanced the influence of Brahman and other high-caste ('Hindu') elites within governments of the Indian Empire and which had brought about a massive 'Hinduization' of the continent[7] – and, perhaps because of such changes – there never was a time, from the late 18th century onwards, when "nativist"[8] reactions to these same radical changes,[9] especially in matters of religious or social consequence, did not occur somewhere.[10] These were sometimes fierce, sometimes massive, and sometimes both fierce and massive. Often these were provoked by some perceived violation of custom or some perceived threat to purity. Institutions such as birth (*jāt*), caste (*jāti*), custom (*mamool*), duty (*dharm*), place (*sthala* or locality), rank, or status were matters so hallowed that they, in themselves, constituted the most sacred and fundamental of religious tenets. Where threats against sacred institutions came from attacks against doctrines and ideologies underpinning those institutions, as scriptural sources of authority or philosophical foundations of authority, reactions could be either intellectual or polemical. Whatever their character, whether institutional or ideological, many changes were seen as dangers to long established traditions. Both the *dharma* or *sanāthana dharm* of high-born Non-Muslims and the *dār-ul-Islām* of Muslims seemed, in the eyes of some, to be profoundly threatened.[11] As often as not, Non-Muslim or "Hindu" reactions came from Brahmans, or from brahmanically cultured individuals and groups, who were not officials employed within the Empire.

By the 19th century, even while an officially sanctioned "Establishment Hinduism" was in the process of being formed as an integral part of the Empire, there were those, both inside and outside this Establishment, who somehow felt threatened and who reacted against change. Among such changes, perhaps none were more disturbing than those initiated, outside of direct official control or sanction by increasing numbers of Christians from Europe, especially newcomers fired by the revivalistic fires of Evangelicalism and Pietism. Some of these European Christians, officials and missionaries alike, directly challenged the older traditions. They did this by not only launching frontal attacks upon existing "heathen" beliefs, customs, and practices, but sometimes by conducting massive conversion campaigns and by establishing attractive educational programmes. Such activities, especially when insensitive or insulting and, worse yet, when perceived as threatening, triggered violent responses in defense of *dār-ul-Islām* and *sanāthana dharm*. The cumulative effects of such reactions, if and when they ever combined, could be deadly. Such reactions not only provoked the Vellore Mutiny of 1806 in South India,[12] but eventually contributed to the much more serious conflagration in North India commonly known as the Great Rebellion (or Great Mutiny) of 1857.

At the "down-to-earth" popular level, as incipient modern movements were organised, efforts to defend the old order, or to reform it, became increasingly and self-

consciously "Hindu." Defensive, exclusivist, fundamentalistic, militant, or revivalist, their purpose was to "purify" the "sacred soil," to remove pollution, sometimes by means of radical "reconversion" (*shuddi.* 'purification'). Attitudes toward any ethnic or religious community not deemed to be properly "Hindu," meaning not legitimately or sufficiently indigenous and 'Native' to Mother India (*Bhārat Mātā*), became increasingly hostile. New radical movements were, in effect, modelled after comparable movements which had come out of the Abrahmanic traditions. Quite explicitly and self-consciously labelling themselves "Hindu," their proponents saw themselves as defenders of 'Hinduism' (*Hindutva Dharm*). All of these movements, in varying degrees, blended together nativist elements which are peculiar to many, if not all, radical conversion movements (especially those which were 'fundamentalistic'). All of them exhibited a particularly nationalistic fervour.[13]

Specifically, movements of this sort made their initial appearance in reaction to "mass" movements of conversion to Christianity among Shanars in Tirunelveli (South India). The Vibuthi Sangam, the Dharma Sabha, and the Chatur Veda Siddhantha Sabha (known in Madras as the 'Salay Street Society') arose during the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s.[14] In aggressive exclusiveness, they can be seen as forerunners of the Arya Samaj of Saraswati Dayanand, the Nagari Pracharini Sabha, the Ganesha Melas of Tilak, the Hindu Mahasabha of Savarkar, and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) of Hedgewar, which later grew up in the north.[15] These movements, in turn, led to others even more extremist and revivalist. The most militantly reactionary and revivalistic of such groups in this century, following paths opened by earlier movements are the various "*jagarans*" of the Dharma Sansad, as seen in the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the Virat Hindu Sammelan, Hindu Samajotsav, Bajrang Dal, and the Shiv Sena.[16]

What seems to have been most at issue, ever since the 1870s, when serious attempts to bring about increasing political participation were initiated by the Government of India, is commitment to the triple Enlightenment ideals of Constitutionalism, Democracy, and Equality. A careful reading of the underlying platforms of every one of those putative Hindu national movements and organisations which have been most reactionary reveals an unmistakably clear hostility to these ideals. Each new advance in democratic and representative self-government since the 1870s, over a century ago, has engendered a deepening of fears and forebodings of ultimate subjection among "high-born" communities. This can be seen in the almost deliberately contradictory and obfuscating rhetoric which came from some of the most outspoken of Hindu leaders. Tilak, calling for both "*swaraj* before reform" as well as sedition and terror against the Raj, never showed enthusiasm for or commitment to Constitutionalism, Democracy or Equality. Nor, for that matter, did Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

Gandhi's actions consistently undermined constitutional processes, especially advances toward democratic self-government as embodied within the Government of India Acts 1909, 1919, and 1935. Out of concern for dangers posed by communities who now call themselves "Dalits," he sought to co-opt such peoples into the fold of Hinduism by piously labelling them "Harijans," "Children of Krishna." That such peoples, having never before been allowed to drink water from the same cup as the "pure" nor allowed entry into their temples,

might have had opinions of their own did not deter him. His scant regard for concerns of Ambedkar, Azariah, Shah, and other Dalit leaders and his staunch defense of the caste system, as a lofty moral, rational and sound way to ordering societal relations, told Dalits all they needed or wanted to know. The brutalising consequences of the caste system had provoked Ambedkar into mounting one the most devastating attacks against caste ever made. Ambedkar had rejected the rationalisations and phoney religiosity behind caste, with its upper-caste social and religious hegemony which had condemned large segments of the population to perpetual thraldom. However, recognition of the utter incompatibility of brahmanical with democratic norms, requiring a total rejection of inequality in all its forms, was also unleashing an elemental hatred which could not be assuaged by pious words from Gandhi. Gandhi's mounting campaigns of extra-constitutional and "non-violent" resistance (*satyagraha*) always ended in communal violence, mainly between Muslims and caste Hindus. In his equivocal relations with the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS and in hosts of other contradictions, he continually gives mixed signals, so that those who heard or read the Mahatma's words seemed only to hear or read what they themselves most wanted to hear and read. In short, from the time he arrived back in India, after his twenty years in South Africa, down to the time of his final assassination by Godsé, a fanatic and frustrated Brahman of Maharashtra with RSS connections, Gandhi's role within the constitutional process was ambivalent. Put more bluntly, his was the role of a spoiler. What might have happened if eleven provincial governments of British India had continued to govern to themselves after 1919, or after 1935, we will never know.[17]

If Gandhi's commitment to constitutionalism, democracy, and equality seems always, at best, to have been contradictory, derisory, and equivocal, what about the commitments of all those organisations of the Saffron Brotherhood which make up the *Sangh Parivar*? In answering this question, one does not have to recount each extra-constitutional action, endeavour, or program pursued by the RSS since Gandhi's assassination and before the destruction of the Babri Masjid. One need only look carefully at contradictions and equivocations in the language of the *Sangh Parivar* since 6 December 1993. Indeed, one need only look at the "cultural" rhetoric of the BJP to get a fairly clear understanding of what might be in store for all of India's so-called "non-Hindu" minorities. The words are clear. To achieve a common National Culture through policies of "Nationalisation," there will be, among other things,: (1) a common civil code; (2) a common educational system; (3) a common human rights commission (abrogating and ending, once and for all, the never implemented "Minority Rights" recommendations of the Mandal Commission); (4) a common set of center-state relations (deleting Article 370, which provides a special status for Kashmir); (5) and a common history (calling for a complete rewriting of understandings concerning events in the past so as to reflect the ideals of *Rām Rājya*).

All radical "Hindu" movements in the post-independence period have either appropriated or absorbed the institutional trappings of "establishment" or "official" Hinduism which had developed under imperial auspices during the 19th century. What has been constructed out of this blending of earlier elements is the culminating manifestation of a new kind of phenomenon. This phenomenon, whatever its historical roots, is quite different from

anything previously known. This, now often referred to as "organised" or "syndicated" Hinduism,"[18] possesses a more discrete and reified structure than ever before. In appropriating both a "denominationalistic" and a "world-religion" character which never previously existed, this kind of "Hinduism," as a modern phenomenon, is not only "proselytising" in it aims, but chauvinistic, exclusivistic, fundamentalistic, and even imperialistic, in its demands. The exclusive claim of the guardians of *Hindutva*, in its most extreme rhetoric, is that the *Sangh Parivar* as incorporated into the *Dharma Samsad* ("Council of Order") "represents" not only all peoples who are of "pure" birth and the "pure" earth of India but also represents only those peoples. At the same time, in seeming contradiction, the same claim is a claim to legitimate authority over all other peoples, if not over all life, which inhabits the sacred soil of India. The proponents of these claims also insist that, in demographic terms, they are "the majority" of India. Hence, both on democratic and on divinely eternal or cosmic grounds, protagonists insist that they can represent and speak for all. These claims to rightful dominance over all peoples, are clearly both nationalistic and religious. *Hindutva*, in short, stands both for the "Religion" (*Dharma*) and for the "Nation" (*Rām Rājya*) of all which exists in South Asia.[19]

## Conclusion

The events which culminated in the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, on 6 December 1992, can be seen as part of an undercurrent of tendencies which have moved in the opposite direction from that gradual integration and consolidation of India which has been going on for the past three centuries. They represent ever active, if nascent, forces which are always pressing in upon duly constituted and settled government. They represent the predatory propensities of ethnic fear coming out of deserts and jungles, from urban and village enclaves alike. Not since the Partition of India in 1947 have such "fissiparous tendencies" gained so much momentum. The "dangerous decades" so darkly suggested forty years ago seem now, in hindsight, to be more manifest and may be approaching a more turbulent turning point.

Seen from another perspective, what we may be witnessing is another "transfer of power" – a coming to rulership of another "corporate dynasty." This new power, representing a rising of "Hindu" nationalism, is visible in the highly organised machinery of the RSS-VHP-BJP axis of the *Sangh Parivar*. This is a power demonstrating a new capacity for political mobilisation and extra-constitutional actions of a magnitude which has not been witnessed in India since the heyday of such action by the Indian National Congress under Gandhi and Nehru (1917-47).

In examining the constitutional implications of recent events, it is important to remember exactly how changes in political behaviour have influenced, and been influenced by, various local constituencies. It has never been possible to totally ignore too many local "holders of power" and local "people in the ranks" of "minorities." Akbar knew this. Warren Hastings knew this. Nehru, in his way probably more than Gandhi, knew this. This is a matter of no small importance for anyone who wishes to understand, more clearly and

exactly, not only how the strength and stability of large political systems in South Asia have come into being but also, conversely, how they have ultimately been undone. Under previous regimes, vital support services have been provided by individuals representing a variety of different but important interests within any given local population. These have come out of many different elite communities.[20] Notables from each community, in turn, have had to make decisions about exactly how to relate themselves and their community to the emerging system of power being created, whether by the Mughals, the Marathas, the Company, the Indian National Congress, or by the allied Saffron brotherhoods of the *Sangh Parivar*. This *Sangh Parivar*, comprising the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the Bajrang Dal, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the deviant, less predictable Shiv Sena (with the ominous acronym "SS"), together with the Shankarachariyas and odd arrays of assorted Sadhus and Pandarams, has formed the *Dharma Samsad*, that Council which has met six or more times over the past ten years. Decisions by leaders of all the various kinds of "minorities," concerning how best to respond to the forces of the *Sangh Parivar*, will wait. They, as different communities of India, will hold commitments of themselves in abeyance until they see exactly what actions an actual BJP Government of India will be attempting to take. Then, and only then, will we begin to know whether or not India as a whole can remain cohesive.

Ever since the 1870s, when the formal rise of constitutionalism, democracy and equality as ideals began to take definite shape in India, the stabilising and strengthening of regimes and political systems in South Asia have called for the continual broadening of constituent participation and the mobilisation of support from an ever wider mosaic of communities, both high-born and low-born. No single feature continues to remain more crucial to any regime, in this connection, than the boundaries and limitations of individual loyalty. As already indicated, the loyalty of any constituency – whether Muslim, Sikh, Dalit, or Christian; whether Tamil or Kashmiri, Assamese or Punjabi, Naga or Mizo or Bengali – is something which can never be taken for granted in India. Events of recent years show that this is something which cannot be taken for granted in our day. In that sense, events such as the Great Mutiny of 1857, the Assassination of Indira Gandhi, or the destruction of the Babri Masjid, different as they were, are but a few sample reminders, among hosts of others, of what happens when the constitutional bonds of *namak-hallal* have, in some way, been sundered or violated and when the logic of political obligation has been broken.

In order for constitutional stability to be achieved and maintained within our own day, the anxieties and fears of many peoples must be assuaged. Many of them have rested their hopes in the Constitution of India. For them the Constitution is not just a promise of protection against the erosion of rights and privileges now enjoyed, as now guaranteed under Rule of Law, but also a promise of increasing equality, security, and well-being in the future. Unless the putative forces of the *Sangh Parivar* – the Saffron elements of the RSS-VHP-SS-BJP brotherhood – wish to rely almost entirely upon the exercise of coercion and violence and resort to the "logic of the fish," they are going to have to rediscover the "logic of circles," and the importance of constructing larger and stronger wheels of collaboration. They are going to need, figuratively speaking, to "rediscover" or "reinvent" the constitutional wheel. They will

need especially to find some way of coming to terms with many more peoples than they currently seem to realise. India, they may discover, has no single majority community. It must either remain a constitutionally viable mosaic of inter-functional minorities; or may fall into a dysfunctional jumble of broken pieces.

## Notes

1. John Gray, *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*, New York, Harper Collins, 1993, is but one of an endless stream of works which certify the ephemerality and instability of even our most ancient and most elemental institutions.

2. Or, as Augustine wrote, "The state is a giant robber band. But what are robber bands, if not little states?"

3. In the court of a Hindu raja, whether in a village or in a palace, the throne would be a *gardi*: symbolizing a female deity (*shakti*), upon which the ruler sat and from whom he derived his virility and power.

4. The environment on the mainland surrounding Bombay Island was never as congenial as that of Bengal and the Karnatic. This seems to have been due, most of all, to the regional strength of Maratha magnates and princes in the Deccan and along the Konkan.

5. Charles Umpherston Aitchison (Sir: 1832-1896), *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads, Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, Calcutta, 1909, revised up to the 1st June 1906. This multi-volume compendium of development, was part of India's Constitutional Law until 1947; and thereafter, through legislation, its provisions have been amended by: (1) the abolition of princely states; and (2) by the abolition of their "privy purses" (pensions), as part of Indira Gandhi's campaign of *"garibi hatao!"*

6. B H Baden Powell, *Land Systems of British India*, Oxford, 1892, in three volumes [originally, *Manual of Land Revenue System and Land Tenures of British India*, Calcutta, GOI, 1882].

7. Defined in terms both of a socio-political and a cultural-technical integration (especially in communication and transport) within the continent and in terms of a religious-institutional and religious-ideological integration of many peoples throughout India – processes which intermingled in countless complex ways.

8. Here we encounter what is, quite admittedly, what must seem to be a baffling complexity. It pertains to the double definition of "Hinduism" with which this essay began: (1) Hinduism as anything native, Native, or nativistic; and (2) Hinduism as some sort of cultural or political construction, however deliberate or inadvertent – e.g. the caste system (*varnashrama-dharma*), *Hindavi* or *Hindutva* domains (*Hindustan*), "Hinduism" in both official and non-official forms engendered under the Raj being described here; and finally, Hinduism as a formal (world) religion distinct from Islam, Christianity, Buddhism etc.

9. Changes of this kind, perceived as being imposed, forcibly, by some higher political authority, could come in many forms, shapes, and sizes. Among the more famous in which the Company governments became engaged were such ostensibly "humanitarian" reforms as ending attempts to end female infanticide, human sacrifice (*meriah*), widow immolation (*sati*), ritual murder (*thugi*), and things of that sort. But, such matters as alleged "conversions" of high-caste adolescents, boys or girls, and their alleged "retention" in missionary schools, raised questions about possible "kidnapping" and about heritability of property.

10. Decisions over matters of life and death within each domestic unit – family, caste, or community – had generally, after all, always been within the sole jurisdiction of that particular unit, so long as its

actions did not infringe upon customs or traditions of some other unit or upon civic peace or tranquillity.

11. Muslim heart-searchings and reactions to change were every bit as nervous or traumatic as those suffered by some "twice-born" peoples. See works by Syed Ahmad Khan, Aziz Ahmed, Mushirul Hasan, Rashidudden Ahmed, Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972; Barbara D Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1982; and David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1978.

12. "New Light on the Vellore Mutiny," Kenneth Ballhatchet and John Harrison (eds), *East India Company Studies: Papers Presented to Professor Sir Cyril Philips*, London, SOAS, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, [Hong Kong: Asia Research Service], 1986, pp 207-231.

13. One of the very best overviews of these developments is found in Ainslie T Embree, *Utopias in Conflict: Religion and Nationalism in Modern India*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990.

14. Less strident, more eclectic and inclusivist, if not irenic, in nationalistic fervor (and perhaps more open to Christian, European and Muslim members of society), on the other hand, were some members of the Hindu Literary Society, the Madras Hindoo Association, the Madras Native Association, and even the Madras Mahajana Sabha, in its earlier stages. These were groups in South India which might be compared, in their openness, with such Bengal institutions as the Hindu College of Calcutta or Brahmo Samaj of Raja Ram Mohan Roy.

15. "The Nagari Pracharini Sabha (Society for the Promotion of the Nagari Language and Script) of Benares, 1893-1950: A Study in the Social and Political History of the Hindi Language," Christopher King, Madison, Unpublished University of Wisconsin, 1974, shows how defensive, exclusivistic and fundamentalistic many Hindus in North India were becoming by the end of the nineteenth century.

16. *India Today*, May 11, 1986, pp 30-39: Cover story.

17. Such "counter-factuals" and "might-have-beens" are ever the enigmas which intrigue historians.

18. The concept of 'Syndicated Hinduism,' seems to have come out of an article by Professor Romila Thapar. See her "Syndicated Moksha?" and other articles in: *Seminar*, 313, September 1985, pp 14-22: Special Issue on 'The Hindus and Their Isms: A Symposium on some Complexities of a Dominant Religion.'

19. "The Concept of 'Majority' as a Devilish Force in the Politics of Modern Indian History," *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, XXV, 3 November, 1987, pp 267-274.

20. Namely, Maratha and Mughal, Naukar and Nawab, Sepoy and Sardar, Raja (or Zamindar) and Ryot, Brahman and Kayastha (or Khattri), Rajput and Sikh (or Jat, or Nayyar, or Thakur), Velama and Vellalar (or Kallar, or Kamma, or Reddi), Komarti and Chettiar (or Marwari or Sheth), Muslim (Arab, Lubai, Malay, Pathan, Persian, or Turk; Ahmadiyah, Ismaili, Bohra) and Non-Muslim (of various sectarian communities), Armenian and Syrian Christian, Bene Israel and Parsi, Buddhist and Jain.

# Ethno-Regional Demands for
# Autonomy in India

Ajay K Mehra

## Introduction

Both as an ideal and principle of governance, democracy is premised upon the urge for and the right to self-governance in a society. But self-governance is not as easy to define today, as it was during the Greek city states. For, the complexity and heterogeneity of modern nation states make it difficult to determine the appropriate level, form and content of self-government. To meet this complex demand, such systems (and concepts) as federalism, local self-government, division of power (between levels of government), decentralisation and devolution of power, etc., have been devised. And yet, not only does this urge remains unsatisfied, it is leading to political agitations, now frequently violent ones, the world over.

Though it is indeed a world-wide phenomenon today, multi-ethnic societies of the developing world have been particularly prone to such agitations for autonomy. The crystallisation of a distinctively indigenous democratic culture[1] and acculturation of the populace in the competitive power game in this part of the world has given a fillip to demands for secession or greater autonomy to ethnic groups within the existing constitutional framework. These demands for autonomy to an ethnic group or a region emphasise the right to self-governance, i.e., a share in political power to shape the future of the community.

The recognition of the right to autonomy to regions – several of these are culture, language or ethnic based – is part of India's political and constitutional history.[2] This was accepted by the Indian National Congress during the freedom struggle, and the demand for this right was successfully made on the colonial administration.

Naturally, the post-independence constitutional engineering made a conscious attempt to take care of sentiments for autonomy. Yet, independent India has been a stage for agitations and movements for autonomy from day one. Barely had the States Reorganisation Commission finished its work in 1956, there began a violent agitation for the bifurcation of the state of Bombay into Maharashtra and Gujarat. Demands for the separation of Nagaland from Assam and of Haryana from Punjab were witnessed in the 1960s. The people of Telangana region carried on a violent agitation for separation from Andhra Pradesh from 1969 to 1972. There was a mini reorganisation of States in the north-east in 1972. And, the 1980s and the 1990s have witnessed heightened and intensified demands for autonomy. The formation of Autonomous District or Regional Councils in Gorkhaland (West Bengal), Bodoland (Assam),

Jharkhand (Bihar) and Leh (Jammu and Kashmir) under the Fifth or Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, and the creation of four new States – Delhi (elevation from UT to State), Uttarakhand, Vananchal and Chhatisgarh – in April 1998 by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government are other instances of politics of autonomy in India. Obviously, the constitutional engineering and political management of sentiments for autonomy have left some scope for such sentiments to flourish, and be politically exploited.

## The Concern

This article is a modest attempt to understand the growing autonomist sentiment in India, and its intensification in recent years. It does so through a comparative overview of three contemporary movements for autonomy in India: namely the Gorkhaland movement in the Darjeeling District of West Bengal, the Bodoland movement in Assam and the Jharkhand movement in Bihar.[3]

There are several other movements and demands for autonomy,[4] not to speak of some secessionist movements, within the Indian Union. The selection of these three, though purposive, is not because they are the most representative of the autonomist movements, but because of their historicity, intensity and focus on autonomy. Moreover, each one of these has reflected the capacity of the Indian constitutional system to resolve such disputes. However, the constitution is only a legal instrument to resolve the struggle for turf involved in the urge for autonomy; therefore, its effectiveness would depend on the political acceptance of the instruments designed. The failure of the Autonomous Council experiment in each of these cases clearly establishes this point.

Moreover, these three merit a comparative analysis for five reasons. First, they have been the strongest autonomist movements during the past decade and a half. Second, each has been an autonomist – not secessionist – movement from the beginning. Third, each began with a demand for separate statehood, but relented to accept larger autonomy within the parent State. Fourth, dissatisfaction began brewing in each one of them within a year of formation and the accord broke down completely in case of the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC), and the extremist groups have taken to arms. And finally, in each one of them, the party at the helm of the Union Government has played a partisan role, even allegedly playing up and supporting the regional autonomist demands to weaken or neutralise the State government ruled by another party.

## Autonomy in the Indian Constitution

Even before the Constitution of India came into existence 'provincial' autonomy was already a practice. The Congress won it after considerable struggle, so there was no question that it would survive beyond the Government of India Act, 1935. And, it did. The Constituent Assembly recognised the principle of division of power, and adopted it to determine the relation between the Union and the State governments. But the powers were not divided in

the sense that "the general and regional governments are each, within a sphere, co-ordinate and independent."[5] The unitarian bias of Ambedkar, the Chairman of the drafting Committee, and the ambivalence of the Constituent Assembly, did not create a federal Republic of India but a 'Union of States.'[6]

Moreover, in spite of a clear division of powers defined in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, there are several provisions that already tilt the balance in favour of the Union Government. Thus, to quote an expert:[7]

> As one observes the insertion of clear provision for central dominance such as altering and annihilation of states,[8] central appropriation of states' legislative field, virtual unitarianization of the nation during proclamations of emergencies, supersession of state government on grounds of constitutional breakdown and disobedience of central executive directives, putting impediments to state legislation through a presidential referral system, the federal idea seems, at least formally speaking, untenable.

Autonomy of States, however, despite constitutional limitations and often the overbearing attitude of the Centre towards the States, has been a live political issue since the commencement of the Constitution of India. The resulting controversy has found expression in various Commissions (Sarkaria Commission being the latest one), judicial interventions over Centre-State disputes, in the awards of various Finance Commissions, and in extensive debate over the role of Governor and academic discourse over Centre-State relations. This nation-wide discourse has in practice protected State autonomy by questioning any misuse of the constitutional provisions by the ruling party at the Centre.

A discussion on the provisions for autonomy in the Indian Constitution requires a reference to some of the special provisions under Articles 370, 371 (A to I) and 244 (including Fifth and Sixth Schedules) which have been designed to give additional guarantee to some of the States. These provisions represent the sensitivity of the framers of the Indian Constitution as well as their efforts to satisfy the desire for autonomy among regional or ethnic communities.

The temporary provisions under Article 370 makes Jammu and Kashmir the only State in the Indian Union to have its own Constitution. It also limits the law making power of the Indian Parliament for the State to matters that correspond to the Instruments of Accession signed between the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir and the Indian Union. An example of asymmetrical federalism, Article 370 symbolises the flexibility of the Indian political system to deal with special political circumstances and accommodate wide-ranging political streams.

The clauses in Article 371 family also reflect the concern of the Indian Constitution makers that the diversity of the Indian society necessitates special treatment to certain regions and communities. They contain special but wide ranging provisions with regard to the States

of Maharashtra and Gujarat (371), Nagaland (371A), Assam (371B), Manipur (371C), Andhra Pradesh (371D and E), Sikkim (371F), Mizoram (371G), Arunachal Pradesh (371H) and Goa (371I). The thrusts of the provisions are two-fold. First, they entitle certain areas in the States covered by the Article to deserve special attention of the State government for developmental purposes. Article 371, for examples, instructs the governments of Maharashtra and Gujarat to establish separate development boards for Vidarbha and Marathwada and Saurashtra and Kutch respectively, insisting on "the equitable allocation of funds for developmental expenditure over the said areas...." And second, there is emphasis on protecting identity and ensuring political autonomy. Article 371A makes it obligatory for an Act of Parliament in respect of religion and social practices of the Nagas, Naga customary law and procedures, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law and ownership and transfer of land and its resources to be approved by the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland. These provisions also seek to protect identity and autonomy of different communities within the state.

The special provisions enshrined in the Fifth and Sixth Schedules which draw their statutory standing from the Article 244(1) and (2), are another admission by the Constitution of India of the variety existing in the country in general and in the north-eastern region in particular. The Fifth Schedule deals with administration of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes and empowers the President of India to notify or de-notify an area in a State as a Scheduled Area[9] and create a Tribes Advisory Council in such an area. Recognising the variety existing in the States of the North Eastern region, the Sixth Schedule proposes the creation of autonomous district councils in certain specified districts.[10] And, almost in an act of admission that even this may not satisfy the sentiments for autonomy of the tribal groups of the region, the provision goes beyond districts and authorises the Governor to break districts into regions to create autonomous regional councils.

These are very interesting provisions, which have assumed importance in recent years due to increasing demands for autonomy in various States. Though district and regional councils had been created only for the north-eastern region under the Sixth Schedule, the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in Darjeeling District of West Bengal has been among the first such autonomous councils to be designed in accordance with the provisions of the Fifth Schedule. The solution to the Jharkhand tangle in Bihar was also sought within the framework of this Schedule. The Jharkhand Area Autonomous Council (JAAC) created in 1995 by the Government of Bihar was modelled on the design provided by the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution. Similarly, the Autonomous District Council in Leh in the Ladakh province of Jammu and Kashmir was also designed in 1996 keeping in view the Fifth Schedule. The increasing use and growing importance of the provisions of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules demonstrate, on the one hand, the flexibility in and the capacity of the Constitution of India to attend to and absorb the demands of autonomy. It, on the other hand, also shows the lack of active instrumentalities within the Indian political system to satisfy autonomist urges in a multi-cultural society without resorting to special provisions of the Constitution.

This necessitates a discussion of the sub-State autonomy, which has been the weakest part of the Indian Constitutional system. The autonomy at the sub-State level was not defined in the Constitution of India. The question of devolution of powers to the sub-State level was put in the non-justiciable Directive Principles of State Policy. The brief reference to self-government in Part IV, Article 40 of the Constitution of India reads "The State shall take steps to organise village *panchayats* and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government." Therefore, when the third stratum of the Indian polity was eventually designed[11] nearly a decade after the Constitution was enacted, it failed to take off. This arrangement suffered from two major weaknesses. First, it was visualised not as a unit of local autonomy, empowering local communities, but as a part of the institutional structure to encourage local participation in 'Community Development' projects launched in the 1950s. It was therefore, to be the lowest stratum in the States' 'delivery network,' supposedly free from politics.[12] Second, without a statutory protection, it became a victim of suspicion and consequent political machinations of the State-level leadership. Thus, except in a few States, *panchayati raj* failed to take off, creating a political vacuum at the local level. This left both the people and the political leadership without an institution with a fair degree of autonomy and adequate freedom to decide on matters of local interest.

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, passed in 1993, seek to rectify this weakness. These two Amendments have been inserted in Part IX and Article 243 of the Constitution and contain provisions regarding local self-government institutions in rural and urban areas. Most of the States have reacted favourably to the amendments and have agreed to bring changes in their local self-government Acts. Whether these would eventually satisfy the urge for autonomy is still being debated. The indications, however, are not very positive. Five years down the road it is clear that most States have ignored the spirit of the amendments in both enacting the legislations based on them as well as in operating the new *panchayati raj*.[13]

## The Three Demands for Regional Autonomy

The eighties witnessed the intensification of three demands for regional autonomy within the Union of India – in Darjeeling District of West Bengal, in the Bodo (a plains tribe) dominated areas along the northern bank of the Brahmaputra river in Assam, and in the Chotanagpur-Santhal Pargana region in South Bihar. Autonomous Councils were created to resolve each one of these – the DGHC was formed in 1988 following a tripartite accord between the Government of India, the Government of West Bengal and the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) which led a violent movement for a Gorkhaland State; the BAC was created in February 1993 following an agreement between the Assam Government and the Bodo leaders; and the JAAC was created on 6 August 1995 comprising sixteen districts of Bihar, following an agreement between the Government of Bihar and the tribal leaders of South Bihar, following years of agitation.

The Gorkhaland[14] and Jharkhand[15] movements have had a long history of over half a century. Their origin is associated with a variety of factors, some common to both and some distinct to each. The urge to preserve ethnic identity and home-rule as a guarantee to that is common. The political and administrative considerations during colonial rule contributed significantly to the rise of both demands. Even the rise of the Bodoland demand could be traced historically to the colonial policies since the British annexed the Assam valley in 1826. In other words, the way the British Indian administration annexed territories to expand their colonial boundaries, and the way they merged regions to create districts and provinces to suit their administrative convenience, led to resentment among cultural and ethnic groups.[16] The consequent resentment against economic exploitation is very strong and historically accumulated in the Jharkhand region.[17]

The Bodoland movement, apparently a recent phenomenon, can be seen as an extension of the struggles that the plains tribals waged in Assam against British colonialism.[18] The All Assam Tribal League formed in 1933 won a separate electorate for the plains tribals under the Government of India Act 1935. On the eve of independence, in March 1947, the Assam Tribal League submitted a memorandum asking for scheduled territories under the Constitution. Thus, when the Plains Tribal Council of Assam voiced the demand for a Union Territory for the plains tribal people in 1967, it was simply building its case on a long tradition of struggle. The eventual creation of the BAC on 20 February 1993 was a culmination of this long struggle. The principal political objective of the agitation as spelt out in several memoranda submitted during January, 1987 to the Chief Minister and the Governor of Assam, the Prime Minister of India and the President of India, was the 'Creation of a Separate State with the status of Union Territory for the Plains Tribals of Assam,' the 'extension of the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution to the tribal compact areas of the northern bank of Brahmaputra' and the 'creation of a Regional Council for "Bodo, Rengma and other non-Karbi tribes" in the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council.'[19]

The accord signed between the Assam government and the Bodo leaders on 20 February 1993 and the BAC created by an Act of the Assam legislature[20] have not attended to the latter part of the demand. It has led to resentment among various ethnic groups in the state.[21]

## The Anatomy of Autonomy Demands

As stated at the very outset autonomy is inherent in democracy. If demands for autonomy still arise in a democratic republic, the adequacy of autonomy – which may forever remain debatable – comes into the question first. The provisions of the Constitution of India examined earlier, clearly indicate that even though the framers of the Indian Constitution were conscious of the diversity of the country and while creating a strong Centre to dispel centrifugal tendencies left room for future constitutional engineering to attend to any demands for autonomy arising out of diversity, they could not anticipate that sentiments for autonomy may still arise in future. The weaknesses both at the State and sub-State levels leave room for political manipulation of such sentiments. And indeed not only have such

sentiments been manipulated, the constitutional provisions have been bypassed too. Moreover, given the multi-ethnic character of the Indian society, the demands for autonomy may emerge even at the slightest disaffection or dissatisfaction. It is, therefore, not surprising that these three and several other ethnic and regional groups[22] have raised demands for greater autonomy.

In some cases, for example in Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Assam and the other north-eastern states, the inadequacy of constitutional guarantees for autonomy and the threat to an ethnic group's right to autonomy has become a *raison d'être* for secessionist demands and insurgency. These need to be mentioned here because they are part of the larger perspective of this discussion. These cases in point indicate the extent to which a demand for autonomy can go if not attended with caution in good time. However, we shall confine ourselves here to the three demands that did not become secessionist and are being accommodated as sub-state autonomy within the constitutional framework.

The weakness or the lack of a constitutional guarantee, however, only provides the backdrop or rationale for the agitations for autonomy. The question as to who does not have and who should have autonomy is invariably being answered in ethnic (or at times in regional) terms. It is not surprising, therefore, that Subash Ghising, the GNLF chief and the chairman of the DGHC, focused on the threat to Gorkha identity. Even earlier movements for greater autonomy in the Darjeeling hills emphasised identity. The preservation of Nepali language, therefore, was one of the main foci of the movement. Even the GNLF movement began with a demand to include Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule.[23]

Similarly in case of the Jharkhand movement, the identity of the tribals inhabiting the region is one of the main foci. The leaders of the movement point out how due to the division of the region in four States – Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh – the language and dialects of the tribals have been threatened. As part of these States, they learn Hindi, Oriya or Bengali.[24] Therefore, there is an effort among the leaders of the movement to revive their languages and dialects. On the other hand, the lack of a recognised language and multiplicity of underdeveloped dialects is one of arguments given by the detractors of the Jharkhand movement.

The Bodoland movement too was launched as a demand "for self-determination from a group of racially and culturally distinct people who no longer recognise the government of the state as representing their interest." And, it caught the imagination of over one million Bodo people who claim to be the original inhabitants of the Assam valley. The perceived threat of 'assimilation' from the caste Hindu Assamese people, or "the hopelessness of achieving political parity with the more numerous Assamese people," gave the impetus to the initial assertion of Bodo identity in cultural terms.[25] In 1973 the Bodos had launched a movement for use of the Roman script in place of the Assamese script for their language. While the assertion of a distinct, identity in cultural terms has been one of the features of the Bodo movement, the economic exploitation of the Bodos is also an established fact.[26]

While ethnic appeal is a powerful instrument of mobilisation, it is not sufficient in itself to mobilise the masses. Grievances, whether real or perceived, are necessary to convince the people that they were being discriminated against. And, economic grievances of under-development, or discrimination by the Centre emerges as a potent argument. It is not surprising that Akali Dal in Punjab, one of the most prosperous States in India, could mobilise support for a greater autonomy demand on discrimination plank.

The autonomy (separate Statehood/Union Territory status/autonomous region) demand in these three cases has also been built up on economic grievances. But economic grievances in each case has not come first, neither has it been the main grievance. In case of the GNLF movement in Darjeeling, for example, it was neither the main demand, nor did it trigger off the movement. The loss of identity, as pointed out earlier, was the main appeal to the ethnic group. Discrimination against the Gorkhas in job opportunities by the Bengali ruling class, and consequent backwardness of the community was raised as a point. Surprisingly, even though the economic backwardness of the region, despite the tea gardens and tourism, is real, it was not highlighted. But decline in the employment potential of the tea industry and uneven implementation of the Centre sponsored Integrated Rural Development Programme have been pointed out by scholars in the region.[27]

In case of the tribals of the Jharkhand region, the economic exploitation of both the region and people has been phenomenal. Chotanagpur region of Bihar is known as the Ruhr of India, supplying the bulk of the country's minerals. Yet, the region and its people have remained backward. Government (both State and Central) compiled socio-economic indicators, are at times deceptive,[28] for this mineral-rich region has several well-developed industrial townships, with high per capita income. These indicators certainly do not present a true picture of its tribal inhabitants, who have been exploited for ages. Even today, bulk of the tribals are engaged only in menial jobs.

Therefore, the Jharkhand movement has rightly based its demand for autonomy on economic grievances like exploitation, unemployment, backwardness and underdevelopment (of people and the region). To begin with, it was essentially a tribal movement protesting against exploitation by the *Dikus* (outsiders), demanding from the British a separate province, from the States Reorganisation Commission in independent India a separate state and struggling for a better share in its mineral resources from the governments of Bihar and India. But their claims have time and again been ignored and turned down because the tribals constitute only 30% of the total population of the region. Therefore, the Jharkhand leadership has tried to make the movement more broad-based by turning it into a regional demand.[29]

The Bodoland movement too has been based on a crucial economic grievance. It is about land, "stolen from the original inhabitants of the land by every migrant into the area – both the earliest of them and the hardier new migrants threatening to do unto them what they themselves did to the Bodos and other tribal people."[30] There has been illegal usurpation of their land. The non-availability of alternative economic activities outside the primary sector had forced them into acute indebtedness.[31]

But as we have seen in the case of the Gorkhaland demand, even though the economic grievances are not unreal, they have not helped in shaping the movement. It has been pure and simple ethnic appeal. In case of the Jharkhand movement, a strong economic appeal along with the ethnic one has not helped the leaders reach their desired goal. And Bodoland, emphasising on ethnic aspect, hoped to achieve economic gains. But the BAC does not seem to have helped them meet their economic grievance.

What, then, is the basis of these ethno-regional demands for autonomy, and how do they succeed or not succeed? As this discussion clearly reveals, the desire for a share in political power as the enabling factor to shape the future of the community is the rationale behind the urge for autonomy. Clearly, the outcome of political movements for autonomy like the Gorkhaland and Bodoland is determined by its popular base. The articulation of grievances and the demand for autonomy, however, seldom have grassroots origin.

Paul Brass has identified "elite competition as the basic dynamic which precipitates ethnic conflict under specific conditions, which arise from the broader values of the ethnic groups in question." Moreover, since "modernisation and industrialisation in large, multi-ethnic societies tend to proceed unevenly and often, if not always, benefit some ethnic groups or some regions of a country more than the others,"[32] the ethnic, regional and even national elites get a chance to politically exploit the ethnicity-conscious dissatisfactions.

This exactly seems to have happened in each of the three cases being discussed here. 'Elite competition' is clearly visible in these three, and various other demands for autonomy in the country. The movement for autonomy for the Gorkhas of the Darjeeling Hills, as pointed out earlier, has been going on since the days of the British. But its precipitation in 1980, building up of a phenomenon called Subash Ghising and the violent GNLF movement that followed it, was due to competition between the national elites led by the Congress and Rajiv Gandhi, and the State elites led by the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) and Jyoti Basu. In the ensuing struggle the State Congress(I) is clearly seen ambivalently trying to balance its national image with State/Regional image. The Hill Council was eventually conceded to Darjeeling in 1988 neither due to its economic backwardness, nor because of the violent GNLF movement, but because of the emerging equation among the Centre, the State government and the GNLF.[33]

Similarly, it was more than a coincidence that the Bodoland movement started and peaked during the Assam Gona Parishad (AGP) rule in the State. For a considerable time the Bodo leaders refused to climb down from their original demand, despite the appointment by the Centre of an expert committee under the chairmanship of Bhupendra Singh on 25 February 1991 to determine the areas inhabited by the Bodos. Its recommendation submitted in March 1992 considered the nature and extent of autonomy and legislative, administrative and financial powers that could be given to the BAC. But its recommendations could not break the deadlock and were summarily rejected by the Bodo leadership. Yet, a year later the same leadership accepted an accord that did not solve the socio-economic question raised by

the movement.[34]    Obviously, political considerations outweighed socio-economic issues. Significantly the Bodo legislators in Assam Legislative Assembly and Bodo leaders in the proposed Council agreed to co-ordinate with the Congress (I).   The Bodo Accord and the BAC collapsed within one year.

The analysis of events indicate that each of the parties was looking around for some political gains.  Hiteswar Saikia, the then Chief Minister of Assam was sceptical of the initiative of the then Union Minister of State for Internal Security, Rajesh Pilot, to bring about an accord to resolve the Bodo problem. Though he maintained that the Bodoland accord would lead to widespread violence because the proposed BAC area (nearly 2,300 sq. km, covering seven districts of the State) included localities with only 2% Bodo population.  Predictably, the Bodo leadership soon demanded 515 villages in the BAC to maintain contiguity.[35]  Moreover, there were sharp differences also between Rajesh Pilot and S B Chavan, the then Union Minister of Home Affairs, who had cautioned about the serious consequences due to reduction of the non-Bodo communities, such as Hindus, Muslim Bengalis and tribal Santhals, to the status of second class citizens.   The advice was ignored.   Two developments, each in opposite direction, followed.   First, the Bodoland Security Force (BdSF), an extremist outfit of the Bodos, soon began a pogrom of ethnic cleansing.  Second, since the main socio-economic issues were not addressed adequately, many of the Bodo leaders were disenchanted far too soon.  It further reinforced the militants.  Consequently, the carnage involving the Bodos and the Santhals, who too have formed militant organisations reportedly to defend themselves.[36]

On the other hand, if despite centuries of exploitation and a tradition of political revolt that goes well beyond a century and a half,[37] the Jharkhand movement did not succeed in getting statehood for the region till the BJP decided to create the Vananchal State, it was for two reasons.[38]  First, conceding the Jharkhand demand has not been politically expedient to the national leadership. And second, the divided and opportunistic Jharkhand leadership has been unable to force an equation with the national leadership. The State leadership too has looked at the question either with political expediency – aligning with Jharkhand leaders when it suited them and distancing from them when it did not – or with ambivalence.  The Janata Party government in Bihar in 1990, for example, came to power with the support of the Jharkhand Party, promising to support its cause.  Yet, it became the biggest stumbling block in the creation of a Jharkhand Autonomous Council.   It is equally important to note that precipitation of the Jharkhand movement in September 1992 by a provocative statement of the Union Home Minister was due to a competition between the national and the State level elites.   No less bizarre was the Jharkhand Party Members of Parliament (MP) offering to support the P V Narasimha Rao Government against the no-confidence motion tabled by the opposition parties in July 1993 as a bargain for autonomy to Jharkhand.[39]  The agreement on 27 September 1994 between the then Union Minister of State for Home, Rajesh Pilot, and the then Bihar Chief Minister, Laloo Yadav, for the formation of a Jharkhand Regional Council, which left the side-tracked Jharkhand leaders bewildered, too confirms that the popular urge for autonomy has become a tool for elites' power play and the resolution of the demand is invariably a result of emerging political equation between various layers of elites.[40]

The events leading to the 'dissipation' of the movement for Jharkhand State – the creation of the JAAC in 1995 as well as the decision of the BJP-led government to create Vananchal, a State comprising eighteen districts of the Chotanagpur-Santhal Pargana plateau in south Bihar – deserve a careful analysis. The JAAC experiment, like the DGHC and the BAC, did not succeed and eroded the credibility of the tribal leadership. The final blow to its credibility, however, came after the JMM bribery case.[41]

Initially a reluctant BJP moved to fill in the political void. However, in keeping with its philosophy of Hindutva placing a premium on Sanskritised Hindi as the language of 'national integration,' it chose the nomenclature Vananchal (literally 'the forest region') for the new State. Though a Sanskritised equivalent of the tribal name Jharkhand, it goes against the spirit under which the Jharkhand State has been demanded since the beginning of this century, if not earlier. Jharkhand (literally, the part of land with *jhar*, or bush, or forest) signifies local sentiments of the myriad exploited tribes – Munda, Santhal, Oraon, etc. – inhabiting the region for a social, political and economic space autonomous of the *dikus* (the outsiders, or non-tribal traders) exploiting the human and economic resource of the region. The BJP's Sanskritised nomenclature Vananchal, on the other hand, may have the same meaning, but it lacks the spirit to accommodate the tribal sentiments for autonomy and hijacks the movement as it were. For, its concern is to accommodate 70% *dikus*, either original inhabitants or migrants, without whom the 30% tribals cannot form their 'own State.' Ironically, the tribal Jharkhand leadership too had realised this fact and had expanded the scope of their demand to a regional one from an ethnic one.[42] But it was too late as its own internal contradictions caught up with it.

The epitaph of the tribal movement was clearly written when the BJP bagged eleven of the fourteen Lok Sabha seats from the region in the 1998 general elections. The creation of Vananchal, along with Uttaranchal and Chhatisgarh, was an electoral plank of the BJP, which the party has honoured. In creating Vananchal only from the tribal regions of Bihar, however, the BJP has attempted to kill two birds with one stone. On the one hand, it has created a State from a mineral-rich region, where presently the going is good for the party; and on the other, it has carefully avoided giving an expanded territory to the protagonists of the Jharkhand. As Babulal Marandi, a tribal MP elected on the BJP ticket and appointed Union Minister of State for Forests and Environment, said, "The idea of a Vananchal state emerged because party leaders doubt the feasibility of the Jharkhand concept. Orissa, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh are not ready to cede any area."[43] The creation of the Chhatisgarh State, where statehood demand was very feeble, too is part of the same deft political move. The Jharkhandis will now never have a foothold in that region, as with statehood new political interests would develop. Moreover, the BJP for now will have another State in its kitty. The socio-economic development of the region and social development of the tribals of 'Vananchal' would nevertheless remain a live issue. Unless the BJP and other political formations are live to the demands and needs of the 30% tribals, who are unlikely to have a fair share in the power structure under the new dispensation to get rid of their exploitation by the *dikus*, the creation of Vananchal would not address the fundamental issues raised by

the Jharkhand movement since Birsa Munda's *ulugulan* (revolution in Mundari dialect) against the British at the end of the last century.[44]

## Autonomy and Nation's Integrity

The attitude of the national leadership of all political hues and shades to the question of autonomy has historically been ambivalent. This came out clearly during the framing of the Constitution as well as in subsequent years. The violent agitations that led to the bifurcation of the erstwhile State of Bombay into Gujarat and Maharashtra and the separation of Haryana from Punjab under a highly charged atmosphere, even though the linguistic identity as the basis of delineating politico-administrative region was formulated and adopted in the organisational structure by the Indian National Congress as early as 1922, are cases in point. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that every linguistic, ethnic or regional group should necessarily be given a State. In fact, it is not possible in India, for it may be detrimental to the interests of the regions that may not be economically feasible. However, it would be equally wrong to conclude that genuine autonomy or self-government at local level would threaten integrity of the nation.

All the political parties and leaders have indeed been reacting to the escalation of these demands either with a siege mentality, or with political expediency. That is, either they look at the demands and movements for autonomy as a challenge to their power, and consequently brand them anti-national, coming down heavily on them with the full might of the state power; or they view movements in terms of the political opportunities they offer them. This opportunity could either be of embarrassing, weakening or dethroning a political party in a State, as for example, in Assam, the GNLF movement in Darjeeling, the precipitation of the Jharkhand movement in September 1992, or the efforts of the BJP and other leaders and parties to raise the demand for an Uttarakhand State consisting of the hill districts of UP, etc.; or it could be in terms of political deals for survival (e.g., the creation of the JAAC by the Bihar Chief Minister Laloo Yadav in 1995) or prospects of political power and influence in the new political set-up, as in the case of elevation of Delhi as a State and the creation of Uttaranchal, Chhatisgarh and Vananchal by the BJP-led government soon after coming to power in 1998.

The ambivalence and siege mentality of the political leadership to the question of ethno-regional demands for autonomy is reflected in frequent pronouncements regarding the need for smaller and more governable States, while political considerations seem to petrify them from adopting a holistic approach to this question. Thus, the usual pattern has been to term an ethnic or regional demand for autonomy as a threat to the unity and integrity of the nation till it goes out of hand and the conceding the demand is the only option, or till it is politically expedient, or till a deal is struck with the leadership of the movement. Thus, the Gorkhaland movement was anti-national till the Congress leadership realised its potential to embarrass Jyoti Basu and the CPM government in West Bengal. The pertinent question is whether such demands for greater autonomy should be regarded a threat to Indian unity. Is division and distribution of power at appropriate levels divisive and disintegrating?[45]

A suspicious approach to division of power, which of course was a result of historical events preceding and following decolonisation of the sub-continent, has created an over-centralised fortress of governance at the Centre. It has weakened State autonomy and throttled local self-government. It is not surprising, therefore, that ethnic groups, regional communities and their elites are increasingly becoming restless at the absence of political power and a share in governance. In other words, it is over-centralisation rather than a rational division of power that has been posing a threat to the integrity of India.

This does not, however, mean that a political issue as serious as autonomy should be given an *ad hoc* treatment. The question whether a demand for autonomy be attended case by case, based on the intensity or popularity of the demand; or with such demands increasing, the issue of autonomy, or entitlement of powers to different levels be reviewed by a States Reorganisation Commission from the overall context of governance of India, needs to be debated seriously. The basic question is whether a holistic approach to self-governance and autonomy to units is more detrimental to national integrity, or dealing with the question in a piecemeal manner by creating States, or autonomous councils under the Fifth or Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

Even implementation of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments by States, which give statutory guarantee to the autonomy (rural and urban respectively) of the sub-State level, reflects the Ambedkarian suspicion to the right of self-governance of the local communities across the country. The implications of the above amendments, which in retrospect seem more a result of political expediency than of a sincere belief in autonomy or decentralisation, is gradually unfolding. The manner in which the States have enacted *panchayati raj* and Municipal Acts based on these amendments, clearly brings out an anti-autonomy bias of the State leadership across the country with a few notable exceptions.[46] Substantive limitations of the Sixth Schedule at the operative level have already surfaced in recent years. The differences between the West Bengal government and the DGHC leadership over finances and holding *panchayat* elections could have blown into crisis but for the statesmanship of Jyoti Basu, the West Bengal Chief Minister. The collapse of the BAC brings out political limitations of these provisions so clearly articulated by B K Roy Burman.[47] Despite the charges of political expediency and exceptional hurry in the conclusion of the Bodo agreement, similar strategies have been followed in cases of JAAC and the creation of three States by the BJP. It is not surprising that the question of boundary has already become a disputed issue in case of the proposed hill State of Uttaranchal. Not only has the Punjab Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal demanded a referendum in the Sikh dominated district, the district and the holy town of Hardwar are refusing to be part of Uttaranchal.[48] These limitations further reinforce the need for a comprehensive look at the question of autonomy.[49]

## Autonomy and Development

The political discourse on autonomy raging in India has stressed upon identity and development. The loss of identity of an ethnic group and underdevelopment of a region (or impoverishment of the ethnic group) are the two potent appeals being used for mobilisation by the leaders spearheading the autonomy movements. The fact that both the appeals have been immensely successful, shows that economic grievances are not entirely perceived. The discussion on the three cases in this article brings out that in each case the resentment against neglect and underdevelopment is real.

The building of a violent mass movement for autonomy in each case based on the appeals of identity and exploitation reflects a belief, or at least a hope, that self-governance to the ethnic group or a regional community could lead to development. How far is this belief or hope true?

The discourse on democracy and development in social science literature is not conclusive on this issue. Rueschemeyer has shown that quantitative cross-national studies establish a positive correlation between development and democracy, whereas qualitative historical studies show a weak correlation between the two.[50] Douglas Lummis holds the view that development undermines democratic ideals.[51] There are others like Amartya Sen who would argue that the record of democracy in ensuring economic development in developing countries is mixed, even negative.[52] Another set of opinion, based on the experience of some of the developing countries, would insist that the institutionalisation of democracy should follow economic development in natural course. Arguing that "the moral appeal of democracy is now almost universally appreciated, but its economic advantages are scarcely understood," Mancur Olson has attempted to establish that democracy provides the best socio-political environment for economic development.[53] These represent only some of the views across the spectrum of democracy-development debate, which remains inconclusive.

The evidence presented by the three case studies in this paper also does not help to resolve this debate in any way. The DGHC is the only autonomous Council which has functioned for some years. And, all these years it has been embroiled in political controversy. The government of West Bengal and the DGHC have quibbled over finances and the holding of *panchayat* elections in the DGHC area, for the DGHC leadership argued that the *panchayats* would be an erosion of its jurisdiction. The BAC has collapsed and the JAAC remained ineffective as due to political uncertainties at the national and State levels the nominated Council continued and elections were not held for it. Therefore, it is not possible to make a definite statement on whether autonomy, or democratisation of local communities, has led to economic development.

In fact, these cases present two contradictory arguments. First, the point – most of the demands for ethno-regional autonomy have their origin in perceived threat to ethnic identity and impoverishment of a community owing to regional imbalances. Regional imbalance

as one of the indicators of uneven economic development clearly makes a case against democracy. There is enough data to show that despite Five Year plans various States have not succeeded in ensuring a balanced growth of all regions within the State. Economic development in several cases has been reduced to populist rhetoric.

There is, however, the counterpoint. Regional imbalances could be attributed in great measure to the lack of the third stratum of democracy in India. In fact, the main argument of this paper is that a weak or non-existent democracy at the sub-state level has often denied the fruits of development to local communities. Democracy, aside from having the advantage of a participatory public and representative institutions, also has the disadvantage of a bargaining model. Political power, unless institutionally ensured, is not evenly distributed. The layered institutional structure ensures against uneven distribution of power and of economic resources. The burgeoning autonomy movements in India are a reflection of this shortcoming.

## Conclusion

The urge of ethnic and regional communities for greater autonomy is a fact of contemporary Indian politics. It has arisen due to constitutional inadequacies as well as ambivalence and political expediency of the political leadership over a period of time. But it cannot be adequately attended to in a piecemeal manner with the help of *ad hoc* constitutional amendments and special constitutional provisions. The whole gamut of power arrangement within the Union of India is required to be reviewed, but not from the angle of decentralisation, rather as entitlement of autonomy to each level. The fear of autonomy, or of specific demands for it, may be entirely misplaced. For, over-centralisation has fuelled, rather than mollified, demands and urge for autonomy.

There are some other contemporary developments that support the cause for autonomy. The centralised Indian state has been facing difficulties in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir. If a semblance of normalcy has returned to Punjab, the restoration of a popular government after a prolonged period of President's rule following the terrorist violence has played some role there. And, with the State government arrogating too much of powers to it to combat terrorism, fears have been expressed that the situation may take a turn for the worse again. A similar exercise helped in Jammu and Kashmir too. In large areas of Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, the writ of the State government does not run. These areas are ruled either by such ultra-left groups as the Indian People's Front and the People's War Group or by gangs of outlaws. The question is, would a carefully designed autonomy structure be worse than this.

Finally, some decentralisation has now involuntarily taken place. Economic compulsion has forced the government to let the market decide a whole range of things. This off-loading has put a question mark against the relevance and rationale of planning. This deserves a mention here because planning has been one of the centralising factors in India.

With its relevance waning, should greater autonomy to lower levels not be considered as an alternative? Of course, this would necessitate a debate on developmental potential of autonomy.

## Notes

1. Opinions may differ on whether political culture in most developing countries conforms to classical theories of democracy. The interplay of such primordial factors as religion, ethnicity, caste, language, tribe, etc. has given a distinct character to institutions and processes of democracy in these countries. I speak of indigenous democratic culture because it has been shaped by the interaction of the transplanted ideology and institutions with the local social milieu. The emerging political ecology, though distinctive, would not perhaps have shaped the way it did, but for democracy. Moreover, with race and ethnicity making an entry on the political stage of the developed countries too, the classical notion of democracy is under strain the world over.

2. The Indian National Congress had recognised early this century that the linguistic regions represent appropriate boundaries of governance. In fact, several of the Congress circles were organised on this basis. As Sitaramayya, the official historian of the Congress, records, "Another factor that largely contributed to the great success of the (Home Rule) movement was that from its very inception it recognised the integrity of language areas, and in organising the country, adopted the linguistic principle as determining the provincial delimitation. In this respect it was ahead of the Congress," Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *History of the Indian National Congress*, S Chand (ed.), 1969, Vol. I, p 130.

   Also see, Ashis Banerjee, "Federalism and Nationalism: An Attempt at Historical Interpretation" in Nirmal Mukarji and Balveer Arora (eds), *Federalism in India: Origins and Development*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1992, pp 41-63.

3. The Jharkhand movement, as we shall see later in the paper, encompasses three more States of the Indian Union, besides Bihar - West Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. But the largest chunk of the territory claimed by the exponents of the Jharkhand State falls in Bihar and the movement historically as well as currently has been strongest in Bihar. In fact, the Bihar Government led by Laloo Yadav conceded the creation of the Jharkhand Area Autonomous Council, consisting of eighteen districts of south Bihar, with its headquarters in Ranchi in 1995. The BJP-led Atal Behari Vajpayee government decided to carve out a tribal State Vananchal from Bihar in April 1998, comprising the area of the Jharkhand region, ignoring the claims of the leaders of the movement for a share of tribal districts from West Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh, which loses its tribal districts to a new Chhatisgarh State. Naturally, the focus of the paper would be on Bihar.

4. In several areas demands have been made, or are repeatedly being made, by political parties and leaders, but they have not crystallised into movements.

5. K C Wheare, *Federal Government*, London, Oxford University Press, 1945 (The book has successive editions).

6. The debate in the Constituent Assembly presents a telling account of how the mood of the national as well as provincial leaders changed in favour of a strong Central government. K M Munshi reminded the Assembly, "...one supreme fact in Indian history that the glorious days of India were only the days... when there was a strong central authority in the country, and the most tragic days were when the central authority in the country was dismembered by the provinces trying to resist it," CAD, Vol. VIII, 1949, p 927. See, CAD Vol. IX, 1949, for the discussion under reference here.

7. Mohit Bhattarcharya, "The Mind of the Founding Fathers" in Nirmal Mukarji and Balveer Arora (eds), *op.cit.*, p 89.

8. The reference here is to Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution of India. It is, however, important to point out that so far the Centre has not used the provisions of these two Articles entirely on its own.

9. To be declared so by the President of India.

10. Read with Articles 244(2) and 275(1) of the Constitution.

11. A Study Team under the chairmanship of Balwantrai Mehta was appointed by the Planning Commission of India to recommend a design of sub-State level local self-government. It designed the system popularly known as *panchayati raj*. The Mehta Team offered two broad directional thrusts: First, it argued that there should be administrative decentralisation for the effective implementation of the development programme and that the decentralised administrative system should be under the control of elected bodies. Obviously, the Committee recommended administrative decentralisation for rural development with elected bodies at the fringe. See India, Planning Commission, *Report of the Team for the Study of Community Projects and National Extension Service*, New Delhi, 1957.

12. Elections for the PR institutions were planned to be non-party elections, as partisan politics at the grass-roots level was seen to be detrimental to economic development.

13. For an assessment of these Constitutional Amendments see Nirmal Mukarji, "The Third Stratum," *The Statesman*, New Delhi, May 10, 11 & 12, 1993. An analysis of enactments by the States in consonance with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment points out that the "state Acts go against the spirit of not just the amendment but of the Constitution which sees the panchayats as institutions of self-government," Mahi Pal, 'Violating the Spirit of Panchayati Raj," *The Times of India*, August 8, 1994, p 8.

14. For a detailed history of the Gorkhaland movement see, Tanka B Subba, *Ethnicity, State and Development: A Study of Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling*, New Delhi, Har Anand Publications, 1992.

15. For a history and a brilliant analysis of the *raison d'être* of the Jharkhand movement see, Susana B C Devalle, *Discourses of Ethnicity: Culture and Protest in Jharkhand*, New Delhi, Sage, 1992.

16. Subba, *op.cit.*, pp 32-34; Devalle, *ibid.*, pp 70-75; Ram Dayal Munda, "Dispossession and Exploitations of Tribal People Through Communication Manipulation: With special Reference to Tribal People," unpublished paper, Ranchi, Ranchi University, (undated); and Madan C Paul, "Udayachal Movement, Plains Tribals and Social Structure in Assam," New Delhi, *Social Change*, 21(2), June 1991, pp 59-66.

17. See Devalle, *ibid.*, Munda, *ibid.* and *Memorandum for the Formation of Jharkhand State* Ranchi, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha Central Committee, undated.

18. H K Barpujari (ed.), *Political History of Assam (1826-1919)*, Vol.I, Government of Assam, 1977, pp 94-95.

19. Karbi-Anglong District Council is an existing autonomous Council under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India in Assam. M S Prabhakara, "A Tortuous Course: Anatomy of an Agitation," *Frontline*, Madras, 26 March 1993, pp 42-43. Also see, *The Assam Tribune*, 21 February 1993 and *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, 7 March 1993.

20. See, *Memorandum of Settlement (Bodo Accord)*, Government of Assam, 1994 and, Government of Assam, *The Assam Gazette Extraordinary*, Dispur, 15 May 1993.

21. Soon after the Bodoland accord was signed the Misings, Karbis and other tribals in the State raised demands for autonomy. Not only in Assam, dormant demands in other States such as UP (Uttarakhand), MP (Chhatisgarh), Vidarbha (Maharashtra), Jammu and Ladakh (Jammu and

Kashmir) also found vocal support. The Uttarakhand movement has since blown into a major movement for a separate State. See, "Another Stir Threat in Assam," *The Times of India*, New Delhi, 12 April 1993; Debashish Munshi, "Bodo Accord Sparks Other Tribals Demands," *The Times of India*, New Delhi, 23 April 1993; M S Prabhakara, *op.cit*, "Uttaranchal Demand Day on Friday," *The Times of India*, New Delhi, 27 April 1993 and "Mulayam Wakes up to Uttarakhand Cause," *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, 30 April 1993 and Ajay K Mehra, "Peeling the Autonomy Onion," *Mainstream*, 26 June 1993.

22.  North-east has become a virtual ethnic tinderbox. Aside from Assam, the Naga-Kuki (north-eastern tribe) confrontation in Manipur has disturbed the peace of the region. See, Nandita Sardana, "Manipur: The Hidden War," *India Today*, 30 June 1993, pp 64-71 and T Tarun, "NSCN's Search for Legitimacy," *The Observer of Business and Politics*, New Delhi, 6 July 1993, p 9.

23.  Subba, *op.cit*

24.  See, *The Report of the Committee on Jharkhand Matters*.

25.  Hiren Gohain, "Bodo Stir in Perspective," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24 June 1989, p 1377.

26.  Wasbir Hussain, "Burden of a Victory," *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, 7 March 1993 and M S Prabhakara, *op.cit*, p 41.

27.  Paul, *op.cit*, and Gohain, *op.cit*

28.  Milindo Chakrabarti, "Gorkhaland Agitation in the light of IRDP Implementation Policies," Lecture delivered at the Centre for Himalayan Studies on 16 July 1988, North Bengal University, and Manas Dasgupta, "The Gorkhaland Agitation in Darjeeling: Some Political and Economic Dimensions," Special Lecture No. IX at the Centre for Himalayan Studies, North Bengal University, 1988, both quoted by Subba, *op.cit*

29.  Census of India, 1981, figures for *Household Literacy, Drinking Water, Electricity and Toilet Facilities* do indicate that these areas are backward, but in relative terms they do not seem the most backward areas. New Delhi, India Demography Division, Office of the Registrar General, Ministry of Home Affairs, 1989.

30.  Devalle, *op.cit*, Munda, *op.cit*

31.  M S Prabhakara, *op.cit*, p 41.

32.  Paul R Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, New Delhi, Sage Publications, pp 13 and 25.

33.  For an exposition of the attitude and politics of various political parties in the Gorkhaland movement see Chapter VIII on "The Politics of Expediency" in Subba, *op.cit*, pp 174-193.

34.  See, *The Assam Tribune*, 21 February 1993 and M S Prabhakara, *op.cit*

35.  Kalyan Chaudhuri, "Area of Darkness: Accord unclear on Territory," *Frontline*, 26 August 1994, pp 30-32.

36.  Kalyan Chaudhuri, "Carnage in Lower Assam," *Frontline*, 5 June 1998, pp 38-39.

37.  See Devalle, 1992, Chapter 4, pp 109-150 for details and a brilliant analysis of the Jharkhand protest.

38.  The creation of the JAAC following an agreement between the Bihar government and the Jharkhand leadership in September, 1994 also falls in the same category, for then Bihar Chief Minister Laloo Yadav conceded JAAC only when he desperately needed the JMM support for political survival.

39. Splits and splintering of the Jharkhand movement has been legendary. Aside from the fact that the movement got divided into several factions, the Jharkhand leadership has been indulging in opportunistic alliances from time to time. It is an irony that the then Bihar Chief Minister Laloo Yadav's Janata Dal, the Jharkhand Party's electoral ally in the 1990 elections, became the biggest stumbling block in the realisation of autonomy for the Jharkhand region. The then Union Minister S B Chavan's statement in September 1992 was also an indication of the Jharkhand leaders' proclivity to indulge in opportunistic alliances. The arrest of the JMM leaders in the infamous JMM bribery case for allegedly accepting bribe to support the Narasimha Rao government gave a severe blow to the credibility of the Jharkhand cause. See, Ajay K Mehra, "A Callous Leadership," Bombay, *The Independent*, 21 October 1992; "Roots that Clutch," Calcutta, *The Telegraph*, 4 November 1994; "Jharkhand in a Jam," *The Pioneer*, 5 October 1996 and Abhijit Sinha, "Lalloo not to Allow Bifurcation of Bihar," *The Pioneer*, 2 May 1993.

40. "Jharkhandis Feel Left Out as Laloo, Centre Strikes Deal," *The Indian Express*, 28 September 1994, p 1.

41. Ajay K Mehra, "Jharkhand in a Jam," *op.cit.*

42. Ajay K Mehra, "Roots that Clutch," Calcutta, *The Telegraph*, 4 November 1994.

43. Kalyan Chaudhuri, "Carving Out a Vananchal State," *Frontline*, 5 June 1998.

44. The legend of Birsa Munda, a semi-literate youth of 20 preaching a new religion, who took up cudgels on behalf of the poor and exploited Munda tribals of Chotanagpur plateau to challenge the might of the British Raj, still bestirs the Chotanagpur tribals and rekindles hope of better days. The saga of Birsa *bhagwan* (god) is significant to them, for to arrest him the second time on 3 February 1900 the British had to deploy a huge army. Since he died under mysterious circumstances on 9 June 1900 in Ranchi jail, it is claimed that the British did not have the courage to give him a trial. See, Ajay K Mehra, "Jharkhand in a Jam," *op.cit.*

45. "Division" and "distribution" are deliberately used in preference to "decentralisation" and "devolution." Though more popularly used, the latter set of concepts indicate a condescending, top-down attitude to autonomy; whereas this article advocates the 'entitlement' approach to autonomy. In other words, each community in a society and polity has the right to political autonomy within the constitutional framework. This approach suggests a "cascade" approach to autonomy, particularly for a multi-cultural nation like India. The constitutional framework should, therefore, recognise that "right" and "entitlement" and take away for the higher level only what is necessary for keeping the nation together and for its effective governance.

46. Mahi Pal, *op.cit.*

47. B K Roy Burman effectively articulates the limitations of the Sixth Schedule in "Federalism in Perspective: Problems and Prospects for North-East India," *Mainstream*, 7 August 1993, pp 7-10.

    (i) scope of exercise of the Governor's power - whether as the constitutional head of the state he is to be guided by advice of the State Ministry, or whether he can exercise his power based on the resolutions adopted by the Autonomous District Council;
    (ii) context and conditions of the right of supersession of the District Council by the State Government;
    (iii) whether the District Council Administrates use of land and resources as subsidiary of the State or as a supra- tribal entity;
    (iv) nature of the State in the disbursement of the share of revenue of the District Council;
    (v) concurrent jurisdiction of some States even in matters of enactment of customary laws;
    (vi) right of the State to take over functions like primary education which are inherent functions of the District Council under the provision of the Constitution;
    (vii) discretionary role of the State in assigning development activities to the District Council.

48. *The Times of India*, 7 and 8 July 1998.

49. See, Ajay K Mehra, "The Demand for Smaller States in India," *Politics India*, 1(12), June 1997.

50. D Rueschemeyer, "Different Methods-Contradictory Results? Research on Development and Democracy," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 32(1/2), 1991, pp 9-38.

51. C Douglas Lummis, "Development Against Democracy," *Alternatives*, 16, 1991, pp 31-66.

52. Amartya Sen, "How is India Doing?," *New York Review of Books*, XXIX(21), Christmas, 1982.

53. Mancur Olson, "Dictatorship, Democracy and Development," *American Political Science Review*, 87(3), September 1993, pp 567-576.

# Armed Conflicts by the Haves:
# A Case Study of Punjab

Mahendra P Lama

## Sikh Nationalism: Historical Perspectives

### The Akali-Congress Initiatives in the Pre-Independence Period

The first Akali Movement[1] in Punjab (1920-25) started with their struggle for Gurudwara reform. The Gurudwaras suffered from corrupt and non-Sikh practices and were also used to condemn the growing Indian nationalism thereby supporting the reactionary activities of the British officials. Naturally the British authorities resisted any reformation efforts. The Akali Jathas succeeded the educated Sikhs (`neo-Sikhs') to actively control the movement for Gurudwara reform.[2] Very soon the two representative bodies of the Sikhs, the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) – mainly to manage the reformed Gurudwara- and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) – to co-ordinate the work of various Jathas and to provide volunteers for reform – came into being. During this five year movement these two bodies not only took control of all the important shrines (including the Golden Temple, the Akal Takht and the adjoining Gurudwaras) through peaceful agitation and passive sufferings, but also strengthened the forces of Indian nationalism in Punjab by ejecting the Mahants, the Government appointed Managers of Gurudwaras. Despite desperate moves by the unnerved authorities to keep its official control on the shrines intact, the Akali Dal was able to give a legal status to SGPC under the Sikh Gurudwaras and Shrines Bill in July 1925. [Samata Era, pp 9-10]

Akali-Congress unity and co-operation based on strong sense of nationalism provided many Akali leaders high positions both at the provincial and national level. The Akalis supported the Congress stand during various parleys for transfer of power. They together forged a united front against the Muslim League. In pursuance of that understanding the Sikhs rejected Muslim League's offer of a sovereign State, and also cold shouldered the British offer "to enable them to have political feet of their own on which they may walk in to the current of world history." They accepted a "solemn undertaking" by the Congress that promised "a set-up in the north wherein the Sikhs can also experience the glow of freedom."

The resolution passed by the Punjab Legislative Assembly at their meeting in Delhi in July 1947 re-assuredly mentioned that "in the divided Indian Punjab, special Constitutional measures are imperative to meet the just aspirations and rights of the Sikhs."

As a result the Sikhs cast their lot with independent India at the time of partition on 15 August 1947. [Samata Era, p 15; Singh, 1982, pp 34-35]

*The SGPC-Akali Dal Co-ordination*

The Gurudwaras Act of 1925 placed all the Gurudwaras (Sikh temples) of Punjab under the legal jurisdiction of the SGPC founded in December 1920 by orthodox Sikhs. This naturally provided SGPC with a wide-ranging role in the Sikh community. Politically it has been a stronghold of the Akali Dal since its very inception thereby providing the latter with tremendous resources – moral, human, institutional, and of course, financial. [Telford, pp 973-974] Being a sister organisation of the SGPC, the entire political strategies of the Akali Dal have not only been well knit with the former but also have a consistent operational co-ordination. In fact, on many occasions the political demands of Akali Dal were similar to the religious demands of the SGPC as the latter had very strong political contents in their demands.

Gobinder Singh's survey of SGPC members in the post-Punjabi Suba era confirms that the body had become overwhelmingly political and had shifted away from its religious origins. In fact the emerging pattern of the SGPC membership could be largely explained in terms of the support structure of the SAD which has been a politico-religious organisation of basically the rural based agrarian interests. Since the SAD claims to identify its ideology with the basic socio-economic concepts of Sikhism, its religious appeal has also earned for it considerable following among the non-farming sections of the Sikh community. [Singh, Gobinder, pp 151-154]

On top of this, the candidates for the SGPC elections are sponsored (95%), normally on party spirit, by the SAD high command. Since the scholarly Sikhs with higher religious competence lack mass following and support in the community due to their apolitical disposition and status, they do not often get the opportunities of being sponsored. Even the co-option of 15 members to the SGPC is generally made from financially well to do and politically prominent Sikhs in India. An interesting trend has been the greater association of low religious proficiency with the SGPC membership and higher offices in it thereby indicating greater inflow of politicised individuals to this institution. [Singh, Gobinder, pp 162-164]

The SGPC is almost completely dominated by the males. As against the total female of about 47% in the population of Punjab their sampled strength on the SGPC is not even 1%.

Viewing retrospectively, the Jat Sikhs have always been in the ascendancy of power ever since the Sikh Gurus initiated a campaign of egalitarianism in the Panth. The chain of developments in the agrarian sector in Punjab with the ushering in of the 'green revolution' have given the Jats peasantry a predominant position. Jat in Punjab is synonymous with the

landed farmer. This has sharpened their political consciousness and have brought them to the fore of the Sikh leadership both in the political and the religious system. That is why the agriculturists constitute a little over three-fourth of the elected SGPC members.

Till the fifties, the forces within the SGPC was more or less evenly balanced between the secular and the separatist elements. But in the later years the SGPC steadily came into the grips of individual personality who increasingly devoted himself to political chicanery. [Chopra, p 397]

## Post-Independence Political Processes in Punjab

*Punjabi-Suba Demand*

In the post-independence Punjab which included Haryana, Sikhs constituted 35% and Hindus 61% of its total population. Soon after the partition strains started developing between the Akalis and the Congress which ruled the Centre particularly over the issues of sharing political power at the provincial level. The unwillingness on the part of Congress to concede and accommodate the Akali claims to reorganise Punjab on linguistic basis provided the Akali leadership a cause to agitate. Failure of two experiments in coalition with the Congress in forming the Government in Punjab heightened the Akali leadership sense of alienation. When the Draft States Reorganisation Commission refused to accept the formation of a Punjabi Suba (state) in 1955, the Akali Dal pursued an irredentist strategy and launched a mass mobilisation campaign. [Chima, pp 850-851] This turned into an agitation for the Punjabi Suba in 1955. Akali Dal for the first time in the post-independence period rose to a new peak. The Government conceded the formation of regional committees within the Punjab legislature in 1956. The Regional Formula, as the scheme came to be known allowed the two zones – the Hindi and Punjabi – a certain measure of autonomy in all matters except law and order, taxation and finance. After accepting the Regional Formula, the Akali Dal decided to work as a purely religious body. Many Akali leaders joined the Congress and fought the 1957 elections on the Congress tickets. [Dang, p 243]

The Akali Dal gave a trial to this scheme but got disenchanted soon. Meanwhile in January 1956, predominantly Sikh-populated Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU) were incorporated into Punjab. This led to another phase of intense agitation in 1960. Sant Fateh Singh and Master Tara Singh appeared on the political scene giving a distinctly linguistic slant to the demand of Punjabi Suba. They maintained that "we are not concerned about percentage. We want the Punjabi Suba to comprise an area where Punjabi language is spoken regardless of the fact whether the Sikhs are in a majority or minority." Their talks with Nehru failed to yield any solution and when Master Tara Singh broke his oath to fast unto death for this cause in August 1961, the leadership of the Akali Dal passed from the bhapas (urban merchant and trading class Sikhs) to a rural Jat jathedar (local Akali

organiser), Sant Fateh Singh. This was an important shift in Sikh politics as it confirmed the gradual ascendance and dominance by Jats in the Akali leadership.

The immolation threat by Sant Fateh Singh on 25 September 1965 in the Golden Temple precincts led to the appointment of a Cabinet Committee of both Houses of the Parliament and its report recommending the Akali demand for Sikh majority Punjabi Suba (with a Sikh population of 60.2% and a 37.6% Hindu population) was finally conceded by the Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, on 23 April 1966.

However, even the creation of an exclusive Punjabi speaking State did not fully solve the Akali problems as many issues remain outstanding thereby giving the Akalis the chances to keep the Centre in tenterhooks. The inability of the Akali Dal to form a majority state government without coalition support remained an unresolved but chronic problem. The Akalis became more strident in the later years. [Chima, p 851]

*Question of Political Authority: Congress-Akali Differences*

One of the most intriguing aspects of the Punjab problem has been the struggle and quest of major political parties and religious leaders to usurp the political authority in the state. In many ways this urge has been translated into fierce political battles sometimes leading to most dastardly violence. Many analysts also suggest that it was because of this incessant desire to come to power that both regional and national political parties made some major hollow promises and unduly eulogised the Sikh community that encouraged them to aspire for more and more. Mrs Gandhi did hint at this aspect when she said "it is one of our more prosperous States and part of the problem has arisen out of its prosperity." [Grover, p 377]

An interesting example was the fact that whenever the Akali Dal, despite demographic changes, was unable to win any election outright, the party was faced with a serious dilemma as their *raison d'être* was to serve the Sikh community but the Sikh vote alone was insufficient to thrust the Akalis into power. The best option for them therefore, was to apparently maintain a secular platform to accommodate non-Sikh Punjabis and to form united front ministries with the other non-Congress parties, most notably the Jan Sangh, a party of urban Hindu communalism. This strategy paid dividends till at least 1972. [Telford, pp 969-971]

The Congress has been the most dominant and broad based party receiving support mainly from the Hindu including the Scheduled Castes and segments of the non-Scheduled Caste rural Sikh population. On the other hand, the Akali Dal's support base has been much narrower with a concentration on Jat Sikh peasantry and segments of the urban Sikh population. The other parties like Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (formerly known as the Jan Sangh) and Communist parties get support from urban Hindus and marginal segments of the Jat Sikh peasantry respectively. The average percentage of votes polled by these parties

in the six Punjab Legislative Assembly elections between 1967 and 1985 [Congress-39.4%, Akali Dal (Sant/Longowal)-29%, Jan Sangh/Janata-BJP-8.4%, CPI-5.7%, CPM-3%, other parties-3.6%, and Independents-10.8%] manifest more or less a consistent political structure of Punjab. [Chima, p 852]

In the initial phase of internal emergency (1975-77), the Centre sent secret emissaries to the Sikh leaders to find out the possibility of discussions with them but the Akalis rejected them and instead launched the 'Save Democracy' morcha on 9 July 1975. It is at this juncture, that the Akalis made full use of places of religious congregation-Gurudwaras to oppose the emergency. [Jacob, 1990, pp 4-5] The aftermath of the Emergency saw a historical high point of co-operation and equilibrium between the Sikh political system and the newly formed Janata Party led central government.

The Akali-Janata (including the Jan Sangh)-CPM coalition headed by Prakash Singh Badal ruled Punjab for a couple of years. However, this was only a momentary experiment as when the famous Janata split at the national level took place inevitably leading to its fall from power, Akali Dal President Jagdev Singh Talwandi terminated its alliance with the Janata Party. The return of Congress to power in Punjab in 1980 intensified the Akali factional bickerings (particularly the factions led by Badal, Tohra, Talwandi, Barnala and Sukhjinder). This led to increasing tension particularly in rural Punjab. The landlord lobby from the richest region (Malwa) consolidated its hold over Akali Dal and SGPC. It is at this crucial conjunction that seeds of the ensuing crisis began to germinate. [Singh, Gopal, 1987, p 16; Chima, pp 852-853]

During the assembly elections of 1980 Congress not only raised communal issues but also showed Akali Dal in poor light by highlighting its anti-Sikh character as it aligned with the forces that had betrayed the Punjabi people on issues like Punjabi Suba. The most remarkable aspect of the Congress campaign was the introduction and maiden appearance of some religious leaders including Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale who later became an international name as a militant Sikh leader. Then for a long time to come the AISSF/ Bhindranwale and the Akali Dal, became locked in a protracted conflict for gaining political supremacy.

*Political Strategies of the Akalis*

The Akalis adopted three strategies – constitutional, infiltrational and agitational – to pressurise the Central Government for acceptance of their demands. The Dharam Yudha[3] (religious agitation) was launched in August 1982 in the situation of political wilderness brought about by the backdrop of, i) failure of the Akali Dal to get the Anandpur Sahib Resolution implemented through negotiations with the Janata Government at the Centre, ii) the dismissal of the Akali ministry in the State by Mrs Indira Gandhi in 1980 and iii) its subsequent defeat in the 1980 Assembly elections. So it reverted to its old agitational tactics. [Dang, 1987, pp 243-245] It presented a list of 45 demands and grievances based

on the Anandpur Sahib Resolution. During this agitation, the Akali Dal recruited an army of one lakh of self-sacrificing Sikhs, mostly the youth. In order to give sustenance to their agitation the Akalis also significantly involved the "Panth" and added religious demands. They shifted their Head Quarters to the Golden Temple and attracted huge congregations when the "morcha dictator" Sant Harchand Singh Longowal started issuing commands from within the Golden Temple. [Singh, Gopal, 1995, pp 13-14]

*Hindu-Sikh Communal Issues*

The differences among the Sikhs, Hindus and the Muslims were more religious than social. Despite occasional clashes, the age-old harmony characterised their normal existence and relationship. Believers of different religions were there, more or less, among all the three major social groups like the Jats, the Rajputs and the Khatris. The Punjabi society has been broadly divided into four large occupational groups: (i) priests and professionals (ii) traders (iii) agriculturists and (iv) artisans and landless labourers. Traditionally agricultural population is over-represented among the Sikhs and non-agricultural occupations such as trade and services among the Hindus. [Sharma, p 113]

The root cause of the communal tension in Punjab lies in the channelling of economic growth through the existing inegalitarian social structure. Economic development, instead of rectifying an unjust social structure, has in fact been reinforcing it. The occupation related caste dominance belonging to the two different religious categories have in fact made their occupations fortress – like as they are able to invoke the solidarity of their religious group in safeguarding their economic interests from encroachment by the opposite dominant castes. [D Souza, p 52]

The overwhelming majority of the population of Punjab belongs to the two major religious categories of the Sikhs (60.21%) and Hindus (37.54%) and the rest are Christians (1.19%) and the Muslims (0.84%). However, when it comes to the question of rural-urban dispersion the Sikhs form the majority in a more pronounced magnitude of 69.17% in rural areas as against 28.56% of the Hindus. The Hindus far outnumber the Sikhs in urban areas with 66.39% and 30.79% of the population respectively. The genesis of this divide lies in the British policy of confining the Sikhs as an agrarian community, to provide fodder for the cannons.

Table I indicates an almost neat complementary relationship between the percentages of the Hindu and the Sikh population in each district. In terms of the overall population distribution the districts can be divided into three broad categories: (a) the first six districts with a pronounced Sikh majority, namely, Bhatinda, Amritsar, Sangrur, Ludhiana, Ferozepur and Kapurthala  (b) the next two districts with a moderate Sikh majority, which include Ropar and Patiala and (c) the last three districts with a Sikh minority and a Hindu majority, which include Gurdaspur, Jullundur and Hoshiarpur. [D Souza, p 55]

The processes of economic transformation and urbanisation and the consequent redistribution of the population have reinforced the tendency for the Hindus and the Sikhs to be placed in the different sectors of the economy. Agriculture and trade are the two major sectors of the economy that have grown enormously in the recent years. Most of the inputs and outputs of agriculturists in the rural areas have to pass through the traders in the urban areas. Since these two occupations are dominated by two different religious groups, some how the clash of economic interests has acutely entrenched into its political economy.

Table I

Percentage Distribution of Hindu and Sikh Population by
Districts and by Total, Rural and Urban Composition

| District | Hindu | | | Sikh | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | Rural | Urban | Total | Rural | Urban |
| 1. Bhatinda | 22.56 | 12.92 | 61.13 | 76.93 | 86.67 | 37.96 |
| 2. Amritsar | 23.43 | 8.23 | 60.31 | 74.22 | 89.29 | 37.65 |
| 3. Sangrur | 27.14 | 21.25 | 50.25 | 66.90 | 75.20 | 34.33 |
| 4. Ludhiana | 33.22 | 16.88 | 63.82 | 65.71 | 82.47 | 34.34 |
| 5. Ferozepur | 33.58 | 24.02 | 72.22 | 65.07 | 74.82 | 25.69 |
| 6. Kapurthala | 38.02 | 28.45 | 69.69 | 61.26 | 70.80 | 29.68 |
| 7. Ropar | 43.49 | 39.21 | 67.46 | 55.61 | 60.10 | 30.51 |
| 8. Patiala | 44.37 | 37.49 | 63.92 | 54.24 | 61.03 | 34.93 |
| 9. Gurdaspur | 48.02 | 40.94 | 75.90 | 44.82 | 51.03 | 20.38 |
| 10. Jullundur | 53.91 | 44.19 | 76.49 | 44.90 | 54.73 | 24.04 |
| 11. Hoshiarpur | 59.25 | 57.13 | 74.65 | 39.38 | 41.60 | 23.23 |
| 12. Punjab | 37.54 | 28.56 | 66.39 | 60.21 | 69.37 | 30.79 |

Source: D Souza, p 55.

The gains from the rapid development of agriculture after the introduction of new methods has been mainly cornered by the tertiary sector. Trade being the most important component in this sector, the trading actors the majority of whom are the Hindus had to face the backlash of the big peasants. In other words it has been agricultural castes in the rural areas vs. the Hindu trading castes in the urban areas. This has invariably been distorted into communal schisms.

## Hindu Communalist and the Sikh Response

Hindu communalism in Punjab can be traced back to the British period when in order to protect their money-lending business and also to check the conversions of Hindus, particularly the low-castes, the Hindus resorted to founding communal bodies. They started the Shudhi movement (purification of converted Hindus to bring them back into Hinduism) through the Arya Samaj, and this had an immediate reaction among the Sikhs. The communal organisations within the two communities in one form or other have continued to exist till now, for example, the Chief Khalsa Diwan and the Dal Khalsa among

the Sikhs, and the Hindu Maha Sabha, the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) and the Hindu Sangathan among the Hindus. [Singh, Gopal in Grover (ed.), p 87]. A well-known Sikh scholar Gopal Singh in fact states that:

> "the Hindus are themselves responsible for their alienation, insecurity and frustration. By disowning Punjabi as their mother tongue, they have become rootless, and have cut themselves off from the culture, history and society of Punjab, thus leaving the Sikhs to claim that Punjabi culture and Punjab history as exclusively theirs. The Arya Samajist leaders, representing Hindu trading interests, are largely responsible for this situation. For example, in the years 1949-51, Arya Samajists like the late Lala Jagat Narayan, the then Secretary of the Punjab Pradesh Congress, mobilised Hindus to declare Hindi as their mother tongue in the 1951 census and again during the 1981 census." [Singh Gopal, in Grover (ed.) pp 87-88]

The fear of the rapid disorientation of the Sikh society and its apprehension about the absorption of Sikhism into Hinduism particularly due to westernisation; the concern of the fundamentalists arising out of the adoption of non-Sikh habits such as the haircut, trimmed beard, smoking, etc., by Sikh youths and the harping on the century old theme that Sikhs are nothing but a part of Hindu society by the Hindu fundamentalists have further vitiated and aggravated the communal divide.

The central political parties like the Congress also contributed to the communal divide that prevailed during the peak of Punjab agitation. "In most cases these armed Hindu organisations could not be organisationally distinguished from the Congress(I), the leaders being active and well known Congress(I) members also... these organisations enjoyed the patronage of the state. Most of the riots that happened in Punjab towns during 1982-84 were engineered by these fascist gangs... were fairly large-scale ones and Sikh business interests were badly affected. It is interesting to note that the riots happened only in the Hindu majority towns." [Jacob, pp 18-19]

## Punjab Crisis

*Genesis of the Crisis of 1980s*

The Akali movement took a sharp turn in October 1973 when its working committee adopted a historic resolution now known as Anandpur Sahib Resolution (ASR). Later the Dal's open session at Ludhiana (October 1978) adopted twelve resolutions as their main demands. The major demands were greater autonomy, transfer of Chandigarh, consideration of territorial disputes, proper distribution of Ravi-Beas waters, All-India Gurudwara Act, etc. Many of these demands were longstanding and genuine grievances. It is intriguing that very little public debate and discussion took place on these demands.

Among the many backdrops to this Resolution the immediately significant one was the ousting of Akali Dal from power in Punjab by the Congress Party in 1972. Though this

resolution is supported by all the factions of Akali Dal, this seems to have got a number of versions depending upon the factional groups of the Akali Dal. [Singh, Gopal 1987; White Paper, 1984]

This Resolution has generated considerable controversy. Telford aptly remarks that for some, it "provides the ideological basis for the demand of Khalistan," while others believe that it, only demands "more autonomy for a Sikh dominated Punjab." A more balanced view argues that the ASR is neither a call for Khalistan nor simply a demand for devolution. Rather, it is "a comprehensive statement" of the Akali Dal's principles, and "like most political manifestos, consistency or logic are not necessarily its strong points." [Telford, p 971]

Nevertheless it emphasises religious fundamentalism and makes Sikh religion the basis of nationality. The first postulate states "the Shiromani Akali Dal is the very embodiment of the hopes and aspirations of the Sikh Nation and is fully entitled to its representation." The first two purposes of Akali Dal are i) propagation of Sikhism and its code of conduct and denunciation of atheism and ii) preservation and keeping alive the concept of distinct and independent identity of the 'Panth' for attainment of which it is determined to have all those Punjabi speaking areas, deliberately kept out of Punjab.

The contents of economic policy and programme in the ASR makes its character clear. It demands land ceiling at 30 standard acres instead of 17.50 acres, cheap inputs and abolition of excise duty on tractors, and remunerative agricultural prices. To have a wider appeal it also talks about workers, middle class employees, agricultural labour and educated unemployed. The resolution expresses very clearly opposition of the capitalist farmers to traders and monopolists. It demands complete nationalisation of trade in food grains and unrestricted movement of food grains in India. [Gill and Singhal, pp 46-47]

*Decentralisation: The Crux of the Akali Demand*

The first and foremost demand of the Akali Dal is that the constituent States should be given maximum autonomy possible within the federal structure. The ASR stated, "in this new Punjab, the Central intervention should be restricted to Defence, Foreign Affairs, Posts and Telegraphs, Currency and Railways." A different version of the ASR was put forth by Akali Dal (Talwandi Group) at a World Sikh Convention in Anandpur Sahib in April 1981 which stated *inter alia* "an autonomous Region in the North of India should be set up forthwith wherein the Sikhs' interests are constitutionally recognised as of primary and special importance." Yet another version of the ASR authenticated by Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, President of the Akali Dal, was issued in November 1982. This version asks for the merger of all Punjabi-speaking areas "to constitute a single administrative unit where the interests of Sikhs and Sikhism are specially protected." [White Paper, pp 324-325]

The demand of the Akalis came into more sharper focus when the Congress Government consolidated the process of centralisation of power of the states through repeated amendments of the constitution during the Emergency period of 1975-77. The fundamental rights were also not spared. The demand of SAD for decentralisation of powers and the recasting of the constitutional structure of the country on real and meaningful federal principles to obviate the possibility of any danger to national unity were openly accepted by other political parties including Janata Party, CPI(M) and many other regional parties.

Though the demand for Khalistan or a separate nation figures nowhere in this resolution, the word 'Sikh Kaum' translated as 'Sikh nation' invariably occurs which was interpreted by Longowal as a demand for a separate identity for the Sikh community and not a separate country.[4]

## Constitutional Problems

Many educated Sikhs find the Constitution to be heavily tilted against their community. For instance, wherever the word Hindu occurs in the Constitution, it is meant to denote Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs as well. However, when it comes to granting special rights, concessions and privileges it finds itself excluded. They allege that the provision of these rights only to the scheduled castes within the Sikhs are meant to induce and attract them to the Hindu fold. [Singh, 1982, p 42]

The SAD raised a completely new demand in January 1984 asking for an amendment of Article 25(2)(b) of the Constitution and almost simultaneously announced an agitation which included the burning and mutilation of copies of the Constitution. This article relates to the freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion which states that (2) "nothing in this article shall affect the operation of any existing law or prevent the State from making any law - (b) providing for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all and sections of Hindus." [Government of India, 1988, p 8] The Akali Dal also sought to link this with the idea of a separate personal law for the Sikhs.

## Other Demands

### Chandigarh Issue
The Akali Dal wanted Chandigarh to be transferred immediately to Punjab; and Haryana to be given resources to build its capital. They also wanted the fate of other disputed Punjabi-speaking territories to be placed before a tribunal consisting of linguistic experts. They wanted it to be decided on the basis of language taking the village as the unit. [White Paper, p 324]

*Ravi-Beas Water*

The Akalis believed that the sharing of the water of Ravi-Beas rivers was unfavourable to them as during the Emergency the Central Government had imposed an arbitrary decision in this regard. They wanted this issue to be placed before the Supreme Court, for the decision based on universally accepted riparian principles for the distribution of waters. Since irrigation is the life of the agriculture-based economy of Punjab it got wide public support over the issue.

The March 1976 award which allocated 3.52 million acre feet of water each to Haryana and Punjab and 0.2 million acre feet to Delhi was also vehemently opposed by the SAD as this would have denied irrigation facilities to around nine lakh acres of cultivated land in Punjab which they had enjoyed for over half a century. This would have spelt economic ruin as the State's prosperity rests largely on agriculture. [Singh, 1982, p 40]

*Religious Demands*

The unilateral promulgation of an ordinance by the Centre amending the Delhi Gurudwara Management Act, without consulting the SGPC has been considered a gross violation of the Nehru-Tara Singh Pact of 1959 which stipulated a prior consultation with the SGPC. They had other very specific religious demands that included the relay of 'Gurbani Kirtan' from Golden Temple, vacation of restrictions on carrying 'kirpan' in domestic and international flights, ban on sale of cigarettes, liquor and meat in the walled city of Amritsar and an all India Gurudwara Act covering historic Gurudwaras all over India.

*Discrimination*

The complaints of alleged discrimination have been very often raised by the Sikh leadership which range from issues like ridiculously low Central investment in the public sector units in Punjab; poor share in the benefits from the existing hydro power projects and multipurpose dams; indifference to the construction of the Thein Dam on the Ravi river; and the systematic reduction in the proportion of Sikhs in the armed forces from over 33% on the eve of Independence, to less than 12% today.

*Governments' Rigidity*

Many view that if the issues raised by the Akali Dal had been seriously addressed by the Central Government at this stage only the subsequent violence and blood bath could have been largely averted. Although the differences were narrowed down sufficiently during various negotiations, a section of the academic community also alleged that the Government did not want a negotiated settlement and deliberately scuttled the negotiations. [Samata Era, pp 26-27]

The Government maintained that the propositions contained in the ASR on Centre-State relations are at total variance with the basic concept of the unity and integrity of the nation as expressed in the Indian Constitution. The government found it

unacceptable even as a basis for discussion. However, recognising the importance of the subject, the Government set up in June 1983, a Commission under the chairmanship of Justice Ranjit Singh Sarkaria to examine and review the work of the existing arrangements between the Union and the States in regard to powers, functions and responsibilities. The Akali Dal was adamant that the Government should make specific mention of the ASR while referring the matter to this Commission. Nevertheless, the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission still remain unimplemented.

The linking of the transfer of Chandigarh with the transfer of Abohar-Fazilka area is cited as Government's unreasonableness. At least 60 out of 115 villages in Abohar-Fazilka area are Punjabi-speaking and are not contiguous to Haryana. A corridor along the inter-state boundary between Punjab and Rajasthan has to be provided to Haryana to make it contiguous which may be an absurd idea. The fact that these areas are sought to be excluded from Punjab simply because the non-Sikhs are in majority there, in effect, amounts to, not only accepting the Khalistan philosophy but also encouraging a communal divide. Even though this transfer of Chandigarh was announced by Mrs Gandhi on 29 January 1970 and was to take place by January 1975, it is yet to be implemented. Mrs Gandhi as late as 1984 also maintained the stand that "however, something must be given to Haryana in its place. Now, this was the obstacle... what would go to Haryana?" [Grover, 1995, pp 378-379]

Though there are no private radio broadcasting facilities to any group anywhere in the country as a matter of national policy, the Government offered to arrange for direct relay of Shabad Kirtan from the Golden Temple. In deference to the sentiments of the Sikh community, instructions were issued in February 1983 permitting Sikh passengers to carry kirpans which do not exceed 22.8 cm in length and whose blade length does not exceed 15.24 cm in domestic flights. The Akali Dal's demand for the enactment of an All India Gurudwara Act did not favour the Centre as it received a large number of representations from many sections of the people against such legislation. [White Paper, pp 327-328]

The half-hearted and egoistic approach of the Government could be substantiated by the fact that the Akali Dal wanted 3 hours relay of Gurbani but the Government insisted on 2 hours. The critics of Government handling of the Akalis also mention that the Government's plan, it seems, was to linger on the negotiations to buy time and then strike with heavy repressive hand. This is a familiar tactic used in Assam also in the agitation against the foreigners led by All Assam Students' Union.

*Green Revolution and its Impact*

Punjabi society is mainly based on agriculture. Of the 25 million inhabitants of the Punjab in 1921, at least 14 million were agriculturists by occupation. For many decades in the pre-independence period, agriculture remained largely backward on account of intense sub-division of land. [Sharma, 1987, p 15] The colonialists gained enormously both through

repressive taxation and by developing Punjab as an agrarian belt producing surplus. In essence, Punjab became an efficient backyard to maintain British hegemony in both war and peace. However, the agrarian and industrial economy of Punjab was severely dislocated by Partition particularly because the colonial regime had settled the Sikh people in western Punjab in a planned manner, which was consciously developed into the granary for the colonial set-up. At one stroke the economy was shattered as the rich canal colonies along with the Muslim peasantry went to western Punjab in Pakistan and the Sikhs and Hindus fled to Eastern Punjab in India under distress conditions. In the latter, the peasantry had to start its struggle anew. [Jacob, p 105]

In the post independence period agriculture emerged to be the most vital economic activity in Punjab contributing as high as 58% of the state income and employing about 59% of the total working force in the state in 1981. Punjab soon emerged as the richest state in India with the highest per capita income. The Punjab economy recorded a very high rate of growth during 1966-76 mainly because of the Green Revolution. [Singh, 1995, p 76] With only 1.6% of the nation's total land area and about 2% of the population, it provides 73% of the country's procurement of wheat and 48% of its rice and also contributes as high as 10 and 20% of the national total rice and wheat production respectively (Table 2).

Table 2

Punjab's Contribution to the Total Rice and Wheat Production

| Year | % of rice | % of wheat |
|------|-----------|------------|
| 89 – 90 | 9.10 | 23.43 |
| 94 – 95 | 9.49 | 20.67 |

Source: Ministry of Finance,(GOI), *Economic Survey*, various issues.

Green Revolution brought about some perceptible and far-reaching changes in the agrarian structure of Punjab. Food grain production trebled from 4.2 million tons in 1966 to 11.96 million tons in 1980 (21.8 million tons in 1994-95). The psychological infrastructure was provided by the eulogising of the predominantly Sikh peasantry as a "hardy stock" easily adaptable to modernisation. It transformed Punjab's agrarian economy from a largely subsistence farming to profit-oriented agriculture; strengthened agriculture-market network; introduced greater degree of specialisation in production as they grow mainly wheat in Rabi, and paddy, cotton, and sugarcane in Kharif; recorded considerable increase in the use of modern inputs like high yielding varieties of seeds, chemical fertilisers, insecticides and weedicides and mechanised tools like pumping sets, electric motors, threshers, tractors and to some extent harvest-combines also.

The Green Revolution which reached its plateau by the mid-1970s has now shown distinct signs of its petering out. However, it ushered in certain newer dimensions. Firstly, it experienced capitalist development at a relatively fast rate transforming a large chunk of peasantry having greater ownership of land and command over capital resources into

capitalist farmers. Since these farmers had insufficient family labour they hired agricultural workers. These farmers not only had surplus income for accumulation but also benefited most from the government facilities such as co-operative credits, subsidies on inputs etc. Many of these farmers have begun to invest in transport trade and industry.

Secondly, this accelerated the process of consolidation of smaller landholdings into larger ones and sharply augmented the ratio of landless labour in the total agricultural work force from 17.3% in 1961 to 32.1% in 1971 to about 40% in 1983. This considerably accentuated the inequalities in land distribution. While the percentage of smallholdings is the lowest in Punjab, the percentage of large holdings is the highest as shown in Table 3.

This along with the increasing presence of migrant labourers (almost all of them are Hindus) from other states constituting about 38% of Punjab's total agricultural work force aggravated both displacement and poverty. They soon became the major source of mobilisation for militant Sikh groups. [Chima, pp 857-858]. There emerged a distinct class of agricultural labourers mostly belonging to backward and scheduled castes. [Gill and Singhal, pp 42-43]

Table 3
Comparative Figures (in percentages) of Distribution of Rural Households
according to the Size of Land.

| Area | Holdings of less than 2-5 acres | Holdings of 2-5 to 7.5 acres | Holdings of more than 7.5 acres |
|------|------|------|------|
| Punjab | 12.0 | 28.1 | 59.9 |
| All India | 34.5 | 37.1 | 28.5 |
| Kerala | 80.5 | 15.5 | 3.0 |

Source: Singh, Gopal, 1987, p 10.

Thirdly, the issue of prices became increasingly critical as it has been the Central Government which has been fixing the minimum support price for their entire produce on the recommendation of the Agricultural Prices Commission. On the other hand, the monopoly traders buy and sell to farmers and earn a huge margin of profit. This monopolisation (both public and private) extended further to the agricultural inputs also. Here arose the contradiction and clash of interest of the capitalist farmers with the traders and industrial monopolies. The present Akali leadership represents the interest of the former which considers the latter as the manifestation of authoritarian tendency through its main party, i.e. Congress(I). The Akali Dal therefore, invariably brings in the question of minimising the role of industrial monopoly bourgeoisie through redefining Centre-State relations.

The increasing cost of agricultural inputs and diminishing output returns aroused fears among the capitalist farmers about future economic gains. Under the 1980 Congress-led central government, input prices increased by a staggering 20-30% annually, the

rationing of fuel and certain building materials became common, and in order to maintain its national buffer stock, the Centre re-imposed "food zones" by regulating inter-state commerce. This was aggravated by the ban on transportation of food grains out of any of Punjab's twelve districts. This not only forced the farmers to sell their produce in the already flooded market but also created a serious consternation in the food deficit areas. The gap between the price paid by the procuring government agents (Rs 127 per quintal) and prices to retailers (Rs 200 per quintal) looked discriminatory. [Chima, p 856] When they produced a bumper crop, there were no buyers, as it happened in the case of potatoes in 1979, and sugarcane later. This underlined the farmer's helplessness against market conditions.

The ASR also talks of fixing the price of agricultural produce and opposes the demarcation of food zones and the restrictions that go with it on the movement of food grains and demands that "the whole country should be a single food zone." It demands "increased and cheaper power and irrigation facilities." When the Akalis came into power they ensured that the farmers particularly the Sikh Jats get benefits even at the cost of state exchequer. The subsidy elements in all the major inputs were hiked steadily. For instance, the rent for electricity for the use of tube wells was reduced from Rs 19 to Rs 12 per horse power, urea price from Rs 125 to Rs 82 a bag by Akalis. When the Congress replaced the Akalis in 1980, the former could not afford to maintain the level of subsidies extended by the latter. This naturally gave a solid fighting ground for the Akalis. [Singh, Gopal, 1987, p 15]

The phenomenal increase on the demand for critical inputs like electricity and water naturally led to a large scale shortage which provided a playing field for both anti-Centre politics and communal elements to a great extent. The huge shortage of electricity had to be reckoned with rationing for an equitable share between agriculture and industry. Since these sectors were basically dominated by Sikhs and Hindu-bania respectively, they cried hoarse accusing each other of misappropriating the share. The tones were distinctly communal. [Alam, pp 88-89]

Fourthly, the distinctly favourable terms of trade (Tables 4 and 5) in the industrial sector vis-à-vis the agricultural commodities, attracted the wealthy Jat Sikhs towards investment opportunities in non-agricultural operations. However strict centrally controlled licensing procedures thwarted these investments, and as a result, 70% of the bank deposits of Punjabis were invested outside the state. This was in sharp contrast to the growing requirement of agro-based industrial units. The Centre even refused to build or allow private capital to enter in critical areas like building additional sugarcane processing mills to match ever rising sugar production. [Chima, p 856]

Table 4

Wholesale Price Indices of Agricultural Products, Manufactured Products and Food Grains
(1970-71 = 100)

| Year | Index for Agricultural Products | Index for Manufactured Products | Index of Foodgrains | Ratio of agricultural prices to manufactured goods prices | Ratio of Foodgrains prices to manufactured goods prices |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 71-72 | 100.4 | 109.5 | 108 | 91.7 | 98.6 |
| 74-75 | 169.9 | 168.8 | 199 | 100.7 | 117.9 |
| 77-78 | 174.8 | 179.2 | 172 | 97.5 | 95.9 |
| 80-81 | 210.5 | 257.3 | 226 | 81.8 | 87.8 |
| 81-82 | 235.5 | 270.6 | 235 | 87.4 | 86.8 |
| 82-83 | 248.1 | 271.7 | 264 | 91.3 | 97.2 |

Source: Government of India, *Economic Survey*, various issues.
Excerpted from *Punjab Today*, [Gill Sucha Singh, p 114]

Table 5

Procurement Price, Cost of Production and Rate of Return over Cost of
Wheat Cultivation in Punjab

| Year | Procurement price, Rupees per Quintal | Cost of Production Rupees per Quintal | Rate of Return Cost (percent) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1970 – 71 | 76.00 | 61.04 | 24.50 |
| 1973 – 74 | 76.00 | 67.10 | 2.23 |
| 1976 – 77 | 105.00 | 101.39 | 3.56 |
| 1978 – 79 | 112.50 | 101.45 | 10.89 |

Sources: Rajbans Kaur, *Agricultural Price Policy in Developing Countries with special Reference to India*, Ph.D. Thesis, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1982, p 275.
Excerpted from *Punjab Today*, [Sucha Singh Gill, p 117]

Finally, the skewed distribution of the benefits of the Green Revolution became conspicuous, when just 20% of Jat rich farmers grabbed more than 60% of the total land. A study conducted to assess income distribution over six different categories of Punjabi farmers concluded that the level of mechanisation largely paralleled the size of holdings. It showed that hiring out of assets, including equipment, draft animals and land to the smaller farmers, constituted almost 22% of non-farming income of Class 6.[5] This only reflected grossly unequal distribution of technological benefits. [Bhalla and Chadha, pp 826-833]

This uneven distribution of benefits is amply reflected in the caste structure too. The Jat capitalist farmers who are usually pitched against the scheduled castes (Mazhabis) have been an overwhelming beneficiary. The Mazhabis along with other low caste artisans like Lohar Sikhs (blacksmiths), carpenter Sikhs (Ramgarhias), Rai Sikhs, Labana Sikhs, Cheema Sikhs have developed their own "culture of deprivation." At the political level

their hostility against Akali capitalist farmers (and liking for Congress(I) or communist parties) and their Nirankari background have made them special targets of Sikh extremists which force them to fall into the Akali fold. [Singh, Gopal, 1987, p 12]

Equally serious has been the regional distribution of these benefits and their implications on the mobilisation of forces for agitational purposes. The uneven distribution of benefits across the various districts of Punjab (see Tables 6 and 7) in particular, Gurdaspur and Amritsar's wheat yield, which is really only marginally better than average. [Telford, pp 976-977]

From this data, (Table 6, 7 and 8) it is evident that in terms of per-hectare value of production, the farmers of Gurdaspur and Amritsar have done moderately well. However, Grewal and Rangi argue that value productivity "does not necessarily reflect the economic position of the farmers of these districts." They took into consideration the farm size and computed the per farm value of gross output for districts in which they found that the farmers of Gurdaspur and Amritsar drop far down, ranking eighth and ninth out of twelve, respectively, while the six districts of the Malwa occupy the top six positions. The significance of these differences could be related to the observed fact that the majority of the militants in the Punjab crisis were Jat Sikh youths from farming families of the Gurdaspur and Amritsar districts. Some circles viewed this area as "a *de facto* Khalistan," while Akali Dal leaders, since the mid-1960s, have hailed from the richer districts of the Malwa region. This indicates regional and class dimension of the crisis wherein these two groups vied for hegemony within the Sikh community though both pointed their guns to central rulers in New Delhi. [Telford, p 977]

Table 6
Per Hectare Yield (Kg.) of Principal Crops in Punjab 1976-1977
(state ranking of district in brackets)

| District | Rice | Wheat | Sugarcane |
|----------|------|-------|-----------|
| Gurdaspur | 2,282(9) | 2,106(10) | 5,038(10) |
| Amritsar | 2,262(10) | 2,493(2) | 5,052(9) |
| Kapurthala | 2,894(5) | 2,129(9) | 5,248(7) |
| Jullundur | 2,856(6) | 2,420(7) | 5,877(3) |
| Hoshiarpur | 2,000(11) | 1,840(12) | 4,149(12) |
| Ropar | 1,694(12) | 1,940(11) | 5,253(6) |
| | | | |
| Ludhiana | 3,614(1) | 3,160(1) | 6,285(1) |
| Ferozepur | 2,422(8) | 2,445(4) | 5,232(5) |
| Faridkot | 3,366(2) | 2,472(3) | 5,362(5) |
| Bhatinda | 2,605(7) | 2,356(8) | 4,358(11) |
| Sangrur | 3,251(3) | 2,436(5) | 6,046(2) |
| Patiala | 2,961(4) | 2,424(6) | 5,571(4) |

Excerpted from *The Political Economy of Punjab* (by Hamish Telford, p 977)

## Table 7
### Annual Growth Rates of Per Hectare Yields of principal Crops, 1966-67 Through 1976-77
### (percentages in brackets)

| District | Rice | Wheat | Sugarcane |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gurdaspur | 6.37(10) | 3.98(4) | 6.88(4) |
| Amritsar | 5.29(11) | 2.93(6) | 5.20(9) |
| Kapurthala | 7.98(8) | 0.98(10) | 6.60(5) |
| Jullundur | 8.34(7) | 3.54(5) | 7.74(3) |
| Hoshiarpur | 6.94(9) | 6.67(1) | 10.24(1) |
| Ropar | 9.70(5) | 2.66(7) | 9.89(2) |
| | | | |
| Ludhiana | 13.86(1) | 0.88(11) | 5.94(6) |
| Ferozepur | 9.46(6) | 4.22(3) | 3.03(11) |
| Bhatinda | 12.30(2) | 1.92(9) | 4.53(10) |
| Sangrur | 11.15(3) | 5.43(2) | 5.46(8) |
| Patiala | 9.91(4) | 2.50(8) | 5.66(7) |

Source: Tables from R S Johar and P S Raikhy, "Agricultural Productivity in Punjab: An Analysis in Inter-District Variations" in *Studies in Punjab Economy*, R S Johar and J S Khanna (eds), Amritsar, Guru Nanak Dev University, 1983, p 43.
Excerpted from *The Political Economy of Punjab* by Hamish Telford, p 978.

Note: Faridkot District was formed in 1972 and is thus omitted.

## Table 8
### Estimated Gross Farm Income in Punjab, 1978-79 (State ranking of district in brackets)

| District | Value Productivity (Rupees/Hectare) | Av. Farm Size (Hectares) | Farm Income (Rupees) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ludhiana | 5,135 (1) | 3.15 | 16,175 (2) |
| Patiala | 4,721 (2) | 4.20 | 19,828 (1) |
| Jullundur | 4,494 (3) | 2.36 | 10,461 (7) |
| Gurdaspur | 4,021 (4) | 2.13 | 8,565 (8) |
| | | | |
| Amritsar | 3,962 (5) | 2.11 | 8,359 (9) |
| Sangrur | 3,905 (6) | 4.10 | 16,012 (3) |
| Ropar | 3,730 (7) | 2.12 | 7,907 (10) |
| Ferozepur | 3,698 (8) | 3.13 | 11,575 (5) |
| | | | |
| Kapurthala | 3,513 (9) | 2.16 | 7,587 (11) |
| Faridkot | 3,280 (10) | 3.51 | 11,514 (6) |
| Hoshiarpur | 2,972 (11) | 1.81 | 5,379 (12) |
| Bhatinda | 2,670 (12) | 4.53 | 12,094 (4) |

Source: S S Grewal and P S Rangi, "Imbalances in Growth of Punjab Agriculture" in *Studies in Punjab Economy*, Johar and Khanna (eds), p 64.
Excerpted from *The Political Economy of Punjab* by Hamish Telford, p 979.

## Industrial Backwardness

After the partition the core industrial sector was inherited by Pakistan. More so when the creation of Punjabi Suba division was effected in 1966, the robust industrial complex around Delhi went to Haryana and mineral and forest resources to Himachal Pradesh.

The large-scale industries suffer from a number of anomalies particularly in the background of Punjab's sound and resilient agricultural performance. Punjab accounts for 17% of India's cotton production but has only 6.6% of the looms and 1.3% of the spindles; it produces 3.63% of India's sugar cane, yet produces only 1.3% of India's sugar. Similarly Punjab consumes about 13% of the annual national fertiliser consumption whereas it hardly produces 5% and the state owns 23.9% of India's tractors whereas its tractor and trailer production capacity does not exceed 8%. [Telford, p 980, Alam, p 85] The industrial structure of Punjab continues to be at a very early stage of development where most industrial units are small in terms of production, employment of capital and labour. In terms of the structure also it is characterised by an overwhelming preponderance of small industries without much product diversification. Equally noteworthy has been the lopsided spread – over of these industries with a large concentration in three districts, namely, Ludhiana, Jalandhar and Amritsar. From 1961 to 1971, the share of manufacturing in the total state income has shown a slight increase from 10.12 to 11.00%, but the proportion of male workforce engaged in manufacturing has actually declined from 15.60 to 11.30%. This is contrary to what took place in agriculture. There is no basic change in this situation since then.

The Sikhs in general refuse to accept the official argument that it would be an act of foolhardiness to make huge investments in a border State like Punjab both because of the poor mineral resource base and border sensitivity. Instead they consistently maintain that Punjab was being bled white because of the Centre's refusal to grant licenses for setting up big industrial units in the State. This centralisation of State power in India under the big bourgeoisie [Alam, p 85] leadership has resulted into the export to other states of nearly 70% of its cotton and about 60% of its molasses only to be imported back as some value added.

Table 9
Advance-Deposit Ratio in Selected States in India
(Year ending in December)

| State | 1972 | 1975 | 1978 | 1979 | 1980* | 1981* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Haryana | 51.1 | 62.6 | 61.4 | 70.9 | 70.4 | 72.3 |
| Punjab | 33.2 | 38.1 | 37.0 | 42.1 | 42.3 | 45.9 |
| Delhi | 53.3 | 92.7 | 117.5 | 108.5 | 81.0 | 80.0 |
| Bengal | 76.0 | 72.9 | 63.5 | 64.4 | 61.4 | 55.6 |
| Gujarat | 57.4 | 61.0 | 50.4 | 53.7 | 57.5 | 54.7 |
| Maharashtra | 83.5 | 86.0 | 72.5 | 76.1 | 79.1 | 80.5 |
| Tamil Nadu | 110.1 | 109.1 | 94.2 | 86.9 | 94.7 | 91.9 |
| India | 67.2 | 73.5 | 69.9 | 68.9 | 66.9 | 66.8 |

Sources: Calculated from RBI, *Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India*, various issues.
* Provisional
Excerpted from *Punjab Today* [Sucha Singh Gill, p 114]

The real reasons of industrial backwardness of Punjab, necessarily, lie elsewhere. Scholars attribute this to certain inherent reasons rooted in the social and economic

structure of the Punjabi society including lack of industrial entrepreneurship and managerial talent that are manifested in the sociology of predominant peasant culture of Punjab. This historically inherited disjunction between industry and agriculture along with the low labour productivity in the modern manufacturing sector (which is about 77% of productivity in agriculture) and the conscious policy of the Indian state to encourage only a marginal presence of the public sector enterprises in Punjab are attributed to this backwardness.

As a result of industrial stagnation there has been a massive siphoning away of the domestic resources to other states. It is estimated that out of Rs 360 crore bank deposits per annum, on an average, for the last two decades, Rs 250 crore are used outside Punjab. [Singh, 1982, p 41] Table 9 indicates as how low has been the advance-deposit ratio in Punjab as compared to other states.

*Impact of Labour Migration*

The Green Revolution also led to a heavy influx of cheap migrating labour force (mainly from UP, Bihar and Rajasthan) into agriculture, adversely affected the already limited employment opportunities in Punjab. Most of them settled down in Punjab during non-harvest and non-sowing seasons taking up petty jobs as rickshaw pulling, road and house-construction etc. They have acquired voting rights. The Jat Sikh landlords who in fact were responsible for bringing them started demanding de-enfranchisement of the Hindu labour-force from outside the State.

This labour force has also largely created a serious demographic imbalance in Punjab in communal terms. From 60% in 1971, the strength in the Sikhs population has reduced to 52% in 1981 whereas the Hindu population has shot up to 48% from around 40%. Consequently, in the electoral arithmetic it is the Akalis who are the losers. The fundamentalists and the extremists seek to capitalise on this hurt psyche of the Sikh community. [Singh, Gopal, in Grover, p 82]

## Prelude to the Upsurge of Secessionist Violence

The Akali agitation marred by tensions and violence had a direct bearing on the Punjab crisis. It widened the gulf between the two major Punjab communities – the Hindus and Sikhs – where the former started feeling more insecure and alienated. The confrontational action of the Akalis like recruitment of one lakh self sacrificing Sikhs was retaliated by the Hindu communal bodies like Hindu Sangathan and Hindu Suraksha Samiti by recruiting their own volunteers at Patiala, Jalandhar etc. As a matter of fact, the communal violence in Patiala and Jalandhar in 1983 summer was a direct fall out of this sordid recruitment. There are obvious linkages between the two.

One can cite examples galore of killings that were blatantly communal. The situation became so alarming that the Chief Minister Darbara Singh of Punjab, resigned and

the state was brought under President's rule with effect from 6 October 1983. The Punjab Disturbed Areas Ordinance, 1983 and the Chandigarh Disturbed Areas Ordinance, 1983 were promulgated on 7th October, 1983. The Armed Forces (Punjab and Chandigarh) Special Powers Ordinance, 1983 was promulgated on 15 October 1983. These Ordinances were later passed as Acts of Parliament.

*Emergence and Rise of Bhindranwale*

Initially, Bhindranwale was the leader of a small Sikh seminary (the Damdami Taksal since 1977) who later overran the hegemony of the Akali Dal, by exploiting both the Congress(I) and the Akali Dal and declared himself as the leader of the Sikh *Panth* (spiritual way). In a zeal to rejuvenate and distinguish Sikhism, Bhindranwale narrowed down traditional definition of Sikhism (*keshari* identity) to only those who take *amrit*, the baptismal nectar (the *amritdhari* identity). [Telford, p 974]

As Bhindranwale's message spread, it came to have two distinct political strands. He argued that the Sikhs were suffering from internal decline and external threat and drove home the point that the Hindus under the imperialist rulers of New Delhi are trying to enslave the Sikhs through atrocities. He argued that the Sikhs have never felt so humiliated, not even during the reign of the Moghul emperors and British colonialists. How long can the Sikhs tolerate injustice? He essentially said that the evil lay in the difference between the righteous and renegade of the Panth and wanted to revive an older tradition of armed fight that went very well with the archaic outfit of the revivalist movement. It also filled its adherents with the irrational zeal. It was this emotionally charged atmosphere that raised an obscure preacher into a charismatic figure. [Samata Era, pp 33-34]

He characterised the Delhi rulers as Brahminical Hindu communalists. He launched equally vicious attack on the Nirankaris, a sect of Sikhism calling them as heretical and criticising their affiliation with the Congress Party. The Baisakhi day (April 13, 1978) violent clash with the Nirankaris that killed at least sixteen Sikhs in Amritsar was precipitated by him. These incidents marked the beginning of the radicalisation of Sikh politics that swept through the Punjab in the 1980s and into the 1990s. [Telford, p 975]

After the cakewalk victory of Mrs Gandhi in the 1980 Lok Sabha election and its enormous electoral gains in Punjab (with Darbara Singh as its Chief Minister) chiefly at the expense of Akali Dal, there emerged a new kind of polarisation that took the political dynamics outside the purview of electoral politics. Bhindranwale with a large following of Sikh youths came into its centre stage. [Jacob, p 10] The Akalis made the unconditional release of Bhindranwale (arrested in September 1981) their first priority. After his release the Akalis had to accept him into their fold. Bhindranwale and the Akalis remained in an uneasy coalition for another year, but the alliance was nothing more than mutual exploitation. The armed struggle initiated by Bhindranwale and his student supporters was

designed not only to pressurise the government but also to undermine the Akali Dal. [Telford, p 971]

After that it was a meteoric rise for Bhindranwale as five major incidents/ events catapulted him to an enviable position.

i)   the killing of the Nirankari chief on April 24, 1980.
ii)  attacks on and killings of the Jalandhar based mass media
iii) shifting of the Bhindranwale group headquarters to the Golden Temple in Amritsar opening a parallel power centre.
iv)  emergence and functioning of other militant Sikh organisations like Khalistan National Council, Akhand Kirtani Jatha Dal Khalsa, Babbar Khalsa from within the Golden Temple.
v)   declaration of Dharam Yudh (holy war) against the government by Bhindranwale and the Akalis prompt follow up though with a different set of demands.

### The AISSF and Student Politics

Bhindranwale's well oiled nexus with the All India Sikh Students' Federation (AISSF) headed by Bhai Amrik Singh, another ambitious leader, soon made him the fulcrum of the contemporary Punjab crisis. So far the AISSF, formed in 1943 by the Akali Dal, worked as a frontal organisation of the latter mainly to bring the Sikh intelligentsia closer to the party. At the time of partition, it fought for an independent Sikh state, and when that failed it took up the Punjabi Suba cause. [Telford, p 981] The leaders of the AISSF have been well educated. And both for it and the Taksal the real backbones have been the sons and daughters of Punjab's middle and low-level peasantry and agricultural workers.

The AISSF's stand on Khalistan was identical to Bhindranwale's who maintained that:

> "I neither support Khalistan, nor am I against it. We want to stay with Hindustan, it is for the central government to decide whether they want us with them or not. This is the job of the Centre, not mine. Yes, if they give us Khalistan, we will take it. We won't make the mistake of 1947. We are not asking for it but we'll take it if they give it to us." [Telford, p 983]

Meanwhile other extremists organisations such as Dal Khalsa, Akhand Kirtani Jatha and National Council of Khalistan operating from within the Golden Temple Complex suddenly became very active. Some of them were banned on 1 May 1982, but started more openly campaigning for an independent Khalistan.

A symbiotic relationship between the agitation of the Akali Dal, the virulent communalism bred by extremism and the secessionist, 'largely' supported by external elements came into existence. And there emerged a definite pattern in the structure of

violence in Punjab. Top Hindu and Nirankari leaders, professionals and innocent bus passengers were killed in day light after separating them from other passengers in the same bus. A large number of extremists were also butchered in the encounters with police.

*Operation Bluestar*

The unprecedented orgy of violence in April and May 1984 left the Akali Dal unmoved. What really provoked the Centre was the announcement of another agitation to start on 3 June 1984 which included in it the prevention of the movement of food grains from Punjab to other States by force and non-payment of taxes and dues to the Government. This would have engulfed the whole State in lawlessness, violence and precipitate it to anarchy. The government had to act.

The most devastating blow to both the Akali Dal and Bhindranwale came from the Operation Bluestar when the Centre sent its armed forces for the first time to the Golden Temple to flush out the terrorists. This weeklong operation witnessed a heavy fighting in and around the temple where Bhindranwale and Amrik Singh were also killed along with a host of terrorists.

> The terrorists had converted the Golden Temple complex into a veritable fortress for mounting attacks on any para-military or military forces ...They had received extensive training in military operations and use of explosives and sophisticated weapons, installed their own communication systems and stored adequate quantities of foodgrains to last several months. Training had been provided by experienced ex-army personnel and battle plans had been drawn up with ingenuity, ....he terrorists were as well trained and well equipped as any regular force could be... A large quantity of weapons, ammunition and explosives was recovered, including automatic and anti-tank weapons. A small factory for the manufacture of hand grenades and sten guns was also found within the precincts of the Golden Temple. ...It was evident that weapons were craftily deployed and tried. For example, rifles and automatic weapons were used from the lockout positions sten machine carbines were the major weapons on the first and second defensive lines since ranges of more than 25 to 30 yards were rarely available around the main complex. [White Paper, pp 348-351]

Mrs Gandhi ordered the army to launch Operation Bluestar to end the perceived "terrorist" Khalistan threat. Martial law was imposed, hundreds (perhaps thousands) of Sikhs died, thousands were arrested, and civil liberties in the state were suspended. As a result, active armed resistance against the Indian state began for the first time in Sikh-centre relations. [Chima, pp 854-855] The task assigned to the Army was to check and control extremist, terrorist and communal violence in the State of Punjab and the Union Territory of Chandigarh, provide security to the people and restore normalcy. [White Paper, 1984]

The government played safe by deploying Rajput, Dogra, and Madras army companies and deliberately excluding the Sikhs from the operation. Only a couple of Sikh

Generals were given action command. Entire Punjab was completely cut off from the rest of the world. Indian and foreign journalists were expelled or confined to their hotel rooms and the only news filtering out was through rumours and government news bulletins. The exact number of casualties are unknown.

Expectedly this action brought forth applause to the Centre as people heaved a sigh of relief from the perpetuation of terrorist violence. On the other hand, there was a widespread condemnation particularly from the Sikh community. A major fall out of the Army action was the mutinies by the Sikh soldiers now known as "Sikh Mutiny" in at least five major camps like Ramgarh, Punjab Regimental Centre in Bihar (where they also killed their commandant and proceeded fully armed in army vehicles towards Amritsar), Ganganager in Rajasthan, Jammu, a camp on the outskirts of Bombay and Pune. They were unorganised and spontaneous. All these mutinies were brutally crushed by the army. [Jacob, p 22]

*Impact of Riots*

The assassination of Mrs Gandhi on 31 October 1984 and the subsequent riots led to a systematic institutionalisation of the migration of people and businesses from and towards Punjab. A large number of Sikhs outside Punjab, feeling extremely threatened for their life and property, started exploring the possibility of going back to Punjab. The political implication of this could be very serious in the long run as die-hard Sikh militants had always wanted Punjab to be converted into a pure Sikh area.

The two ordinances issued for amending the National Security Act in April and June 1984 (being Ordinance 5 of 1984 dated 5 April1984 and Ordinance 6 of 1984 dated 21 June 1984) and the Terrorist Affected Areas (Special Courts) Ordinance, being Ordinance 9 of 1984 dated 14 July 1984 have some seriously objectionable clauses. On top of these, the earlier laws restrictive of civil liberties like Special Powers (Press) Act 1956, the Chandigarh Disturbed Areas Act 1983, or the Armed Forces (Punjab and Chandigarh) Special Powers Act 1983 were still operative in Punjab and Chandigarh.[6]

*Punjab Accord: How Effective?*

The Operation succeeded only in terminating the first phase of the crisis. Two far more violent phases have followed thereafter. The second phase saw the assassination of Indira Gandhi and a failed peace process even with the Rajiv-Longowal Accord. This phase came to a definitive end in May 1988 with Operation Blackthunder, another army assault on the Golden Temple. The third phase saw an intensely serious Sikh secessionist movement with a staggering level of violence. The later part of this phase particularly after Congress came into power with Beant Singh as the Chief Minister in February 1992 (only 21.6% of the voters used their franchise and most of the parties boycotted it saying it to be an unfair poll) however, witnessed an unprecedented lull in the terrorist activities. Some observers

termed it as the wiping away of the militants in Punjab. This was contrary to what many believed – that because of the poor legitimacy of this new government the state would fall into deeper anarchy.

The Accord is an eleven-point agreement covering a wide variety of issues. If we do a content analysis of its provisions we would find that at least 5 out of 11 terms have nothing to do with the original charter of demands of the Akali Dal. They include i) compensation to innocent persons killed, ii) equality in army recruitment, iii) enquiry into November 1984 riots, iv) rehabilitation of those discharged from the army and v) disposal of pending cases. The other three deal with the outstanding Akali demands i.e. i) all-India Gurudwara Act, ii) representation of minorities and iii) promotion of Punjabi language. The remaining three terms pertain to the other three crucial issues of the Punjab problem viz., i) territorial claims where Chandigarh will go to Punjab, a Commission would be appointed to decide about the boundary disputes; ii) Centre-State relations and iii) sharing of river water which will be referred to a Tribunal.

Given the intricacies and complexities of the Punjab problem the Accord could never have been a matching answer. Besides the literal non-implementation of the Accord both in letter and spirit, it was not acceptable to the militants who actually ruled the roost mainly on the grounds of political legitimacy.

In fact after the Accord was signed Punjab witnessed more serious militant and political realignments like the split in Akali Dal, the formation of Panthic Committee, emergence of militant groups like the Khalistan Commando Force, Khalistan Liberation Force and Babbar Khalsa as important armed groups, growing overseas support from Sikhs settled abroad and the emergence of numerous splinter groups of militants. The most significant development during this period was probably the open declaration of Khalistan by the militants on which Bhindranwale and his followers had maintained an ambiguous stand.

Punjab witnessed the most violent movements in the post-independent India. The militants initially led by Bhindranwale turned into uncontrollable disparate groups after his death. Although most militants remain committed to the creation of Khalistan, the movement gradually lost much of its ideological coherence and moral purpose. Correspondingly, there has been a tremendous escalation of violence in Punjab-nearly 20,000 people have been killed in the last ten years. The movement related political instability and the subsequent economic sufferings attracted a staggering number of Sikh youths to militant activities. [Telford, p 986] Tables 10 and 11 show the extent of the human damage done by the armed struggle in Punjab.

Table 10
Killings in Punjab 1981-1993

| Persons killed by terrorists | 1981 | 1982 | 1983 | 1984 | 1985 | 1986 | 1987 | 1988 | 1989 | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hindus | 10 | 8 | 35 | 237 | 45 | 324 | 425 | 858 | 442 | 734 | 744 | -- | -- |
| Sikhs | 3 | 5 | 40 | 122 | 17 | 196 | 478 | 1044 | 734 | 1694 | 1874 | -- | -- |
| Total | 13 | 13 | 75 | 359 | 62 | 520 | 903 | 1949 | 1176 | 2437 | 2618 | 1519 | 46 |
| Policemen killed by terrorists | 2 | 2 | 20 | 20 | 8 | 42 | 95 | 110 | 152 | 493 | 496 | 251 | 23 |
| Terrorists killed | 14 | 7 | 13 | 77 | 2 | 78 | 328 | 373 | 699 | 1321 | 2177 | 2109 | 748 |
| Terrorists arrested | 84 | 178 | 296 | 1630 | 491 | 1581 | 3750 | 3882 | 2466 | 1759 | 1949 | 1473 | 898 |
| Encounters | 0 | 5 | 3 | 80 | 20 | 109 | 410 | 416 | 582 | 706 | 1282 | 1389 | 527 |

Sources: V N Narayanan, *Tryst With Terror: Punjab's Turbulent Decade*, New Delhi, Ajanta Books International.

Table 11
Militants' Life Span

| Name | Militant Outfit | Date on which came to Public Notice | Date of Death, Capture/Escape | Militancy Life Span Years-Months |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gurbachan Manochahal | Chief, Panthic Committee | April 1986 | Feb 1993 | 07-00 |
| Wassan Singh Zafarwal | Panthic Committee | April 1986 | Out of country | 00-00 |
| Aroor Singh | Panthic Committee | April 1986 | Oct 1987 | 01-06 |
| Gurdev Singh | Panthic Committee | April 1986 | Oct 1987 | 01-06 |
| Sukhdeve Singh Babbar | Chief, Babbar Khalsa | June 1984 | Aug 1992 | 08-00 |
| Sukhdev Singh 'Sukha Sipahi' | Chief, KCF | 1987 | July 1988 | 01-00 |
| Gurjant Singh | Chief, KLF | 1987 | Aug 1992 | 04-06 |
| Bhudhsinghwala | Chief, Sakhira gang | 1985 | May 1986 | 01-00 |
| Sukhdev Singh Sakhira | Panthic Committee | April 1986 | Nov 1986 | 00-06 |
| Dhanna Singh | Chief, KCF | 1981 | June 1984 | 03-00 |
| Manbir Singh Chaheru | Lt. Gen. KCF | 1987 | July 1988 | 01-00 |
| Tarsem Kohar | Member, Mathura gang | 1984 | Hanged 1992 | 04-00 |
| Harjinder Singh Jinda | Member, Mathura gang | 1984 | Hanged 1992 | 04-00 |
| Sukhdev Singh Sukha | Chief, Mathura gang | 1984 | 1987 | 03-00 |
| Mathura Singh | Chief, Halwara gang | 1986 | May 1987 | 01-00 |
| Jamail Singh Halwara | Babbar Khalsa | May 1985 | Aug 1987 | 02-00 |
| Anokh Singh | Bhindranwale Tiger Force | 1986 | 1988 | 02-00 |
| Surjit Singh Penta | AISSF (G) | 1986 | May 1988 | 02-00 |
| Gurjit Singh | AISSF (Bitto) | 1986 | 1989 | 03-00 |
| Daljit Singh Bittoo | Babbar Khalsa | 1988 | 1991 | 02-00 |
| Avtar Singh 'Kauli' | Chief, Tat Khalsa, KLF | 1985 | Oct 1987 | 02-06 |
| Avtar Singh Brahma | Chief, KCF | 1987 | 1991 | 04-00 |

Sources: V N Narayanan, *Tryst With Terror: Punjab's Turbulent Decade*, New Delhi, Ajanta Books International.

The post Accord period also witnessed a solid move by the state administration to liquidate the militants. This was done by effectively handing over the affairs of the home department to Police chief, J F Riberio who was later succeeded by more virulent KPS Gill. One finds a sharp increase in the number of encounter killings and also the retaliations against the state offensive. The two major military operations further escalated the armed conflicts between the state forces and the militants. In the "Operation Mund" (an extensive combing operation in the marshy and bushy grassland stretch between Beas and Ravi in the border area with Pakistan) the para-military burned out the area in the name of destroying the suspected dens of militants and the "Operation Black Thunder" (May 1988, another security forces entry into Golden Temple complex) was conducted to flush out terrorists who had reoccupied the Temple complex.

In fact it is widely believed that the police harassment of innocent persons and excesses themselves have provided new recruits to the terrorists and their cause. It is found that in areas of police officials known for their repression and cruelty, support for terrorism has increased instead of decreasing, while the task of those speaking against terrorism has become more and more difficult. [Dogra, 1989]

Despite its inadequacies and shortcomings, however, the Punjab Accord was a timely measure which not only sought to find a peaceful solution to an extremely delicate situation within the liberal democratic framework, but also isolated the adventurist forces.

Bhindranwale and his supporters took Punjab politics out of the boundaries of parliamentary politics and, looking at the trend since then, it seemed highly improbable that it will ever come back into the ambit of constitutionalism. However in the last five years the rate at which Punjab has returned to normalcy has been simply amazing. Despite a complete lull in terrorist activities the Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh was assassinated right out side his Secretariat in 1995.

*A Foreign Hand*

The foreign hand behind the entire Punjab cauldron has been a much-debated issue. If the government and the media have pin-pointedly proved the presence of foreign elements in Punjab there have been equal rebuttal from some sections of the Sikhs and the foreign countries that invariably figure in the Punjab agitation. The government apprehended that Pakistan is bent upon the dismemberment of India. In her long interview given to the BBC immediately after the Operation Bluestar, Mrs Indira Gandhi, said

"now one specific thing that came out in our press and which was told by some young men who were misguided enough to try and leave that they were excited to do this by what they saw on the Pakistan TV... We are not saying it is a government plot. We are saying there are some external forces. I do not think anybody has used the word government... the CIA is active in a number of countries and there is no reason to think that it is not active here. But whether

it is involved in this or not, I do not think, I have not been specifically asked nor have said anything about it." [Samiuddin, Abida, 1985, pp 302-303]

The leftist leader M Farooqi was more emphatic when he said "our party has been continuously exposing the designs of US imperialists and the Zia military regime to aid and abet the separatists (to Khalistanis in this case). All the more reason that a political solution should have been evolved in time to counter the conspiracies of the imperialists and their henchmen." [Samiuddin, Abida, 1985, p 335]

The foreign hand issue could be examined from three indicative perspectives i) the quality and quantity of arms that have been in use in Punjab, the training given on the use of these arms outside India to the militants, ii) the organisational support the militants and other political parties received from abroad and iii) the moral and political support the activities of the agitationists commanded from abroad.

The capture of Chinese-made weapons was set up as inviolate proof to this assertion. Pakistan's political and military interests in Punjab were evident. Many sophisticated weapons came through Pakistan, meant for both the Sikh militants and also smugglers and hired murderers generally used by politicians, dacoits and feudal forces. [Jacob, p 11]

In a recent change in the strategy of the terrorists, there has been an increase in the smuggling of explosives-RDX in particular-into Punjab. The AK-series rifles are no longer smuggled in as large numbers as they were earlier. "The militants are relying more on explosives because it provides a lot more stealth" says O P Sharma, Punjab's Director General of Police.

The arms and ammunitions continue to flow – even after Rs 200 crore was invested on the first-ever border-fencing project – and is indicated by the recovery of 250 kg RDX by the Punjab and Haryana police in January 1996. The Babbar Khalsa alone, which claimed responsibility for assassinating Beant Singh, is estimated to have smuggled in over 150 kg of RDX. Police say that this is a part of a consignment of nearly five quintals of RDX that was smuggled into Punjab during 1995 by the International Sikh Youth Federation, Babbar Khalsa and Khalistan Commando Force. This is aimed at the efforts by badly mauled terrorist outfits to regroup and launch a fresh round of militancy. The role of narcotic smugglers have become more prominent in this arms import. [Vinayak, p 145]

The *India Today* report also made an interesting revelation, "interrogation of a Pakistani national, Sahib Mohi-ud-din – a smuggler turned gun-runner for the Punjab militants who was captured by the police revealed how during his seven gun-running trips to India in the past three years he had ferried consignments of narcotics and gold permitted by the ISI as a remuneration for smuggling weapons. According to him, the ISI is running a regular training centre for smugglers on how to negotiate obstacles during border crossing.

For every gun-running trip, he was given Rs 12,000 by the ISI handlers." [Vinayak, pp 145-147]

To escape the detection of their communication with their contacts in Pakistan, the Punjab militants now use multi-country dialling techniques. For instance, the message is delivered to Pakistan by calling up contacts in Moscow and Germany and that too using a coded message. [Vinayak, p 143]

The White Paper mentioned that

"several secessionist Sikh organisations are operating abroad. The chief among them which have raised the slogan of Khalistan or a separate Sikh state are the National Council of Khalistan (NCK), Dal Khalsa, Babbar Khalsa and Akhand Kirtan Jatha. The NCK headed by Dr. Jagjit Singh Chauhan is active in the UK, West Germany, Canada and the USA. The Dal Khalsa activities are mainly in UK and West Germany, while the Babbar Khalsa is operating largely from Vancouver in Canada...
Dr. Jagjit Singh Chauhan first raised the slogan of Khalistan at a press conference in London in September, 1971. On April 12, 1980, he announced the formation of National Council of Khalistan. The Dal Khalsa was originally established in India on April 13, 1978 with the avowed object of demanding an independent sovereign Sikh State. It appears to have been based on the ideas of the late Giani Bakshish Singh, a pro-Naxalite leader of Birmingham. The Dal Khalsa advocates use violence to achieve its objectives. According to it 'only terror will help us to achieve our target.'
The Akhand Kirtani Jatha started mainly as a religious group, but it extends support to other Sikh political and extremist organisations, particularly the Babbar Khalsa. It holds that the Sikhs would not be able to maintain their purity unless they achieved an independent State. It has branches in UK and Canada." [White Paper, pp 343-346]

The considerably huge Sikh settlements developed over the years in the United States, Britain, Canada and many South East Asian countries have led to a steady stream of remittance in hard cash from abroad. Several hundreds of crores of rupees flow into Punjab every year. In the absence of any significant industrial or tertiary activities in Punjab, this money has been predominantly used in conspicuous consumption of modern consumer goods or in speculative ventures. Of late illegal hawala transaction by the foreign-based militants as a means to finance terrorists in Punjab has also been found out. [*Hindustan Times*, 1996]

*Media: Role and Responses*

In fact there had been a very strong demand for serious action against the militants hide out in the Golden Temple complex by various national and regional media. In Punjab (mainly the Hind Samachar group of three dailies *Punjab Kasari, Hind Samachar, Jag Baniand* and the Veer Pratap of Virenders, both Arya Samajist leaders) steadily stepped up their clamouring for military intervention. At the national level the dailies like *Times of India* and *Indian*

*Express* demanded a military solution and started criticising Indira Gandhi and her government for having weak knees.[7]   Lala Jagat Narain the owner of the Hind Samachar Group and later his son Ramesh Chander were murdered, allegedly by Sikh extremists for their crusade against the Dal-Khalsa, Khalistan and Bhindranwale's anti-Nirankari campaign.

Equally damaging was the role of a section of the Punjabi press like the daily *Akali Patrika, Ajit* and other news magazines like *Sant Sipali* which published highly inflammatory and communal news. They called the Hindu press as that of "Lalas" or "Mahashayas" with all derision. It is said that the Punjab press also fully 'co-operated' with the Government. The strict censorship imposed and restrictions on the movements of journalists in Punjab took care of whatever little dissent or disobedience was left.  The newspapers of Jalandhar were not allowed to be published for several days.  So complete was the 'co-operation' that the pressmen did not protest even against the curbs on their basic right to investigate and report.

For the state run media like television and radio to serve the narrow sectarian interests of the ruling party, irrespective of the social and political costs involved, has been an old story in India and nothing astounding. This is what exactly happened in Punjab.  The All India Radio and Television withheld the news of Indira Gandhi's death for a couple of hours though the news had already travelled to different parts of the country through other means like telephones and other foreign media.  When they finally relayed the news it was done in such a way that the entire Sikh community was held responsible for the murder.  Crowds screaming "blood for blood" were repeatedly shown on the screen and the fact that two Sikhs killed her was again and again emphasised.  TV and radio were assiduously preparing the background for the impending bloodbath.  [Jacob, p 23]

The Punjab imbroglio also exposed the skin-deep secularism of some media agents in India which saw a Khalistani in every Sikh.  The media projected Akali movement as a communal, chauvinist, parochial, separatist and terrorist movement thereby failing to distinguish between the main stream of Akali Dal and the extremist stream of Bhindranwale. In other words, the Akali Dal perspectives did not find a place in the media. The demands contained in the ASR were rarely discussed and debated. Instead undue prominence was given to self-styled leaders such as Bhindranwale and Jagjit Singh Chauhan who had little following in the beginning.

On the other hand the media would hardly reveal to the nation the frequent violations by the government machinery, constitutional guarantees of fundamental rights of the people and acts of 'state terrorism' perpetrated by the police, and other central para-military forces like CRPF, the BSF and later the Army. It is aptly remarked that:

"people have lost confidence in reliability of the official media. It was first said that Akal Takht was not damaged. Then they claimed it was slightly damaged. While in fact, it is damaged to such an extent that Baba Santa Singh who undertook Kar Seva at the behest of the Government suggested to demolish it

totally and rebuild it afresh. Similarly, it was said that no damage was done to Harmandir Sahib, and the Indian army men avoided firing on it... The truth is that, according to the report of the chief engineer of the Public Works Department, there are 259 bullet marks on Harmandir Sahib alone." [Samata Era, p 57]

A massive campaign was launched in the media against those who protested against the Army action. They were abused, ridiculed and termed as 'traitors.' At one time it looked as if there is no place for any dissent in our 'national press' and every newspaper has become a mouthpiece of the Congress (I) Government." [Samata Era, p 57] Jacob makes a pertinent remark when he states that

"Punjab is a classic illustration of this role of the media. Concealing the objective reasons behind the turmoil there, the big media right from the beginning embarked on a systematic programme of distortions and vilifications. This they tried through subtle and direct misinformation constantly pumped into the public mind. They propagated that in Punjab the Sikhs are bent upon exterminating the Hindus, while the actuality was far different. The plan was obviously to create hatred towards the Sikhs by the people of other States. The indifference shown by the people in other areas when thousands of Sikhs were butchered after the killing of Mrs Gandhi owed in no small measure to this gross distortion by the media. The media in general ably collaborated with the schemes of the ruling party at that time to communalise the issues and thereby corner the Hindu votes. [Jacob, p 41]

## Notes

1. The word Akali (immortal) was first used by Guru Gobind Singh for those of his followers who were known for their sacrifice, fanatical temperament, purity of character and sincerity of conviction. They were also known as Nihangs (dragons) and commanded great respect from the Sikh community.

2. For the Sikhs, Gurudwara by tradition, is both a temple and a social centre for the entire community from where the political power largely emanates. This is more so as it also controls the social, cultural and educational institutions of the Sikhs.

3. The *Dharam Yudh* passed through many phases – "Nahar Roko," 8 April 1982 (stop digging Sutlej-Yamuna-link canal agitation), "Rasta Roko," 4 April 1983 (stop transport agitation), "Rail Roko," 17 June 1983 (stop train agitation) and the "Kam Roko" 29 August 1983 (stop work agitation).

4. H S Longowal declared on 12 October 1982, "that the Sikhs have no designs to get away from India in any manner. What they simply want is that they should be allowed to live within India as Sikhs, free from all direct and indirect interference and tampering with their religious way of life. Undoubtedly the Sikhs have the same nationality as other Indians." Quoted by A G Noorani, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 2 July 1984. Some other phrases misunderstood are: 'Raj Karega Khalsa,' it means that pure and honest persons will rule, and that not only Sikhs will rule' 'Khalsa Da Bolbala' similarly means that truth will prevail (something like *Satyameva Jayate*). [Samata Era, pp 19-20]

5. Size of operational holdings were defined as: class 1 (.10 to 2.49 acres), 2 (2.50 to 4.99 acres), 3 (5 to 7.49 acres), 4 (7.50 to 12.49 acres), 5 (12.50 to 24.99 acres), and 6 (25 or more acres).

6.  Under the National Security (Amendment) Ordinance a detenue arrested under a law of preventive detention finds it virtually impossible to challenge his detention by filing a Habeaus Corpus. A detenue covered by the amendment will undergo imprisonment for a period of nearly 6 months even if he is eventually found by the Advisory Board to be entirely unjustified.

7.  The then Information and Broadcasting Minister H K L Bhagat had called all editors of Delhi newspapers individually one month prior to the Army action to seek assurance if they would support the Government if a 'strong action' was taken. And support came overwhelmingly. The Army action was hailed by almost every important newspaper in India. Many of them wrote front-page editorials congratulating the Prime Minister and saluting the Indian Army for its 'successful' operation. For the first time, newspaper organisations and fora such as All India Newspaper Editors' Conference and Press Club of India, which generally keep their concern limited to the issues related to the press, came out with statements supporting the Government action. None of them bothered to question the wisdom and necessity of the Army action and to ponder over the serious repercussions it will have for the future of the nation. [Jacob, pp 51-52]

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# Stable Crisis: Kashmir, India, and Pakistan

## Rasul Bakhsh Rais

No other regional dispute appears to be so complex, stubborn, and emotionally charged than the Kashmir problem. Even the changing international environment at the end of the cold war and a general climate of international reconciliation do not lend any hope that this long festering wound of British colonial legacy would heal up any soon. Rather, there is a danger that the present low intensity conflict in Jammu and Kashmir may escalate the level of tensions which are already high between India and Pakistan, strengthen ethnicity in the region and influence the politics of extremist religious groups both in India and Pakistan. The two countries have gone to war three times, twice over Jammu and Kashmir (1948 and 1965), and one cannot rule out another military showdown, despite a policy of calculated restraint on both sides of the border. Insurgencies fuelled by clashing national aspirations and spirals of violence ultimately defy logic and rationality. They generate their own momentum in which even the most powerful of the policy-makers lose control over events.[1] I am not predicting another war between India and Pakistan, but pointing out to the dangers inherent in the current phase of conflict in Kashmir.[2]

Why does Kashmir invoke so much hostility between India and Pakistan? Is it a bilateral dispute between the two countries? What role does religion play in defining the perceptions and policies of each party to the dispute? Where do the people of Jammu and Kashmir themselves stand in the issue? Why has the issue been so resistant to a peaceful solution?

The article will address some of these questions in the light of historical evolution of the Kashmir problem and in the backdrop of current regional and global transformations. The Jammu and Kashmir problem has generated a stable crisis in the region because it is rooted in the animosities of partition of the British Indian Empire, communal hatred and, most importantly, influenced by the politics of national identities. The article will also argue that the ground reality in Jammu and Kashmir has changed drastically over the past seven years. The issue is no longer confined to the old debate of Indian secular nationalism or Pakistani Muslim nationalism. Although the politics and national aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir may be shaped by these two extremes of the subcontinent's historical divide, the Kashmiri ethnicity and self-assertion has gradually earned itself a place in the regional agenda.[3] This factor has gained greater attention of the intellectuals and policy analysts because of the ongoing uprising in Kashmir against the Indian forces. In the course of discussion, we will focus on three identities – Indian, Pakistani, and Kashmiri – which generate three divergent interpretations of history and policy prescriptions. Before examining their positions and perspectives, it would be necessary to briefly trace the origin of the Kashmir issue.

## Origins of the Dispute

Jammu and Kashmir was one of the 584 princely states which, under the Partition arrangements worked out in 1947 had only the options of joining either India or Pakistan.[4] In opting for either of the two, the rulers of the princely states were advised to keep in mind the factors of geographical proximity and communal makeup of the population. Three of the princely states – Kashmir, Hyderabad and Junagadh – faced a difficulty in quickly deciding which side to opt for. Hyderabad and Junagadh had Muslim rulers, but their populations were predominantly Hindu, and the states happened to be within the boundaries of the new Indian states. Junagadh decided to accede to Pakistan, while Hyderabad wished to declare independence. They could not escape the new geopolitical reality. India quickly absorbed these states into the Union by using force.

Kashmir was a different case altogether. Its population was predominantly Muslim but its ruler was a Hindu. All communication links of Kashmir were with those areas which became part of the new state of Pakistan. Moreover, economically and culturally, the large majority of Kashmiris were closer to Pakistan than to India. Maharaja Hari Singh faced three complex considerations.

a)  Accession to Pakistan was never on his cards because his Dogra Hindu community of the Jammu region would feel unhappy, insecure and uncertain about their future in Pakistan – a nation state demanded and earned in the name of Islam.

b)  Joining India posed a danger of civil unrest because most of the Muslims of Kashmir would resent any such unilateral decision without ascertaining their wishes. The Maharaja had been facing a popular movement for liberation of the State from his autocratic rule since the mid-1930s. He feared that any quick decision to tie the future of Kashmir with India would further fuel the anger of his Muslim subjects and could lead to his overthrow.

c)  To claim for Kashmir the status of an independent nation. In this, his difficulty was that none of the groups involved in the partition of the *raj* – Britain, India and Pakistan – was inclined to permit the Maharaja to opt for an independent Kashmir.

A memory of repression and brooding resentment in the wake of delaying tactics on the issue of accession to Pakistan further fuelled the sentiments of the Kashmiri Muslims against his rule. Their political agitation in the fall of 1947 paralysed Maharaja's administration and totally crippled his ability to exercise any authority. The crisis was aggravated by the entry of the Pathan tribesmen from the Frontier Province. Apparently, they wanted to wage a *jehad* (holy war) against the Maharaja of Kashmir to liberate the fellow Muslims from his tyrannical rule. But this was largely in response to India's pressures on the Maharaja to accede to India.[5] Not organised, and never under any unified command structure or discipline, the tribal invader injected a new element into the Kashmir situation. Although they, along with the local population, succeeded in forcing the Maharaja to flee Srinagar, they failed to maintain their control over the capital.[6]

As the Maharaja faced an imminent danger to his rule, he approached India to defend the state against Pakistan-sponsored invasion. India was eager to extend its security umbrella to Kashmir but on its own terms – only after the Maharaja signed the instrument of accession with New Delhi. Whether or not the Maharaja actually signed the instrument of accession, the pace of events around Srinagar was such in October 1947 that Indian forces began landing well before any, if any, legal formalities were completed.[7] The question remains: did the Maharaja sign the instrument of accession? If he did, could he do so ignoring the wishes of the people of Kashmir? Could he so flagrantly ignore the two principles, geographical proximity and communal composition of the population, in deciding to accede to India? Leaving aside such question, it is a fact that the ambiguities of the instrument of accession, motives of the Maharaja as well as those of the Indian leaders, and the convoluted logic that a ruler embodied the general will of the population continue to influence behaviour of all the parties in this conflict?

## India: Secular Nationalism

India made two important moves on Kashmir: one military and the other diplomatic, between October and December 1947. It sent its forces to Kashmir to suppress internal unrest and secure the state from the tribal invasion from Pakistan. It succeeded in ending the resistance in the Valley and establishing a firm control over Srinagar. Meantime, India decided to file a complaint against Pakistan in the United Nations Security Council under Articles 34 and 35 of Chapter 6 "Pacific Settlement of Dispute" of the UN Charter.[8] India pleaded its case on the basis of legality of accession, while Pakistan challenged the same as a violation of popular wishes of the people of Kashmir.[9] The Security Council resolutions of April 21, 1948, August 13, 1948 and January 5, 1949 have defined the UN position on the issue. The essential elements of the UN proposed solution are: the withdrawal of forces, the holding of a plebiscite and the setting up of an interim government in Kashmir.[10]

The Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru himself repeatedly promised that the people of Kashmir would be allowed to exercise their right of self-determination. He said: "We have declared that the fate of Kashmir is ultimately to be decided by the people. The pledge we have given, and the Maharaja supported it, is not only to the people of Kashmir but to the world. We will not and cannot back off it. We are prepared, when peace and law and order have been established, to have a referendum held under international auspices like the United Nations. We want it to be fair and just reference to the people, and we shall accept that verdict. I can imagine no fairer and juster offer."[11]

India continued to insist that Pakistan had no *locus standi* in the matter, and that it had to vacate the areas it had occupied. While India recognised a special status for Kashmir, it was determined not to allow the State go Pakistan's way. It was not willing to accept the logic of Muslim nationalism extended to Kashmir.

Nehru had a unique advantage: Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, a charismatic Kashmiri leader and head of the National Conference, was his close friend, and ideologically closer to Indian secular nationalism than to the concept of Muslim nationalism.[12] Abdullah was a

Kashmiri nationalist, liberal in political outlook and secular in orientation. He was never attracted by the strong wave of Muslim nationalism in India and the demand for a separate homeland for the Muslims. He was able to keep his party at least neutral in the Congress-Muslim League political struggle. He recognised the unique character of Kashmir as a multi-cultural and multi-religious entity, much in the image of larger India. Instead of joining either of the two mainstream movements towards two distinct nationhoods, Sheikh Abdullah preferred to confine his political work to Kashmir. The general sentiments of all Kashmiris in the pre-partition days were in favour of an independent, self-governing Kashmir, a desire which Abdullah retained. However, compelled by objective realities of the situation, he made compromises with India, quite often vacillating and appearing indecisive about the future of Kashmir.[13]

There could be no better alternative to Abdullah in the political and military chaos that India faced in Kashmir after sending its forces there. One of the first conditions that the Maharaja had to accept as a part of his deal with India was to release Sheikh Abdullah and make him the Prime Minister of Kashmir. No wonder then that at his release and after assuming the office of the Prime Minister Abdullah echoed India's line on Kashmir. He condemned Pakistan's "invasion in Kashmir" in the Security Council and demanded that it should vacate the occupied territories.[14] In the early phase, Kashmir's relationship with India symbolised and mirrored the personal friendship between Abdullah and Nehru. While pledging to a plebiscite in Kashmir, Nehru believed that the Kashmiris would accede to India. He thought that Abdullah, with a much larger following than any other Kashmiri political leader, could be persuaded to throw his weight in favour of a union with India. On the other hand, Abdullah preferred independence but with some arrangement with India in matters of security or, if possible, a confederation of India, Pakistan and Kashmir.[15] However, due to Abdullah's vacillating attitude and compromises on critical junctures, his position on the issue has remained controversial.

## Forced Union

Under the Instrument of Accession, the Jammu and Kashmir State was not bound "in any way to acceptance of any future Constitution of India."[16] Therefore, India had to negotiate with Kashmiri leaders the terms of future constitutional relationship. The Instrument of Accession restricted Kashmir's association with India only to defence, foreign affairs and communications. In May 1949, Nehru, while discussing Kashmir-specific provisions of the constitution with Abdullah, reconfirmed that "it will be for the Constituent Assembly of the State, when convened, to determine in respect of what other subjects the State may accede, not the State government, still less the Government of India."[17]

An agreement on the draft of constitutional provisions, later incorporated in the Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, was reached between the Indian and Kashmiri leaders. This was to guarantee autonomy to Kashmir. But the vital aspects of these provisions were altered unilaterally by the Indians when the Article 370 was finally adopted. Sheikh Abdullah and many other Kashmiri leaders resented this move and their distrust of the Indians began to grow stronger. Even the Article 370 was mentioned as a temporary provision in the

Constitution. Sheikh Abdullah's interpretation was that this Article could not be abrogated, modified or replaced unilaterally. The temporary nature of the Article itself vested the power to finalise constitutional relationship between Kashmir and the Union of India in the Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly.

The Indian Constitution has restricted powers of the Union government to the terms of the Instrument of Accession, but these may be extended to other matters "with the concurrence of the Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly."[18] Abdullah was adamant at making the Kashmir Constituent Assembly a sovereign body, constitutionally capable of resisting forced integration. At times, he felt gravely frustrated over the attitudes of the Indian leaders who demanded closer integration which most of the Kashmiris thought was undesirable. Finding Abdullah too nationalistic, Nehru told him, "Sheikh Saheb, if you do not stand with us shoulder to shoulder, we shall cast a chain of gold around your neck."[19] To which he replied, "But don't do that or else you may wash your hands off Kashmir."

Around 1953, while Abdullah was still the Prime Minister, he began to talk of independence for Kashmir. He questioned as to how long India would remain a secular entity and tolerant of the special status granted to Kashmir. His strong Kashmiri nationalism seemingly revisited him at a time when he was facing dissent within his own party and some opposition from Hindu groups in the Jammu area which were demanding full integration of the State with the Indian Union.[20] He made two moves in this direction, which offended Nehru. First, he began exploring avenues, with the help of foreign diplomats, particularly British and American, as to how they could help Kashmir become independent. Second, he constituted a committee in the Constituent Assembly to consider ways and means of seeking independence. His open pronouncements and personal correspondence with Nehru also demonstrated his independence mindset.[21] This became a departing point between Abdullah and Nehru – long-time friends and political allies. Nehru was also facing considerable criticism at home about granting a special status to Kashmir, and some of the Hindu nationalist groups had become too noisy. Personally, Nehru could not accept secession of Kashmir, which, in his view, was an integral part of Mother India.[22]

For Nehru, national interests of India came before any personal relationships. Fearing damage to the Indian position in Kashmir if Abdullah was allowed to stay in his prime ministerial position, he ordered his arrest and replacement by a compliant person, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad. Bakshi proved the opposite of what Abdullah was. He strongly supported Kashmir's closer integration with India.

The decision of the Kashmir Constituent Assembly in 1953 raises more questions than it resolves the issue of the future status of Kashmir. How representative was the Assembly? Could an "elected" Assembly substitute for a general plebiscite? Was the Assembly given any such mandate? Were the actions of the Central Government of India valid in removing a prime minister who commanded the majority in the Assembly? All the members of the Kashmir Constituent Assembly, except two, had been elected unopposed.[23] The political groups opposed to the National Conference were disqualified or they had

boycotted the elections because of pre-poll rigging tactics of the government. This makes the representative character of the Assembly highly doubtful.

India's public posture on Kashmir began to change in 1953. Nehru, who himself had enthusiastically supported a plebiscite, reversed his position. He declared "Kashmir is symbolic as it illustrates that we are a secular state ...if we disposed of Kashmir on the basis of the two-nation theory, obviously millions of people in India and millions in East Pakistan will be powerfully affected. Many of the wounds that had healed might open out again."[24] A number of factors influenced this change in India's position: a) Relationship of trust between Abdullah and the Indian leaders had disappeared, b) Nehru's own policymaking group – which thought that a pledge of plebiscite by Nehru was not necessary – pressed him hard to change his attitude, c) the Hindu nationalist elements in Jammu and India demanded integration of Kashmir with India, d) Nehru was disappointed over the stance of the Western powers that had aligned with Pakistan, e) The setting in of the cold war affected a fundamental change in the position of the Soviet Union on the Kashmir issue, because of Pakistan's policy of alignment with the US, the Soviet Union began to support the Indian position on the ground that, after the resolution of the Kashmir Assembly, the issue was not relevant to the UN Security Council. The real reason behind India's going back on its pledge to hold a plebiscite was that it "...was no more confident of winning it."[25]

Nehru's *volta face* on Kashmir reflected his deep conviction that the Two Nation Theory was wrong, and that the application of the same "...to Kashmir will have disastrous consequences in the whole of India. Not only will our secularism end, but India will tend to break up."[26] In his view, Kashmir was rather a symbol of Indian secularism where a Muslim majority was "willing" to live within the Indian Union. The international factors mentioned before – particularly the British and the American support to Pakistan – though extended under the calculations of a Soviet threat, influenced Nehru's "new" Kashmir policy. To him, Kashmir's accession was final, and the issue was not negotiable since it pertained to India's "domestic" affairs.

The domestic political scene in Kashmir changed when, in 1963, Bakshi was removed from the office of the Prime Minister. Bakshi was helpful to India in securing Kashmir's accession. But he failed totally in maintaining any support for the same among the people. Using the authority of the Article 370, he turned autocratic and repressive. He lacked any legitimacy after rigging the 1963 elections. His removal gave Nehru another opportunity to bring back Sheikh Abdullah. On Nehru's instruction, the conspiracy case against Abdullah was withdrawn, and he was released in January 1964. Abdullah was bitter and quite unyielding on the issue of independence of Kashmir in his negotiations with Nehru. Contrary to the expectations of Nehru, Abdullah argued that Article 370 was not irrevocable, and, since it was a temporary provision in the constitution, any change in it would be subject to ratification by the Kashmir Assembly.[27] He softened his position on independence only when Pakistan was dismembered in 1971. He realised that no external power could support him enough to get an independent status for his State. But Abdullah's compromise with India on the question of independence was more personal than an indication of a popular wish. Prolonged

imprisonment and the realisation of the fact that India will not quit Kashmir had a sobering effect on him. But there were others who were willing to take up the issue when he caved in.

## Uncertain Course

Abdullah's death in 1982 removed the most important element from India's Kashmir policy. India committed a series of blunders in handling political events in Kashmir in the 1980s. These include the formation of a coalition between the National Conference and the Congress,[28] the Congress's bid to capture political power, the chipping away of the Article 370 though constitutional amendments, and, most importantly, the rigging of successive elections. The National Conference lost its political influence and legitimacy after it rigged the 1987 elections.[29] The present uprising has its origins in the electoral fraud of that year. Even most of the moderate elements who had challenged the high-handedness of the National Conference and Congress realised that the existing political order was bankrupt, always manipulated by the central government, and quite inadequate to fulfil their legitimate political aspirations.

For the past nine years, Muslim militant groups have been fighting a guerrilla war against the Indian forces. The atrocities, torture, and the destruction of life and property by the Indian forces are all well-documented by the Amnesty International and other foreign and Indian human rights groups.[30] Kashmiri groups claim that Indians have killed over 50,000 Kashmiris.[31] On the other hand, India claims that it is fighting terrorism sponsored by foreign elements. In civil wars inspired by ethnicity and conflicting nationalism, truth becomes the first casualty.

The Kashmir insurgency is an indigenous phenomenon and rooted in the mishandling of Kashmir politics by the Indian government.[32] External elements like Pakistan are peripheral and secondary to the entire process of conflict. The Kashmir uprising that has continued unabated and the Indian military action at a vast scale lead to the conclusion that:

a)   Kashmir remains an unsettled issue;
b)   Each party to the conflict is attempting to force a unilateral solution rather than to explore some realistic options.
c)   Attitudes of the parties to the conflict have become more hostile in the process of conflict.

India sees the aims of the Kashmiri resistance in direct conflict with its fundamental interests of national integrity, secular ideology and communal harmony.[33] These three concerns have guided India's Kashmir policy for almost five decades. It argues that allowing Kashmir to secede through an armed struggle, or even agreeing to conduct a plebiscite will unravel the Indian federation which comprises so many diverse religious, ethnic and linguistic groups. It fears that another partition of India will generate a backlash against one hundred million Muslims who live in India, energise Hindu nationalist elements and, eventually, undermine the ideological foundation of India. Even if one ignores the logic of India's position on Kashmir, it has the power to suppress any local resistance.

The uprising, however, has regenerated a policy debate over Kashmir in the Indian political circles. Three views are quite prominent among the Indian leaders. The Hindu nationalist groups would like India to pursue complete and full integration of Kashmir with the rest of India by doing away with Article 370 of the Constitution. They see the Kashmiri uprising primarily in the light of Islamic militancy and use this argument to incite the nationalist sentiments of their Hindu followers. They also point their finger at Pakistan for the trouble in Kashmir and suggest that Islamabad must be taught a lesson.[34] The leaders of the mainstream Congress party, who are responsible for the current crisis, would like to see a solution through a carrot – and – stick policy. They have tried to co-opt some Kashmiri leaders to negotiate a deal essentially within the parameters of the present constitutional arrangements. They seem willing to grant economic concessions, political power and better guarantees of autonomy. In pursuing this strategy, the Indian government held elections in September 1996 for the Kashmir Assembly after seven years of presidential rule. Although the mainstream Kashmiri nationalist alliance, the Hurriat Conference, boycotted the polls, and the turnout was far lower than it has been officially stated by the Indian authorities,[35] a political process has been restored. Farooq Abdullah's National Conference is once again in power. It seems India could not find any other credible leader in Kashmir to rely on and reach an understanding. Abdullah, who believes in a solution of the problem within the Indian Union, now demands greater autonomy for the State.

The more moderate elements in the intellectual and political circles of India think that perhaps restoration of Article 370 in the original form may address Kashmiri grievances and nudge them back to participate in the political process. All Indians seek a solution to the Kashmir problem essentially within the Indian Union, disregard Pakistan as a legitimate party, and argue that Nehru's promise of a plebiscite was irrational, impractical and never conceived in terms of secession of Kashmir from India.

## Pakistan

Pakistan considers the Kashmir dispute as unfinished agenda of the partition. The founders of Pakistan based their claim for a separate state for Muslims of the subcontinent on religion by asserting their unique civilisational characteristics, distinct ways of life and a divergent worldview. The underlying fear was that Muslims would remain a permanent minority in a democratic India dominated by Hindus. Religion as a social force, and its revival in the wave of liberal nationalism, had begun to redefine group identities long before partition. Failure to reach a political accord between the Congress and the Muslim League that would guarantee autonomy to areas of Muslim concentration and constitutional protection of their rights further strengthened the demand for Pakistan. The country was created primarily under the compulsions of minority fears, sense of Muslim identity and the geographical fact of two Muslim population blocs on the periphery of the main landmass of India.

From Pakistan's point of view, the principle of Muslim majority areas of the subcontinent forming its parts must have applied to Kashmir. Kashmir was contiguous, culturally closer to Pakistani regions, and economically integrated with western Punjab. Had there been a fair distribution of territories in Punjab strictly on the basis of the stated principle

of Muslim majority districts going to Pakistan, there would have been no border contact between India and Kashmir. Allocation of Gurdaspur, a Muslim majority district, to India by the Radcliff Boundary Award smacks of a conspiracy. It gave India a land bridge to Kashmir to influence future options of New Delhi.

Pakistan attempted to persuade the Maharaja that he acceded to Pakistan keeping in view the fact that the overwhelming majority of his subjects were Muslims. Pakistani leaders believed that, if the Kashmiris were allowed to choose between India and Pakistan, a substantial majority of them would have cast their lot with Pakistan. The tumultuous events of the summer of 1947 in India eventually inspired the much agitated people of Kashmir to liberate themselves from the Maharaja, who appeared indecisive on the question of accession. Feeling entirely left out in the partition plan, and suspecting that the Maharaja would maintain his widely despised rule by manoeuvring for independence or opting for India, some Muslim groups took up arms against him. The Muslim uprising started around Poonch, Mirpur and Muzaffarabad but quickly engulfed the entire Kashmir Valley.[36] The Maharaja responded by more repression and an indiscriminate use of the military, which forced some to seek refuge in adjoining Pakistan. The cycle of violence, mainly in the Muslim dominated areas, created the condition of a civil war. This crisis coming on the heels of an unprecedented transmigration of population along communal lines fuelled the passions of many in Pakistan to help Kashmiri Muslims against the high-handedness of the Maharaja.

But the volunteer groups of Pathan tribesmen, who began crossing into Kashmir in October 1947, were not entirely a private response. The official agencies of the Frontier province were involved in aiding the tribal fighters. The Government of Pakistan was obviously an interested party. But it was not sufficiently organised to arm and fund the tribesmen to fight with the Kashmiri Muslims to liberate the State. The government's public posture on the issue was different. Pakistan stated that it had nothing to do with the tribesmen, and that it wanted the Maharaja to respect the wishes of the people of Kashmir who wanted their State to accede to Pakistan. The tribesmen option worked militarily to the advantage of Pakistan in the initial phase. But, politically, it pushed the Maharaja decisively towards India.

Lord Mountbatten, still a Governor General of India, accepted the accession of Kashmir to India as requested by the Maharaja and recommended by the Indian Government declaring that the step was temporary and that the final decision on the question rested with the people of Kashmir.[37] The Indian government also made a similar pledge. Nehru, in one of his telegrams to the Pakistani prime minister Liaqat Ali Khan, said "our assurances that we shall withdraw our troops from Kashmir as soon as peace and order are restored and leave the decision about the future of the State to the people of the State is not merely a pledge to your government but also to the people of Kashmir and to the world".[38]

On the complaint filed by India on 1 January 1948, that Pakistan was assisting the invasion of Kashmir, the Security Council appointed the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP). The Commission was created in the light of the debate on Kashmir in the Security Council and its resolution which noted that "both India and Pakistan desire that the question of the accession of Jammu and Kashmir should be decided through the

democratic method of a free and impartial plebiscite." In August 1948, the UNCIP recommended that two steps were necessary before holding the plebiscite. First, Pakistan should "secure the withdrawal from the state of Jammu and Kashmir of tribesmen and Pakistani nationals not normally resident therein who have entered the state solely for the purpose of fighting." The second step was that after "the tribesmen and Pakistani nationals... have withdrawn... [the] Government of India [will] begin to withdraw the bulk of its forces from that state in stages agreed upon with the Commission. Once India and Pakistan completed their withdrawals, a plebiscite would be held."[39] The 13 August 1948 resolution has defined the UN position on the Kashmir issue. However, neither India nor Pakistan complied with the UN resolution. India insisted that Pakistan had to take out its troops first, while Pakistan argued that there was no guarantee India would pull back its forces from Kashmir. Their stubborn attitude produced a deadlock on the issue.

Holding of plebiscite has remained the bed-rock of Pakistani policy on Kashmir for the past thirty eight years. Many a times, it has raised the issue at the UN, insisting that the Security Council should implement its resolution. During the cold war years, the former Soviet Union exercised its veto to block any Security Council action. Western powers, though sympathetic to the Pakistani position, were also reluctant to force India to implement its plebiscite pledge.

Frustrated by the pro-India tilt of its allies and inaction of the Security Council, Pakistan's policy makers decided to launch a covert operation in Indian held Kashmir in 1965.[40] The purpose of this operation, code-named Gibraltar, was to incite a Kashmiri uprising against the Indian rule. The decision was influenced by the following perceptions: India was facing growing Kashmiri resentment against its rule in Kashmir; the Indian military morale was low after its war with China, and a significant number of forces were tied up along its Himalayan border; the military balance between India and Pakistan was anticipated to tilt in India's favour in the coming years; and aided by Pakistan, the Kashmiri uprising could revive the issue internationally and defreeze the situation in Kashmir.

Pakistani decision-makers didn't fully comprehend the consequences of "Operation Gibraltar." In a naive way, they discounted Indian military retaliation. The operation did not succeed much in generating unrest. Mentally and organisationally, the Kashmiris were not prepared to engage India in guerrilla warfare. Their level of discontentment was not as severe as in the 1990s. Had India faced widespread and persistent a resistance in 1965 as it has been facing for the past seven years, the Pakistani military infiltration might have created a dangerous situation for India.

The most disturbing result of the growing tension in Kashmir was the 1965 war which badly affected the economic and political stability of Pakistan. Pakistan found itself politically fragmented, as the consensus on domestic and foreign policy issues among the civil-military elites began to fall apart. India and Pakistan drifted farther apart, emerging more hostile from the fire of military clash than they were ever before. The war itself was a draw and a costly exercise by two of the world's poorest countries to settle a very complex problem by military means.[41] The restoration of lost military hardware and further

militrisation added to the economic difficulties, slowing down considerably the pace of social development.

With pent-up feelings, hostile attitudes and the willingness to take advantage of each other's domestic political difficulties, India and Pakistan went to war again in December 1971. Pakistan's failure to respect the electoral verdict of the 1970 general elections resulted in a civil war in East Pakistan. This offered India an opportunity to intervene militarily and dismember Pakistan. But the war was not confined to East Pakistan, it saw greater engagement of forces along the Kashmir, Punjab and Sindh borders.

Under the Simla Agreement, Pakistan was able to get back its territories with minor adjustment along the cease-fire line in Kashmir.[42] The Agreement did not influence the legal position of the parties on the Kashmir dispute. India has insisted that the Simla Agreement binds Pakistan to seeking a solution to the problem through bilateral negotiations. However, when they agree to hold talks, India tells Pakistan that Kashmir is its internal affair as the state is an integral part of India. The two countries, under the prodding of the United States and Britain, held six rounds of talks at the ministerial level, represented by Sardar Swaran Singh and Z A Bhutto in 1964, but the last word was, "Kashmir is not negotiable."[43] Pakistan has stuck to its old position that the Kashmir dispute has to be settled through a plebiscite in the light of the UN resolutions, and that it is willing to discuss, at the bilateral level, any aspect of the modalities with India to ascertain which country the Kashmiri people wanted to accede to.

The political scene in the Indian held Kashmir has changed fundamentally over the past nine years, as indicated earlier. India has consistently accused Pakistan of training Kashmiri militants and giving them money and arms; whereas, Pakistan insists that its support is moral and diplomatic, not material. There is general consensus in Pakistan that the Indian occupation of Kashmir is illegal, fraudulent and maintained by military means. All shades of political opinions have stressed the need to settle the Kashmir issue keeping in view the aspirations of the people of the State. The question is how to realise such an ambitious goal in the face of vast and superior Indian military power. In this regard, one may discern three distinct policy lines. The first is to keep the issue alive at all international fora by inviting the attention of the world community to the plight of Kashmir Muslims, focussing on human right violations by the Indian forces and exposing duplicity in Indian policy.[44] The world public opinion, in general, and pressure from the Middle Eastern Muslim countries, in particular, may bring about a change in the Indian policy on Kashmir, at least in the area of human rights. But no one in Pakistan believes that the world powers are really interested in solving this problem within the framework of plebiscite or forcing India to allow a political choice to the Kashmiri people outside its Union. Internationalisation of the Kashmir problem is, however, important, as it serves some other policy objectives. It throws light on the struggle of the Kashmiri people, explains to the world why relations between India and Pakistan are so bad, and sounds a warning that if the dispute is not resolved satisfactorily, the subcontinent may remain tense and volatile, fuelling the conventional arms race and development of nuclear weapons.

The Islamist groups have advocated giving full support to the Kashmiri *intifada*, since it is believed to be indigenous and quite widespread. A number of private groups have

emerged on the pattern of the Afghan *Jehad*. They collect funds, train young volunteers, and make concerted efforts to influence government policy in this direction.[45] These groups have linked up with militant resistant groups in the Indian held Kashmir that have Islamist orientations. Their assumption is that a low-intensity conflict aided by Muslim countries, spear-headed by Pakistan, will eventually prove to be costly for India and force it to settle the issue. They take it as their moral and religious duty to help the Kashmiris who are facing repression by the Indian forces. While arguing this case, the Islamist groups discount the risk of war between India and Pakistan. Some of them, if not restrained, would like to escalate the level of resistance in Kashmir by introducing much heavier and deadlier weapons against the Indian forces. Such elements seek their inspiration from Afghan resistance and Palestinian *intifada*. The privatisation of foreign policy, however, carries enormous risks for national security and poses a fundamental challenge to the Pakistani state. Even if there is a congruence of interests between the private groups and the government of Pakistan, this has to be kept within the confines of general strategic parameters.

Between the above two extremes, moderation and maintaining of *status quo* forms the third line of thinking on Kashmir. Some political elements and intellectuals have begun to see the Kashmir problem in the light of current and future economic costs, as the dispute is generally perceived to be the main cause of mounting defence expenditure.[46] Even the military establishment of Pakistan would like to keep the Kashmiri resistance at a manageable level so that it does not boil over into yet another war with India.[47]

Driven by rhetoric and power considerations, all political leaders have highly politicised the Kashmir issue. They compete with each other in showing greater loyalty to the Kashmir cause. The political polarisation in the country, minority governments and the influence of private groups add to the difficulty of decision makers. Even if they want to take a flexible stance on the Kashmir problem, they may not do so, fearing loss of political credibility. In a way, they are prisoners of their own rhetoric.

## Kashmir Ethnic Nationalism

The rise of ethnic nationalism in the post-cold war world has also influenced the Kashmir uprising.[48] The *Kashmiriat* or Kashmiri identity, as distinct from Indian secular nationalism or Pakistan Muslim nationalism, is not widely accepted. Some Hindu Pundits from Jammu and secular Kashmiri Muslims have promoted this identity in order to disentangle their state from the Indo-Pakistani conflict, and, in the process, make *Kashmiriat* as the basis of an independent Kashmir state. Looking at the diverse cultural and lingual milieu of South Asia, one finds *Kashmiriat* no different from hundreds of other regional identities in South Asia.

There are three factors which have constantly worked against both the development and acceptance of the *Kashmiriat* even among the Kashmiris themselves. First is the cultural diversity of Kashmir. One finds at least five distinct regions, though with some overlapping characteristics. These are: Azad Kashmir, Gilgit, Srinagar valley, Jammu and Ladakh. The Gilgit region has never identified itself with the Kashmir state. Ladakh, a Buddhist area, is culturally closer to Tibet than to Kashmir. The areas which now comprise Azad Kashmir are

more akin to Punjab than any other place. While Srinagar valley is dominated by the Muslim majority, Jammu, barring the northern districts, has a Hindu majority. These divisions and greater public attachment to local identities militate against any notion of a homogenous, unified or single Kashmiri identity.[49]

Second, the secular Muslim and Hindu elements have not been able to hedge the Kashmir state against the central conflict of Indian and Pakistani nationalism. The two antagonistic forms of nationalism were introduced to the Kashmir state as early as when the first signs of British willingness to grant India independence was publicly felt. It was the interplay of these forces which led to the crisis over accession of the Kashmir state. The accession – requested by the Maharaja under compulsion, and later endorsed by the then most popular Kashmiri Muslim leader, Sheikh Abdullah –though controversial, demonstrates the pull of Indian nationalism. The decision to link the fate of Kashmir to India has been contested by the proponents of Pakistani nationalism, leading to separation of one third of the state (Azad Kashmir) from the rest. The clash of these conflictual forms of nationalism has defined the contours of the present phase of Kashmir conflict.

Third is a geopolitical fact. Kashmir is divided between India and Pakistan. The Line of Control in Kashmir is the most heavily guarded border in the world where exchange of fire between the Indian and Pakistani forces occurs frequently. This boundary line has kept all groups of the former princely state of Kashmir divided. The Indian-held and Pakistani-held regions have seen two opposite integration drivers, one in the direction of Islamabad and the other towards New Delhi. The Indian and Pakistani control of the respective areas has encouraged quite different political outlooks among the Kashmiris.

In the face of rival integration drives, repression and cultivation of communalism, reconstruction of a unified Kashmiri identity faces tremendous problems. Although the *Kashmiriat* has disappeared from the political discourse, ethnic sentiment has given rise to a new movement – independence from India. Since 1990, several Kashmiri groups, now united under an umbrella organisation, *Hurriat* (independence) Conference, have been interlocked in a fierce rebellion against the Indian forces.

Some of the characteristics of the current uprising against Indian rule need to be examined in order to assess the impact and direction of the Kashmiri ethnicity:

a) The uprising is primarily confined to the Muslim dominated areas. The Dogra Hindus have not given any support to the *Hurriat* Conference or any other group demanding secession from India.

b) A situation of insurgency has developed mainly in the Srinagar region and northern districts of Jammu. The Kashmiri militants have taken up arms targeting the Indian military deployments. They have adopted all time-tested guerrilla warfare tactics of ambush, sabotage and selective engagements.

c) India has launched an extensive counter-insurgency operation that involves more than half a million troops, including those stationed along the Line of Control.

d)     The insurgency and counter-insurgency operations have caused serious violation of human rights, disrupted the political process and crippled the economy of Kashmir.

e)     The Islamist groups, which never had any substantial following among the Kashmiris, have emerged quite strong. They are better organised, well funded and more committed to independence from India than any other faction.

India has never faced such a level of organised resistance from the Kashmiri Muslims as it has during the 1990s. All groups of the *Hurriat* Conference stress independence from India. This raises many questions: Can, or will Kashmiri resistance force India to grant independence? What role can Pakistan play in assisting the Kashmir resistance? If granted the right of self-determination, will the Kashmiris opt for Pakistan? Is it realistic to assume that a solution to the Kashmir problem is possible within the framework of UN resolutions?

These are all complex but legitimate questions which one has to face in reflecting on the Kashmir issue. The world powers are more interested in stability than justice. They are reluctant to disrupt the *status quo* territorial arrangements. The UN resolutions on the issue may be important declarations of principles but they lack the sanctions or threat of force that would compel India or Pakistan to implement them. In the course of insurgency, Kashmiris have gained global recognition as a third party to the dispute. The Kashmiri groups have argued that the issue should no longer be regarded as a territorial dispute between India and Pakistan, or the choices may not be restricted, according to Kashmiri nationalists, to those given in the partition plan. We have demanded rather a tripartite solution of the Kashmir dispute in which Kashmiris are also involved as a third party. The *Hurriat* Conference has declared that any settlement between India and Pakistan will not be acceptable until the Kashmiris are recognised as a party and they are included in the negotiations.[50]

## Conclusion

The level of resistance has stirred new thinking on the resolution of the conflict, at least in the intellectual circles of India, Pakistan and the West, and has brought home the need to settle it sooner than later. The importance of this issue lies in the fact that its solution may become a basis of reconciliation and accommodation in the subcontinent, while the stalemate may keep India and Pakistan mutually antagonistic, confrontational and hostile. Much would depend on whether India and Pakistan show flexibility in their positions and how open they are in accommodating the aspirations of the Kashmiris. If emotive issues are separated, all three forms of nationalism may find enough political space to coexist with each other.

Although India and Pakistan have included Kashmir in their future agenda of talks and have agreed to form a working group on the issue,[51] it looks unlikely that they would move fast to resolve this outstanding problem. The leaders of both countries face tremendous difficulties in making any departure from their respective conventional positions. India sees no compulsion in making any concession to Pakistan on Kashmir. India thinks it will succeed in suppressing Kashmir resistance to her rule by employing the same strategy it did in its Punjab

state. Even after agreeing to place Kashmir on the bilateral agenda, it has reiterated its old stance that Kashmir is "an integral part of India" and that, under no circumstances, will it surrender its sovereignty over the disputed territory.[52]   In the prevailing circumstances, Pakistan sees hardly any incentive for changing her stand on Kashmir either.

## Notes

1.   On how the Kashmir problem has affected Indo-Pakistan relations, see *Kashmir: A Study in Indo-Pakistan Relations,* Delhi, Asia Publishing House, 1967.

2.   This fear is also expressed in a study sponsored by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.  Selig S Harrison and Geoffrey Kemp, *India and America after the Cold War. Report of the Carnegie Endowment Study Group on US-Indian Relations in a Changing International Environment,* Washington, DC, The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1993, p 33.

3.   As Craig Calhoun writes, "Nationalism, in particular, remains the pre-eminent rhetoric for attempts to demarcate political communities, claim rights of self-determination and legitimate rule by reference to 'the people' of a country." Craig Calhoun, "Nationalism and Ethnicity," *Annual Review of Sociology,* Vol. 19, 1993, p 211.

4.   Section 7 of the Indian Independence Act of 1947 stated that "Suzerainty of His Majesty over the Indian states lapses."  Legally, it could be argued, princely states became independent.  But the British Government declared "We do not, of course, recognise any state as separate international identity."  In other words, their choice was limited to join either India or Pakistan.  In exercising their option, they were told to consider factors like geographical situation and communal interests. See S M Burke, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: A Historical Analysis,* Karachi, Oxford University Press, 1990, p 16; Earl Mountbatten of Burma, *Time Only to Look Forward,* London, Nicholas Kaye, 1949, p 42.

5.   P N Bazaz, *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir,* New Delhi, Kashmir Publishing Co., 1954, p 338.

6.   S M Burke, *op.cit.,* Karachi, Oxford University Press, 1990, p 16.

7.   Alastair Lamb has argued that Indian troops entered Kashmir before the Maharaja had signed the Accession Instrument.  Alastair Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy: 1846-1990,* Hertingfordbury, Roxford Books, 1991.

8.   Security Council documents, S/628, India, 2 January 1948.

9.   See Sir Zafarullah Khan's statement on behalf of Pakistan; UN documents, S/PV 228-29, 16-17 January 1948, pp 36-96.

10.   P L Lakhanpal (ed.), *Essential Documents and Notes on Kashmir Dispute,* Delhi, International Books, 1965, pp 96-131.

11.   *ibid.,* p 57.

12.   Sh. Abdullah, *Aatish-e-Channar,* (An autobiography in Urdu) (Lahore: n.d.).

13.   Tahir Amin, *Mass Resistance in Kashmir: Origins, Evolution, Options,* Islamabad, Institute of Policy Studies, 1995, pp 56-58.

14.   Sheikh Abdullah's statement to the Security Council, official records, 3rd year, nos. 16-35, 241st meeting, 3rd item, pp 16-27, 6 February 1948.

15. I draw this conclusion after reading the autobiography of Sheikh Abdullah. See his *Aatish-e-Channar, op.cit*

16. A G Noorani, "Jammu and Kashmir Accords: A Messy Debris," *The Statesman Weekly,* Calcutta, 23 December 1995, pp 10-11.

17. *Ibid.*

18. See Article 370, Constitution of India.

19. Sheikh Abdullah, *Aatish-e-Channar, op.cit*

20. On political developments in Kashmir and Indian thinking after independence of India, see Karan Singh, *Autobiography 1931-1967,* Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1989; M C Mahajan, *Looking Back,* Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1963.

21. Interview of Sheikh Abdullah reported in Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography,* Vol. Two: 1947-56, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1979, p 118.

22. The Government of India issued "Twenty eight constitutional orders between 1954 and 1977 extending more and more provisions of the Indian Constitution," Amin, *op.cit,* p 66.

23. Alastair Lamb, *Kashmir: The Disputed Legacy,* p 61.

24. Cited by Ashutosh Varshney, "India, Pakistan, and Kashmir: Antinomies of Nationalism," *Asian Survey,* Vol. 31, No. 11, November 1991, p 1002.

25. Balraj Puri, *Kashmir Toward Insurgency,* New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1993.

26. Gopal, Vol. 3, *op.cit,* p 216.

27. See, Alastair Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy, 1846-1990, op.cit*

28. Farooq Abdullah admits today that forming a coalition with Congress was a great mistake. See his, *My Dismissal,* Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1985, p 21.

29. N Y Dole, "Kashmir: A Deep-rooted Alienation," *Economic and Political Weekly,* 5 May 1990.

30. Mushahid Hussain, "India's Bleeding Wound," *The Monthly Herald,* May 1991.

31. There are no authentic figures on casualties. The Kashmiri nationalists exaggerate, while Indian sources give lower figures. Amanullah Khan, "A Shortcut Solution to Kashmir," *The News,* Rawalpindi, 13 July 1995.

32. George Perkovich, "India, Pakistan, and the United States: The Zero-Sum Game," *World Policy Journal,* Vol. 13, No. 2, Summer 1996, p 49.

33. For an Indian view of the Kashmir problem see Ashutosh Varshney, *op.cit.,* pp 997-1019.

34. Mark Finman, "Revealing Account of BJP's March on Occupied Kashmir," *Dawn,* Karachi, 3 February 1992.

35. Elections were held in three phases separately in Jammu, Ladakh and Sri Nagar valley. The Indian sources claim 53%, 57% and 48% turnout respectively. Many observers believe these figures are exaggerated. Shaheen Akhtar, "Made to Win: Polls in IHK," *The News,* 10 October 1996.

36. On the Kashmir situation in 1977, see Bazaz, *op.cit.;* Alastair Lamb, *Kashmir Problem,* New York, Frederick A Praeger, 1966.

37.    J Korbel, *Danger in Kashmir*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1966, p 83.

38.    See Nehru's telegram to Liaqat Ali Khan in K Sarwar Hasan (ed.), *Documents on the Foreign Relations of Pakistan: The Kashmir Question*, Karachi, Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, 1966, p 67.

39.    *Ibid.*, p 162.

40.    See an account of "Operation Gibralter" in Altaf Gauhar, *Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Ruler*, Lahore, Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1994, pp 313-334; Mohammad Musa, *May Version*, Lahore, Wajidalis Ltd., 1983.

41.    Sumit Ganguly, *The Origins of War in South Asia: Indo-Pakistani Conflicts since 1947*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1986, p 90.

42.    Pakistan argues that the Simla Agreement recognises the Kashmir issue as an international dispute and does not prevent her from taking the matter to the United Nations. India's interpretation is that the Agreement limits Pakistan to seeking a bilateral solution.

43.    Author's conversation with Mr. Agha Shahi, former foreign minister of Pakistan. Shahi took the notes of meetings from the Pakistani side.

44.    See for instance, *Kashmir under Siege: Human Rights in India: An Asia Watch Report*, Washington, D.C., May 1991; *Kashmir Imprisoned*, An Indian Human Rights Report reproduced in *The Nation*, Rawalpindi, 19 August 1990.

45.    Author's interviews in several cities of Pakistan and areas of Azad Kashmir in the months of April and May, 1996.

46.    See for instance views of Dr. Mahbub ul Haq former finance minister of Pakistan "A New Pakistan India Détente," *The News..*

47.    Author's interviews with military officials in Islamabad in the months of September-October 1996.

48.    See Iftikhar H Malik, "Ethnicity and Contemporary South Asian Politics: The Kashmir Conflict as a Case Study," *The Round Table*, No. 322, 1992, pp 203-214.

49.    Roger Ballard, "Kashmir Crisis: View from Mirpur," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2-9 March 1991; Iftikhar H Malik, *The Continuing Conflict in Kashmir: Regional Détente in Jeopardy*, Conflict Studies 254, London, Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism, March 1993.

50.    *The Nation*, 25 June 1997.

51.    *The Nation*, 13 June 1997.

52.    See a statement of Prime Minister I K Gujral, *The Nation*, 13 July 1997.

# Ethnic Conflict in Pakistan:
# Case of Mohajir Nationalism

## Mohammad Waseem

### Introduction

Pakistan belongs to South Asia in a geographical and historical sense. It also represents the Eastern tip of the Islamic crescent stretching from North Africa to West Asia and Central Asia. In this way, Pakistan represents the overlapping of the two regions of South Asia and Middle East. It is the second largest Muslim country after Indonesia and one of the more democratic among the Muslim countries. It has been a member of the Western-sponsored military alliances, CENTO and SEATO. It is now a member of the Non-aligned Movement, OIC, ECO and SAARC.

Pakistan has a population of 131.63 million, 67.6% rural and 32.4% urban.[1] The population growth rate at 2.8% is among the highest in the world. In 1990-91 46.93% population was under 15 years of age. Out of a work force of 10 years and above, 50.04% is engaged in agriculture, 10.12% in industry and 12.78% in trade. There are 968,836 members of trade unions in Pakistan. This accounts for less than 1% of the population. A relative structural transformation of the economy is reflected through the decline of the share of agriculture in GDP from 53.2% in 1949-50 to 24.8% in 1995-96 and the rise of industry from 7.8% in 1949-50 to 18% in 1995-96. Per capita income in Pakistan in 1995-96 was $ 495 (Rs. 16,623). Pakistan has consistently showed a deficit in trade balance for many years, in the range of $ 2,764 million in 1980-81 and $ 2,539 million in 1995-96. However, the deficit declined as a ratio of GDP from 8.72% to 2.67% during this period. After accounting for expatriate workers' remittances from abroad at 2.93% in 1995-96, the current deficit in the balance of payment stands at 4.34% of GDP. The workers' remittances moved up rapidly from $ 136 million in 1972-73 to $ 1,397.93 million in 1978-79 and $ 2,885.67 million in 1982-83. After that it declined to $ 1,848.29 in 1990-91 and $ 1,149.01 million in 1995-96. Currently, the Middle East accounts for 72.35% of workers' remittances, with a lion's share of 44.12% from Saudi Arabia, followed by the USA at 9.44% and the UK at 7.62%. Pakistan's external debts stood at $ 31,924.212 million in 1995-96, while the debt service payment on foreign loans of Consortium and non-Consortium countries, financial institutions and Islamic countries stood at $ 1,344.447 principal amount and $ 756.457 as interest. The outstanding debt stood at 38.8% of the GNP and 185.6% of the foreign exchange earnings in 1993-94. Thus Pakistan has a predominantly agricultural, deficit economy, with a heavy foreign debt burden. The low consumption level is reflected through 2,899,520 motor vehicles plying on the roads in Pakistan, 2,255,335 telephone

connections and 2,217,994 TV sets which account for 2.2%, 1.7% and 1.68% of the population respectively. The expenditure on education and health in 1995-96 was 2.5% and 0.8% of GNP respectively. To cite 1995 data, life expectancy at birth was 62.9 years. There were 69,694 registered doctors, 2,753 dentists, 22,531 nurses and 4,277 lady health visitors. There was one doctor for 1,837 people and one dentist for 46,498 people.

Pakistan is situated in a relatively unstable regional strategic setting. It has fought three wars with India, in 1947-49, 1965 and 1971. The last war divided the country into two. Its western neighbour Iran was engaged in a revolutionary upsurge and later a war with Iraq from 1980 to 1988. That was followed by the 1991 Gulf war after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. In the north, three and a half million refugees came to Pakistan from Afghanistan after the communist take-over of Kabul in 1978, followed by the Soviet incursion. During the following decade, Pakistan emerged as a strategic base for launching a resistance movement against the regime in Kabul. This led to withdrawal of Soviet forces and later *mujahideen's* control over the capital. Pakistan still has one and a half million Afghan refugees. The gruesome traffic in arms from Afghanistan is threatening the social fabric of Pakistan. Especially agitational politics of ethnic and sectarian variety has assumed a violent character. As a partial consequence of the Afghan crisis, drug trafficking from across the northern borders of Pakistan has emerged as a major problem for the country which now has more than three million addicts.

Pakistan came into being as a result of the struggle of Muslims in British India to carve out a separate homeland for themselves. Being a quarter of the population, they faced the grim prospects of being reduced to a permanent minority in the midst of a formidable Hindu majority in post-independence India. The privileged position of the Muslim elite was fast eroding in economic, political and cultural fields in the wake of the Indian nationalism led by the Hindu elite. Barring the province of UP which was the traditional seat of the erstwhile imperial power, Muslims everywhere were reduced to a rural community, underrepresented in education, jobs and businesses. Urdu which served as a *lingua franca* in pre-colonial India and was generally identified with Muslims was being overtaken by Hindi – identified as a Hindu language – as a language of revenue administration, education and cultural expression. As the nationalist movement took off in the first quarter of the 20th century under the leadership of Gandhi the Muslim elite, especially from the UP where Muslims accounted for not more than 15%, was largely frustrated in its efforts to seek constitutional guarantees for the security of its cultural, religious, political and economic interests. The premier Muslim party the Muslim League, under the leadership of M A Jinnah struggled to find a way out of the constitutional impasse and finally embraced the demand for Pakistan which was to be established in Muslim majority provinces in the northwest and northeast of British India. That led to the partition of India in 1947. The partition led to cross-migration of millions of Muslims as well as Hindus and Sikhs involving bloody riots. The province of Punjab represented the worst scenario where whole communities had to migrate across the new international borders. This led to a bitter legacy of hatred between the two countries. The unfinished agenda of

partition in the form of the continuing Kashmir dispute has further put the two countries on a collision course.[2]

In the process of constitution making, there was formidable pressure on the largely secular minded ruling elite to Islamize the laws of the nation. The elite only partially accommodated the pressure leaving the Islamic elements frustrated over the issue.[3] Similarly, the government generally suffered from a sense of insecurity *vis-à-vis* India and sought to concentrate all meaningful power in the hands of the Centre at the expense of provinces. This led to the emergence of autonomy movements in all provinces other than Punjab. Other constitutional issues related to: a proper form of government for Pakistan, whether presidential or parliamentary, unicameral or bicameral legislature, separate or joint electorates for non-Muslims and party-based or non-party elections.[4] The 1956 Constitution represented an uneasy compromise between Islamists and secularists, centrists and provincialists as well as bureaucrats and politicians. The extra-parliamentary sources of authority such as Governor General (later president), bureaucracy and army soon took over power. They favoured paternalistic rule rather than political participation, good government instead of self-government and a linear model of economic growth with no commitment to economic redistribution. The emerging military-bureaucratic establishment formally took over power through a *coup d'état* in 1958 in the face of the grim prospects of losing initiative to politicians in the general elections. Later, the establishment promulgated the 1962 Constitution which was presidential in nature and based on indirect elections for president and for national and provincial assemblies. In 1965, Ayub's re-election as president despite massive support for the opposition candidate Fatima Jinnah exposed the fact that the public had been effectively disenfranchised under the new system. A nation-wide movement against Ayub's relatively closed system in 1968-69 led to his overthrow and abrogation of the 1962 Constitution, and later the holding of the first national elections in the history of Pakistan based on adult franchise. The Eastern wing of the country overwhelmingly voted for the Bengali nationalist party, Awami League. When the latter was denied power, it struggled for independence and finally established the new country Bangladesh. During the 1970 elections doors of political participation were opened to the larger public. A new era of leftist politics, ethnic politics as well as politics of Islam came into being, generally identified with the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the Awami League, and Islamic parties such as the Jamaat-e Islami (JI), Jamiat ul-Ulama-I Islam (JUI) and Jamiat ul-Ulama-I Pakistan (JUP) respectively. After Bhutto took over, the National Assembly of Pakistan passed the 1973 Constitution which was parliamentary in nature, with two houses, Senate and National Assembly, a strong prime minister and an enlarged quantum of provincial autonomy. Under Bhutto (1971-77), the state was penetrated by an assortment of non-elite groups while its bureaucratic core lost initiative to the emergent political cadres. Bhutto emerged as a Bonapart, presiding over the weakened state apparatuses of army and bureaucracy, the discredited bourgeoisie and the mobilised sections of the industrial labour. The politico-administrative resources of the post-colonial state as it had existed till that time were over-stretched under Bhutto's populist rule as it sought to meet the public demand for redistribution, thereby alienating various elite groups

as well as the military-bureaucratic establishment. Later, Zia's martial law government (1977-85) suffered from a gap of legitimacy, and therefore projected an ideational sanction of the state in Pakistan by carrying out Islamisation of laws. That confused the legal and institutional situation still further. However, the latent constitutional tradition of the Westminster model bounced back with full vigour in the 1983 Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD). Zia finally held elections in 1985 on a non-party basis after getting himself elected president through a bogus referendum. Before 'transferring' power to public representatives, he got the 8th constitutional amendment passed by the parliament which shifted the balance of power from the prime minister to the president. According to this amendment, the president had the powers to dissolve the parliament as well as appoint armed services chiefs and judges of higher courts The issue of appointments and various administrative actions and non-actions strained relations between presidents and prime ministers for many years thereafter. All three National Assemblies along with respective provincial assemblies elected from 1985 onwards have been dissolved by presidents. There was, for instance, a constant pressure on President Leghari to dissolve assemblies and dismiss Benazir Bhutto's government in late 1996.

## State Formation and Ethnicity in Pakistan

The post-colonial state needs to be understood as more than a limited instrumentality, i.e. more than an agent of modernisation *qua* the political development approach or an agent of exploitation *qua* the Marxist approach. Indeed, more than 'state as agent,' we need to analyse the role of 'state as agency,' i.e. as an objectified authority system put into operation in the form of a legal-institutional framework on the basis of non-arbitrary sources of legitimacy. Structural Marxists such as Nicos Paulantzas tend to look at the state as a condensate of the society at large which represents the competing class or group interests. In this framework, structural roles operate as objective co-ordinates which define inter-class and inter-group relations. Similarly, the pluralist approach to democracy conceives the state as representing multiple group interests. It is argued that the institutional infrastructure of the state is more than a mirror of political forces. As a typical product of the past choices on the part of the ruling elite – in Pakistan's case the colonial bureaucracy – this politico-administrative structure defines and regulates the context for the choices of the current decision makers. For example, certain judicial decisions in the recent history of Pakistan reflect the institutional norms which transcend individual or group interests. One can also refer to the substantive legitimising potential of the constitutional set-up of Pakistan inasmuch as the three martial law governments finally bowed down to public pressure in favour of democracy and held elections in 1962-65, 1970 and 1985 respectively.

Even apart from shaping the formal constitutional structure of the state authority, the colonial heritage continues to exert its influence through the informal patron-client relations between the state bureaucracy on the one hand and the local patterns of leadership on the other. The combined effect of these two aspects of the state's

functioning is that people are not mobilised along radical lines on the left or on the (Islamic) right. In this respect, one can distinguish the state in Pakistan from its Muslim neighbours such as Iran and Afghanistan which do not have a colonial background. The latter lacked an 'objectified' authority system which would have delivered the state from the domineering hold of the ruling aristocracy. In the face of rapid social mobility, the modern over-layer of these societies was swept away along with the state system which was too closely identified with it. On the other hand, the colonial societies from outside the British imperial tradition did develop an 'objectified' authority system but generally failed to establish clientele structures in the locality. For example, the French imperial policies of assimilation in Algeria co-opted the elite within the colonial government and thus de-legitimised them. The radical intelligentsia moved in the vacuum and mobilised people along revolutionary lines. The absence of local clientele structures in Algeria has continued to be reflected in the lack of growth of democracy in that country whereby Islamic radicals have sought to mobilise the people against the perceived authoritarian rule of a remote, impersonal and callous regime of the secular elite.

The ex-British colonial heritage of Pakistan has kept the politics of the country on an even keel in the sense that local leadership has been able to maintain its hold over the population while seeking patronage from the state. However, it also bequeathed an inherent potential of conflict inasmuch as the constituent parts of the country are asymmetrically 'developed' in terms of both political modernisation and social development. While the project of state formation is taken up by the 'national' elite, the citizens do not generally find their attachment with the state as their primary loyalty. Indeed, the so-called 'mono-ethnic tendency' in the Third World states whereby a single ethnic group tends to take control of the levers of power makes other ethnic groups look at the state as the 'other' and thus feel alienated from it.[5] The roots of this asymmetry lie in pre-independence days. The colonial state had penetrated the society along a differential pattern, depending on the pull of indigenous agricultural and mineral resources, pattern of resistance, link with ports on the way to the global market and the inhibitive presence of the rival imperial interests in the region. In the areas comprising today's Pakistan, Punjab was the most developed agricultural region as it had absorbed large sums of metropolitan capital in the infrastructural sector, especially irrigation canals and railways. Similarly Punjab was the most bureaucratically ruled province of British India where the colonial model of district politics was based on patron-client relations between the local administration and the landed elite. On the other hand, Sindh was a backward region in the Bombay Presidency. It got a provincial status as late as 1936. Here the local landlords' oppressive hold over tenants was relatively unmediated by the colonial bureaucracy. Unlike Punjab, the Muslim middle class in Sindh was in its infancy. In the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), the Pathan population was divided into settled districts of British India, the unsettled tribal area and the princely states. Upto the 1930s, the NWFP was only a chief commissioner's province. Similarly a large part of Baluchistan comprised princely states of Kharan, Mekran, Las Bela and Kalat where bureaucracy, judiciary, educational institutions and modern professions in general were not developed. Only in British Baluchistan which

comprised the area surrounding Quetta upto the Iranian border a semblance of modern civic life had emerged. In this way, the differential pattern of political modernisation in Pakistan has represented a great challenge to state formation in the country. The situation is further complicated because Pathan and Baluch communities live on both sides of the border with Afghanistan and Iran respectively, a fact which provided inspiration to their ethnonationalist movements.

While the mode of penetration of the colonial state is a significant variable, the other important factor is the nature of the society itself. Punjab and Sindh were predominantly peasant societies. The former developed a large stratum of middle peasants whereas Sindh remained a feudal area by and large. The NWFP has a tribal society, structured around the segmentary lineage system whereby a series of local pyramids form a recurring pattern of local influence structures. The tribal society in Baluchistan operates in large tribal enclaves presided over by all powerful *sardars*. We find a declining curve of penetration of the British common law in Punjab, Sindh, NWFP and Baluchistan, with the correspondingly rising curve of customary law till we find the *Pakhtunwali and Riwaj* strongly entrenched in the Pathan and Baluch societies respectively. This pattern of differentiation in political and social development can be considered a great challenge to the project of state-formation in that country.

In the NWFP, the Pakhtun nationalism dates back to pre-independence days when the celebrated Congressite leader Abdul Ghaffar Khan led a populist movement in the 1930s to unite the 'Pakhtun nation' which was divided between Afghanistan, British India and the tribal belt as well as between various tribes fiercely hostile against each other. Ghaffar Khan's movement was based on Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence. As partition of India drew near, it became clear that Ghaffar Khan had bet on the wrong horse. He was an ally of the Congress whereas the NWFP, a Muslim majority province, had voted to go with Pakistan in a referendum. Immediately after partition, the new government of Pakistan dismissed the Khan ministry in the NWFP which was perceived to be pro-India and anti-Pakistan. During the last five decades, the Pakhtun nationalist movement has progressively declined as Pakhtuns expanded their share of jobs in the bureaucracy and army, penetrated the national economy and indeed dominated the transport sector. The progressive destabilisation of Afghanistan which was perceived to be the 'natural' home of all Pakhtuns and its decline into anarchy before and after the *mujahideen* take-over of Kabul in 1992 has further eroded the appeal of Pakhtun nationalism in the NWFP.

When Pakistan came into being in 1947, East Bengal was the largest province in the country. It was separated from the rest of Pakistan by a thousand miles of Indian territory. It got increasingly agitated over the Centre's hegemony. In twenty years, the province which had more population than all other provinces combined, got totally alienated from West Pakistan because of the latter's disproportionately high ratio in industrial and agricultural wealth, jobs in the bureaucracy and recruitment in the army. After a civil war

in the aftermath of the 1970 elections which was swept by the premier Bengali nationalist party Awami League, East Bengal emerged as a separate state of Bangladesh.

Baluchistan's accession to Pakistan was problematic from the beginning. The Khan of Kalat who was the chieftain of princely states had planned to stay out of the new federation and joined it allegedly under duress. There were tremors of nationalist resistance against joining Pakistan in 1958 and 1963. The National Awami Party (NAP) government in Baluchistan in 1972-73 under the Baluch nationalist leadership soon ran counter to the PPP government in Islamabad which was increasingly perceived as an intruder in the provincial affairs. Islamabad disapproved various administrative decisions of the government in Quetta including the ousting of non-Baluch employees from the province and handling of disputes surrounding the Patt Feeder Canal area between the local tribes and Punjabi settlers. The cache of Soviet arms in the Iraqi embassy allegedly meant for Baluchistan proved to be the last straw, resulting in the dismissal of the Baluchistan government. It was followed by armed resistance. The Pakistan army was engaged in war against the Baluch guerrilla activity for three long years till the Bhutto government was dismissed by Zia. The new martial law government released the nationalist leaders from jail and the area has been quiet ever since.

Sindh has been the scene of a provincial autonomy movement from the early days of Pakistan. It had recently asserted its identity and got separated from the Bombay Presidency in 1936, with its own claim to a mature written language, mystical tradition and antiquity of civilisation. However, establishing the capital of the new state of Pakistan in Karachi, the capital of Sindh, combined with the emigration of Sindhi Hindus to India and immigration of non-Sindhi Muslims from India, drastically changed the nature of the local society. As the state of Pakistan took root, its centralist tendencies hit Sindh hard. Separation of Karachi from Sindh involved a great emotional distress and a colossal loss of revenue. It was followed by the dismissal of successive governments in Sindh by the Centre, merger of Sindh in One Unit comprising whole of West Pakistan which entailed further loss of identity, jobs and legitimacy of status as a historico-linguistic community for Sindhis, and persistent under-representation of Sindhis in higher bureaucracy, army and business. The Sindhi nationalist sentiment put up various demands ranging from provincial autonomy to a separate country Sindhudesh as envisaged by the veteran Sindhi leader G M Syed. After the 1970 elections, the Sindhi leadership got political power in Karachi which had again become the capital of Sindh in 1970. It re-oriented its political attitudes towards the demand for a greater share from the state's resources rather than for opting out of it. The discovery of the power of their numbers as a majority in Sindh in a democratic set-up which accrued jobs, businesses, and cultural and linguistic assertion redefined the Sindhi politics along federalist and electoral lines. After Zia's martial law government executed the Sindhi leader Bhutto in 1979, the two strands of politics combined to resist the perceived Punjabi domination over Sindh and produce electoral victory for the PPP.

Meanwhile, the Muslim migrants from India, especially those who came from areas other than Punjab and who were described as *mohajirs,* had multiplied into a sizeable community, already one-fourth of the reporting households in Sindh and a majority in Karachi according to the 1982 Census. They emerged on the political scene of Pakistan as a separate entity one year after the 1983 MRD movement in Sindh, symbolised by their party Mohajir Qaumi Markaz (MQM) and their leader Altaf Hussain. The mohajir ethnic movement has been at the centre of the political conflict in Pakistan for the last decade in terms of its potential to destabilise the system. Estimates of casualties range from 2,000 killed in 1995 to 5,000 killed from 1985-95.[6] Violence involved high profile killings of the editor of weekly *Takbir,* Salahuddin, brother of Sindh chief minister Abdullah Shah, brother and nephew of the MQM leader Altaf Hussain, two US diplomats, a Senator and several army and police officers. The growing number of dead and wounded persons affected directly and indirectly a large section of the population in Karachi. Apart from planned targets such as police stations, government offices and offices of rival political parties and factions, often public transport and rallies came under indiscriminate sniper fire with the specific purpose of spreading panic. A large variety of arms were used ranging from pistols to Klashnikovs, grenades, time bombs and rockets. The combined effect of civic violence in Karachi was a heightened sense of insecurity, reflected through infrequent evening visits, construction of gates outside residential compounds, erosion of cultural life and a pervasive feeling of injustice at the hands of the state.

A series of protests have emerged from the MQM and various human rights organisations, legal aid firms, opposition parties and the media, against the alleged human rights violations by the state. These violations include: alleged custodial killings and fake police encounters involving murder of the MQM workers; inhuman and degrading 'searches' in various localities violating household privacy, including molesting of women and maltreatment of the old and young, abduction, torture and killing of the MQM workers by the police, Rangers and the army's Field Investigation Team (FIT); and manipulation of the judicial system against the party's activist members. The MQM's leadership in exile lobbied various international agencies such as Amnesty International and the United Nations Human Rights Organisation and governments such as the US and the UK The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan consistently published reports of police high-handedness and brutality as well as lapses in the judicial procedure. The Benazir Bhutto government tried to diffuse the pressure by tightening the noose around the MQM and mounting diplomatic efforts abroad.

During the last decade, Karachi lost its pre-eminent position as a metropolis and the nation's leading industrial city. While no new investment was forthcoming, some of the existing industrial units were either closed down or reduced to a fraction of their former productive capacity. The city has lost much of its potential to generate employment. Migration from upcountry went down considerably. The breakdown of law and order in Karachi contributed a great deal to the image of political instability in Pakistan which in turn pushed away the potential investors from abroad. Successive moves of Benazir Bhutto's

government to raise foreign investment through a number of Memorandums of Understanding signed with businessmen from other countries were largely frustrated.

Criminalisation of politics took firm root in the city, involving trafficking in drugs and arms, operation of torture cells and incidents of abduction looting and vendetta killings. This situation has rendered initiative into the hands of terrorist gangs of various persuasions. The issue of sheer survival in the form of physical and social security moved to the centre of the public debate. The increasing pressure of street politics stretched the institutional resources of the state beyond their normal functional limits within the modes of civil administration. That kept military in politics by default long after it formally withdrew from public life.

Certain regional countries have been indirectly involved in the current ethnic conflict in Karachi. The intra-MQM factional conflict overlapped with Shia-Sunni conflict and involved Iranian emigres living in Karachi, thus adding an uneasy dimension to the local ethnic strife. Iran has been allegedly involved in the ongoing sectarian conflict in Pakistan by financing and sponsoring the Shias against the Sunnis who are in turn patronised by Saudi Arabia. The internal complexity of Afghanistan's politics as reflected through the limited reach of the Kabul government's writ and Pakistan's hesitation over alienating its northern neighbour kept Islamabad from making it a transnational issue. However, Islamabad has openly accused the Indian government for mobilising, training and arming the MQM workers. Pakistan closed down the Indian Consulate in Karachi in the midst of controversy over the role of India in supplying arms to the MQM's militant cadres, providing them subversive literature and thus spreading political instability in the country.

At the international level, the US, the UK, the UN, the European Parliament and various human rights groups have been taking interest in the ethnic conflict in Pakistan. Indeed, the US diplomats sometimes actively responded to, and often met, the MQM leaders bypassing the Pakistan government and even issued statements contrary to the latter's stated policy.[7] Pakistan in turn criticised the US interference in the internal affairs of the country.[8] Similarly, Pakistan asked Britain for extradition of Altaf Hussain who lived in exile in London from where he had allegedly masterminded terrorist activities in Karachi. However, in the absence of an extradition treaty between the two countries, the visiting British Home Secretary advised Pakistan to ask for extradition through the Commonwealth, and indeed suggested that Britain needed to be further convinced of Altaf Hussain's involvement in terrorist activities.[9] In February 1996, the MQM approached the European Parliament with the plea to hold talks with Islamabad, an idea which Pakistan's interior minister forcefully rejected.[10] In these and other ways, the mohajir ethnic movement cast its shadow beyond the frontiers of Pakistan. The government felt obliged to counter the MQM propaganda, while at the same time trying to pursue a strategy of talking with the MQM leadership to reach some kind of understanding with it.

## Some Theoretical Observations

Ethnicity has moved to the centre of political discourse dealing with nations and nationalism during the last two decades. The fact that modernisation instead of leading to assimilation of ethnic groups constituting nation-states, actually widened the gulf between them is already part of the conventional wisdom. Walker Connor, among others, brought to focus certain realities which had been grossly neglected by the integration-oriented political modernisation theorists, e.g. that multi-ethnic state rather than nation-state is the norm in the contemporary world; that emotional power of ethnic nationalism is generally underrated and that greater contact between ethnic groups does not necessarily promote harmony between them.[11] The ethnic solidarity has been generally understood in terms of sharing of a common fate by members of a community. Talcott Parsons calls it 'feduciary association' which draws upon the transgenerational traditional.[12] Many scholars of ethnicity have focused on primordial loyalties being at the heart of the ethnic revival of our times. For Edward Shils, these loyalties are rooted in blood ties of tribe, family and kin.[13] For Clifford Geertz, these ties stem from social and cultural 'givens' such as custom, language, religion and descent.[14] A D Smith focuses on four features of ethnic community: unique (common) origin, history, collective cultural individuality and a sense of collective solidarity.[15]

Primordialists have been criticised for considering variables as givens, for focusing on subjective attachments to the exclusion of objective determinants of feelings and for focusing on historical and mythical symbols without fully bringing out the voluntarist aspect of the political uses of these symbols by 'ethnic entrepreneurs.' The instrumentalists or circumstantialists consider ethnic ties to be socially and culturally constructed.[16] It is claimed that emergence of social solidarity in response to an external situation transforms an ethnic category into an ethnic group. This leads to resurgence of a real or fictive traditional unity and transformation of objective indicators associated with common ancestry into subjective perceptions.[17] This social constructionist view is largely based on an analysis of the 'social architecture of memories, culture and tradition.'[18] The context for ethnic mobilisation is generally discussed in perceived inequality between communities, often with reference to relative deprivation, internal colonialism and the struggle of underprivileged groups against the norms of the dominant groups.[19]

Paul Brass argues that ethnicity is not a given; instead it is a social and political construction. Elites who are in competition for resources 'draw upon, distort and sometimes fabricate materials from the cultures of the groups' for collective and individual advantages.[20] Secondly, the activities of the modern centralised state play a pivotal role in pushing the elites of the non-dominant groups to ethnic nationalism.[21] The process of selection and manipulation of symbols in order to define ethnic boundaries serves the crucial function of identity formation as the basis for political mobilisation.[22] State policies and elite competition, then, emerge as central variables in Brass's theory of ethnic nationalism.

Competition between ethnic groups can also take place when one of them happens to be migrant, either directly or by descent, and draws upon sources of legitimacy which are inherently different from those of the so-called 'sons of the soil.' In Third World countries such as India, the development process undermined the existing ethnic division of labour by opening up new opportunities in the industrial, educational and social sectors.[23] Weiner has discussed ethnic movements in India – in Assam, Chota Nagpur in Bihar and Telengana in Andhra Pradesh – against the perceived dominance of migrants from elsewhere in the country in terms of nativist sentiments. Such movements territorialise the sources of legitimacy for political power, demand jobs for the local population in proportionate numbers and construct a culturally distinct identity.[24] The rapid growth of education in the lower middle class among locals creates a demand for those jobs which are already in the hands of the migrant middle class. That creates a nativist reaction. In this sense, nativism in India is a middle class sentiment.[25] As employment is an urban, not a rural issue, a nativist movement is essentially urban in nature.[26] When state governments make preferential policies in their favour, it serves the political purpose of gaining local support, although at the cost of grossly alienating migrant minorities.[27]

These observations on ethnic and nativist movements provide a theoretical matrix which can help define the parameters of the present study of mohajir ethnic movement in Pakistan. Interestingly, it does so more by explaining what mohajir ethnicity is not than by defining what it is. For example, the mohajir community did not exist fifty years ago. Mohajirs migrated to Pakistan in 1947 from different geographical regions, linguistic groups and ethnic communities of India. As such, the primordialist position that ethnicity is a product of common history, language, territory and tradition would simply not explain the nature of the current mohajir phenomenon. Mohajirs represent a unique example of the emergence of a new ethnic group within two generations. This process is still not complete in the absence of a high level of social intermixture between various components of the mohajir community in terms of intermarriages and the use of a common mother tongue. However, the direction of the mohajir ethnic movement towards greater internal cohesion is clear. In this sense, the present study is as much a study of mohajir nationalism as indeed of the emergence of the mohajir community, along with its trials and tribulations as well as its quest for identity and status as a nationality or sub-nationality. In this context, it is hard to accommodate the primordialist position which lends a certain uncanny character to the ethno-national bond by defining it in terms of 'the subconscious and the non-rational.'[28] The instrumentalist approach revolves around the activist dimension of an ethnic movement characterised by its organisational profile, strategy of mass mobilisation and political agenda. However, as far as the mohajir nationalist movement in Pakistan is concerned, the two core variables of the instrumentalist approach – i.e. elite competition and state policies – create more problems than solve them. In terms of social embeddedness, the MQM's movement is typically non-elite. As far as the mohajir elite is concerned, it has been generally, if increasingly uncomfortably, ensconced in high official positions, apart from pursuing careers in professions and businesses. This elite has been sitting on the fence, so to say, while the vast lower middle class produced party ideologues,

campaign organisers and militant activists. Secondly, the centrality of the state policies for explaining the mohajir phenomenon has to be considered with great caution, especially as some analysts have actually applied this model to previous ethnic movements in Pakistan.[29] Often, the state's policies led to unforeseen, even opposite, results which undermined the initial political objectives. Not only that the states policies do not incorporate large sectors of public and private activity which constantly throws up new patterns of interaction at various levels. The emergent interpersonal, inter-group, inter-sectoral, inter-ethnic and even international tensions cannot necessarily be linked with the state policies. This is specially true of a Third World state such as Pakistan. External stimuli such as refugee influx from neighbouring countries, illegal drug and arms trade across borders, penetration of intelligence agencies of a hostile country, decisions of the metropolitan corporate sector for or against investment in the locality as well as activities of religious elements, literary writers and the media in general produce a situation on the ground which might not have been a part of the state's calculations at the planning stage. In other words, the state's role must be understood as a both an independent and dependent variable. As we shall see in the case of mohajir nationalism, a whole series of changes ranging from regional developments such as the Afghanistan war, the Iranian Revolution and the 1991 Gulf War to indigenous revival in Sindh in cultural and linguistic terms and the southward expansion of the Punjab-based entrepreneurial elite defy an explanatory model based on state policies.[30]

A similar problem emerges when ethnic nationalism is conceived in terms of inequality between communities. This runs the risk of reducing the whole exercise to building a rationale of the demand structure of the community placed at the wrong end of the equation.[31] Especially in the context of ethnic conflicts between migrant and native communities, as in the case of 'sons of the soil' movements in India, a nativist movement is typically conceived as the movement of an underprivileged community *per se*. As opposed to this, the mohajir movement in Pakistan is the movement of a privileged community. This fact poses a challenge to some of the conceptual implications of the 'inequality thesis.' Secondly, ethnic movements are usually identified with native communities. It is understandable because migrant communities typically lack political legitimacy which usually draws upon numbers, territory and culture of specific politico-administrative units. But the question is: how was it possible for a migrant community such as mohajirs which lacked these sources of legitimacy to launch a collective struggle which has all the trappings of an ethnonationalist movement. We plan to discuss this issue by looking at the mohajir movement in terms of its structural transformation from a migrant to a 'nativist' movement.

Historically, the pattern of migration of mohajirs into Pakistan was characterised by the breakdown of their communal and family ties. For a generation, mohajirs constituted a relatively atomised society. While the mohajir community came to itself, partly as a response to a grave challenge to its privileged position, the most alienated section of mohajirs, the urban lower middle class, took the initiative from the platform of the MQM.

Its leadership started the process of social and political identity formation among mohajirs, translated their social exclusivism into political separatism and cultivated territorial nationalism based on parts of urban Sindh, especially Karachi. We plan to discuss the making of the mohajir community itself, trace the origins and development of the mohajir consciousness during the four decades after independence and analyse the political, strategic and militant dimensions of the mohajir nationalism led by the MQM.

## Making of the Mohajir Community

Mohajirs represent a section of the population which migrated from India after the partition in 1947. The majority of migrants had come from East Punjab and settled in West Punjab. It got more or less assimilated with the native population within a generation. On the other hand, mohajirs generally came from areas further east, south and west in India and settled mainly in urban Sindh. They remained largely unassimilated with the local population even after two generations. In the initial period, migrants in general and mohajirs in particular enjoyed privileged positions in the government, business and bureaucracy which were disproportionately high in both number and power. However, as in the case of the Asians in East Africa and the Chinese in Malaysia after independence, the logic of numbers started exerting its pressure on mohajirs once democracy came into operation through elections. Unlike the former who were considered a by-product of colonialism and thus lacked legitimacy in the post-colonial set-up, mohajirs had indeed led the Pakistan movement itself and therefore enjoyed a high level of legitimacy. The father of the nation Mohammad Ali Jinnah himself was a mohajir from Bombay, while Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan was a mohajir from UP.

A total of 7.25 million Muslim refugees came from India from 1947 to 1951. They constituted 10% of the population in united Pakistan. Punjab took 73% of refugees, Sindh 16.15% and East Bengal 9.7%. The impact of refugees on the two provinces of Punjab and Sindh should be judged in terms of not only their numbers but also their ratio in the local population. They accounted for 25.6% in Punjab, 11.79% in Sindh excluding Karachi and 55% in Karachi alone. Thus, every fourth person in Punjab, every eighth person in Sindh and every second person in Karachi was a migrant.

### Pattern of Migration

|  | Number of refugees (in million) | Share of refugees (percentage) | Ratio of refugees in population (percentage) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pakistan | 7.22 | 100 | 10 |
| East Bengal | 0.7 | 9.67 | 1.7 |
| West Pakistan | 6.52 | 90.3 | 20 |
| Punjab | 5.3 | 3 | 25.6 |
| Sindh (ex Karachi) | 0.55 | 7.6 | 11.7 |
| Karachi | 0.61 | 8.53 | 55 |

Source: Census of Pakistan 1951, Vol. 1 Table 19-A; Vol. 6, p 65.

The place of origin of refugees in India was a significant factor in their prospects of assimilation in the host society. In Punjab, 97.5% refugees came from the north-west zone comprising essentially East Punjab in addition to Ajmer, Delhi, Rajputana states and Jammu and Kashmir.[32] But the migrant community of Sindh was totally non-Sindhi in ethnic, linguistic and geographical terms. This was a crucial difference. In Sindh (excluding Karachi), out of 540,278 refugees, 30% came from East Punjab, 21.7% from the UP and 25.6% from Rajputana states along with small percentages from Ajmer, Bombay, Delhi, the Central Provinces (CP) and Bihar.[33] Similarly, out of 616,900 refugees in Karachi, 35% came from Punjab and adjacent areas, 32% from UP and 19% from Bombay and West India in general, in addition to 8% from the central zone (the CP, Central Indian states and Hyderabad state).[34] While refugees in Punjab were typically Punjabi-speaking and thus had a good chance of assimilation, this did not apply to refugees in Sindh because of their linguistic, cultural and historical remoteness from the local population. In addition, these ethno-linguistic differences were patterned along sectoral lines. For example, 63.9% of the refugees in Sindh, 86.2% in Hyderabad district, and 71% in Suthar districit were living in urban areas.[35] In Karachi, there were only 14.28% speakers of Sindhi as opposed to 58.7% who spoke Urdu as their mother tongue.[36] Migrants in Punjab settled in both rural and urban areas but migrants in Sindh emerged as an urban community. Thus, Karachi overnight assumed a mohajir character identified with Muslims of northern India. Concentration of refugees in Karachi provided a political base for the migrant-dominated government of Pakistan for its policy of seeking a separate status for the city. The idea was that it would shield it from a possible pressure from Sindhis as well as provide a safe haven for the incoming mohajirs from India. The city was carved out of Sindh in July 1948 to become a federally administered area as capital of Pakistan. Its status was raised to Chief Commissioner's jurisdiction in 1952. In 1955, when the whole of West Pakistan was merged into One Unit, Karachi was politically considered a part of West Pakistan and was therefore represented in the West Pakistan Assembly, but was administratively considered federal territory under the central government. When the federal capital shifted to Islamabad in 1959, the erstwhile federal territory of Karachi was first reconstituted but subsequently merged with One Unit, only to be revived as the capital of Sindh in 1970.

Migration involved the traumatic experience of displacement from places of origin, breakdown of family network and a process of rehabilitation punctuated by camp life, settlement on land or urban property and official support for starting civic life once again. All this created a migrant personality *per se*, committed to physical and mental survival. Underpinning this process was the previously existing horizontal ranking between Muslims of various cultural regions in British India and princely states. The UP elite enjoyed a pivotal position among Indian Muslims in the 20th century. The nearer the Muslims to the classical seat of imperial rule in and around Delhi, the higher they were placed in the linguistic, cultural and educational hierarchy. Muslims from the UP were represented in education, services, professions and pan-Indian political life in a disproportionately high number. Correspondingly, they were acutely concerned about their grim prospects under Hindu domination in post-independence India. Hamza Alavi has used the term salariat to

describe the insecure, Muslim middle class of British India with its concentration in the UP which wanted security of jobs, especially in the public sector.[37] After migrating to Pakistan, its sense of cultural superiority and educational achievement kept it aloof from the local people, especially Sindhis whom it considered outlandish and 'peasant.'

While the host society in West Punjab had a somewhat credible power base of its own which enabled it to compete with refugees, its counterpart in Sindh was no match to mohajirs. The ruling dispensation in the province led by the Unionist Party for two decades prior to independence comprised the 'feudal' elite of West Punjab which was also politically ascendant in the Muslim League at the time of partition. Here, the evacuee Hindu officers and professionals were replaced by their Muslim counterparts from East Punjab in 1947. Indeed, the clash between bureaucracy and politicians in (W) Punjab immediately after independence reflected the tension between the educated urban middle class representing the East and the feudal elite representing the West. On the other hand, the pre-partition exercise in political coalition-building in Sindh presented an extreme case of faction-ridden politics.[38] Here, the migrant elite represented the new state almost to the total exclusion of Sindhi leadership. It pushed the latter out of Karachi and turned it into a pawn in the hands of the Centre. Similarly, the most prosperous region of Punjab in terms of commercial agriculture lay in the canal colonies and central districts on the Pakistan side. As opposed to this, Sindh had no progressive peasantry. As mohajirs overnight dominated political, administrative, and cultural life of Sindh, especially in the capital cities of Karachi and Hyderabad, Sindhis looked at them as land grabbers and imperialists. As opposed to this, refugees in Punjab were too well integrated with the host community to project themselves as a distinct social, cultural or sectoral entity.

Political Power Arrangements in (West) Punjab and Sindh after the Partition:
Migrants vs. Locals

|  |  | Punjab situation | Sindh situation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Ethno-linguistic origins | Punjabi speaking vs Punjabi speaking | Urdu/Gujerati speaking vs Sindhi speaking |
| 2 | Sectoral representation | Urban/rural vs Urban/rural | urban vs rural |
| 3 | Class background | Middle class vs progressive Peasantry | middle class vs poor peasantry |
| 4 | Power base | Bureaucracy vs ascendant feudal elite | federal government/ bureaucracy vs decadent feudal elite |

Punjab and Sindh developed different patterns of refugee rehabilitation. Refugees who came from East Punjab, Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir were largely accommodated in West Punjab districts. Almost half of refugees from East Punjab, had already been rehabilitated by July 1948.[39] The government tried to keep whole communities belonging

to the same area of origin together in the process of rehabilitation.[40] The idea was that individuals should be safeguarded from the devastating effects of breakdown of support structures such as family, tribe and community.

On the other hand, Sindh emerged as a problematic area in terms of refugee rehabilitation. The Punjab government asked the central Refugees Ministry that Sindh government should be asked to absorb an extra intake of refugees 'using their powers of compulsion if necessary.[41] It claimed that Sindh had lost nearly half a million more evacuees than the incoming refugees and therefore could take at least as many more.[42] However, the situation on the ground was different as refugees came to Karachi from everywhere in India. Barring a "certain class of Muslims who migrated to the city of Karachi and had crores of rupees with them, (who) purchased properties, (and also) purchased trade and business as well as certain 'middle class people who have also come but who have not come as destitutes," an absolute majority of refugees indeed fell into the last category.[43] The government tried to disperse them in various areas of interior Sindh but often they "went by one train and returned by another."[44] Being largely non-agriculturists, they wanted to pursue trade, crafts and other urban professions. The process of their rehabilitation was very complex and traumatic because it involved settlement in an alien geographical, cultural and social milieu. Indeed, it forced many to go back to India. Karachi blamed the Sindh government for not doing enough for refugees and thus forcing them back.[45] It pointed out that refugees were turned out of Karachi but not settled anywhere else and that zamindars had occupied evacuee land using "some section of an old revenue law."[46] The opinion on the Sindhi side was that in fact "evacuee law" were administered for the benefit of landlords from India.'[47] It is also pointed out that the 1958 Displaced Persons Act rendered locals non-eligible for the ownership transfer of evacuee property if it valued more than Rs 10,000, thus effectively barring Sindhis from the process of emergence of a new propertied middle class in Sindh.[48] The pressure of rehabilitation of refugees was considered to be so heavy that Karachi wanted the Indian government to at least retain those Muslims who had declared their allegiance to Delhi even as it welcomed refugees to Pakistan which was declared to be "the home of all the Musalmans of the world."[49] The federal government accused the Sindh government of instigating Sindhis against refugees on the plea that they would take away their businesses and therefore they should not be welcomed in Sindh.[50] This contrasted with the Sindhis' perception that they had provided "absolutely unprecedented hospitality" to mohajirs.[51]

Another difference in the pattern of refugee rehabilitation in the two provinces related to disposal of property claims especially as the distinction of "agreed" and "non-agreed" areas cropped up for determining the legal status of evacuee property. The areas "agreed" for disposal of evacuee property were essentially West and East Punjab on the two sides of the border. Following the agreement, revenue records of agricultural land were exchanged between the two governments, followed by verification of claims by a Central Record Office. Out of a total of 1,143,102 disposed claims, 95% belonged to Punjab.[52] Refugees from "agreed areas" were allotted land on a provisional permanent basis while

those from "non-agreed areas" were allotted land only on a temporary basis. This led to gross misgivings among mohajirs of Sindh who belonged to the latter category.

The process of refugee rehabilitation in Karachi and Sindh generally remained far from satisfactory. Even in 1954, 7 years after partition, no less than 240,000 out of a total of 750,000 refugees in Karachi were still to be rehabilitated.[53] A major reason for this was that migrants from India continued to come to Sindh at the rate of 100,000 per year, long after immigration had virtually stopped in Punjab. A majority of them belonged to "urban classes" who generally came straight to Karachi.

Patterns of Refugee Rehabilitation

|  | Punjab situation | Sindh situation |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Settlement: smooth; quick (90% by July 1948) | Settlement: problematic, delayed (30% unsettled by 1954) |
| 2 | No returnees | Refugees returning to India (and coming back) |
| 3 | Refugees spread all over Punjab | Refugees concentrated in Karachi |
| 4 | Permanent allotment (agreed areas) | Temporary allotment (non-agreed areas) |

## Patterns of Mohajir Ascendancy

The daunting number of 6.5 million refugees in West Pakistan was too much for the meagre financial and infrastructural resources of the new state. And yet, no refugee group in modern history enjoyed more goodwill and material help in a more substantive sense than the refugees from India. Both refugees and locals were co-nationals and often co-ethnics till 1947. In that sense, it was virtually an internal migration. The relatively secure position of refugees in Pakistan was guaranteed by the fact that the emergent state of Pakistan was itself dominated by migrants from India. Thirteen out of 23 members of the All India Muslim League Working Committee belonged to areas outside Pakistan in 1946-47. In December 1947, when the All India Muslim League Council met in Karachi, migrants accounted for 160 out of 300 members. The Muslim League's Central Parliamentary Board, which selected candidates for election to various provincial assemblies and later the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, comprised three mohajirs. The migrant-dominated central government in post-independence Pakistan distrusted provincial leaders because of their perceived anti-Muslim League and therefore allegedly anti-Pakistan stance in the recent past. This led to the installation of hasty patch-up governments in the provinces led by the Centre's henchmen who were appointed and dismissed at will by Karachi.

The mohajir leadership was acutely conscious of its inherently insecure position in Pakistan in terms of electoral politics. Prime Minister-designate Liaqat Ali Khan was not even a member of the Constituent Assembly. He and five others were "elected" in place of

six members from East Bengal who vacated their seats. The message was clear. The mohajir leadership could hardly be excited about the prospects of general elections.

Their erstwhile constituencies had eroded with the disappearance of separate electorates in post-independence India and migration of a large number of Muslims to Pakistan. The central government led by migrants of both mohajir and Punjabi extraction chose ways and means of bypassing the Constituent Assembly which had been elected by the Muslim members of the legislative assemblies of majority provinces comprising Pakistan, and which was therefore dominated by "locals."

The higher bureaucracy was dominated by migrants, both Punjabi and mohajir. Out of 95 ICS optees for Pakistan, two thirds belonged to the latter group and one-third to the former.[54] Mohajirs who were only 3% of the population had 21% jobs.[55] The mohajir youth generally took to bureaucratic careers in disproportionately high numbers. Thus, 11 out of 12 successful candidates from Sindh including Karachi in the 1950 CSS (Central Superior Services) examination were refugees, as were 14 out of 30 in East Bengal and 11 out of 19 in Punjab; the former two categories of refugees generally comprised mohajirs.[56] Among senior jobs, mohajirs had 33.5% in the federal bureaucracy in 1973 and 20% in the Secretariat group in 1974; however, their share came down to 18.3% in 1986 and 14.3% in 1989 respectively.[57] The decline in the mohajir representation in the higher bureaucracy significantly contributed to discontent in the community.

The third major area of mohajir domination was the business enterprise. The Gujarati-speaking migrants from Bombay in India, especially from the Memon, Bohra and Khoja communities, were in the vanguard of the process of industrialisation in Pakistan. Several leading businessmen had enjoyed Jinnah's confidence in Bombay and helped finance the Pakistan movement during the decade before partition. Jinnah in turn played a role in mobilising them to form Muslim Chambers of Commerce and later 'nation-building' companies for building the new state of Pakistan.[58] Regular contact between these businessmen and the Muslim League leadership on top of the government, both mohajirs, continued in Karachi The policy initiative in the field of economic management of the new country lay firmly in the hands of the mohajir-dominated bureaucracy to the exclusion of any legislative measures from the parliament which would have favoured 'locals.' The government also installed industry under PIDC and then sold it to the private sector, thus diverting the cost of private industrialisation mostly to the public sector. In this way, the government heavily subsidised the national bourgeoisie led by the Gujerati-speaking mohajirs who controlled seven of the twelve largest industrial houses, followed by some Punjabi industrial families from Delhi, Calcutta and Lahore.[59] The government made common cause with the mohajir-dominated bureaucracy and bourgeoisie, and eventually Punjabi-dominated army, in bringing about a bureaucratic polity in Pakistan during the first quarter of a century after independence.

The 1970 election campaign targeted 22 families, a number popularised by the economist Mahbub ul Haq who had criticised amassing of wealth by them in the industrial, insurance and commercial sectors. In 1972, when the Bhutto government nationalised industry in the ten leading sectors including electrical engineering, petrochemicals, iron and steel as well as rudimentary automotive assembly plants, the mohajir bourgeoisie of Karachi was dealt a severe blow. The cotton industry which was located mainly in Punjab was not nationalised. Not surprisingly, while the business community in general turned against the PPP everywhere, the mohajir businessmen were particularly incensed about the colossal loss of their assets and the continuing insecurity in the commercial enterprise throughout the Bhutto period. Combined with nationalisation, the labour reforms of the PPP government hit the business community hard. The mohajir industrial elite shared with its non-mohajir counterpart the overall insecurity at the hands of the 'socialist' PPP regime. It aimed at weaning the industrial labour away from the PPP by using the Urdu-Sindhi controversy to divide the recently mobilised labour force along linguistic lines.[60]

The mohajirs' attitude towards military has been ambivalent from the beginning. They looked positively towards the army as i) the principle of national security against India, ii) the only force which provided an alternative to what was perceived as rule by corrupt, selfish and demagogic politicians, iii) the embodiment of a vision of national destiny based on Islamic solidarity, modernisation and unitarian policies, and iv) a safeguard against the perilous logic underlying the politics of numbers which was anathema to mohajirs. A large majority of mohajirs welcomed the three martial law governments of Ayub, Yahya and Zia. Ironically, all these governments ended up increasing the power and privilege of Punjab which eventually ate up into the share of mohajirs in the national wealth, administrative jobs and educational opportunities. But, mohajirs' political attitudes were generally influenced by considerations other than Punjab. They welcomed Ayub in 1958 because of the grim prospects of the ascendancy of East Bengalis to power. Under Zia, it was the fear of social and political ascendancy of Sindhis which forced mohajirs to link their fate with the army. And yet, mohajirs continued to be remote from the army in a real sense. A large part of the non-gazetted personnel of the army belonged to a different ethnic background, either Punjabi or Pathan, and a different geographical region i.e. upcountry. There was no real institutional link-up, nor cultural affinity between the army and mohajirs. While the latter depended on the former for political reasons, the former had at the most an attitude of benign neglect towards the latter. Indeed, the army leadership never looked at mohajirs as a community in itself, at least not till the 1980s when Zia's martial law government faced a militant Sindhi upsurge during the 1983 MRD movement and found in mohajirs a willing partner against Sindhis.

Not surprisingly, the army's ascendancy was only a mixed blessing for mohajirs. Under Ayub, Punjabis emerged as major partners in industrial development. Similarly, they occupied an ever expanding number of bureaucratic positions, especially as One Unit opened up whole of West Pakistan for them. The shift of capital from Karachi to Islamabad had a negative effect on mohajirs. It distanced them from the seat of government from

where flowed jobs, licences, permits and political patronage in general. Not surprisingly, Karachi was the only district in (W) Pakistan where Ayub was defeated in the 1965 presidential elections against Fatima Jinnah. Later, Karachi became the hub of the anti-Ayub mass movement in 1968-69. It was under these circumstances that Yahya was welcomed in the beginning. But, for the mohajirs who had become accustomed to considering Karachi as a mohajir city, Yahya's decision to scrap One-Unit and restore the city as capital of Sindh "was tantamount to being required to surrender a homeland for the second time."[61] The 1970 election results only justified the worst mohajir fears of regionalisation of politics, augmented by the ascendancy of the localist forces operating from the leftist and ethnic platforms in West and East Pakistan respectively. Mohajirs were clearly out of touch with the popular current of politics. After the military operation started in East Pakistan, mohajirs in both wings of the country again identified themselves with Yahya's martial law government in a desperate search for security against Bengalis and Sindhis by keeping the Awami League and the PPP away from the seat of power at the central and provincial levels respectively. The PPP rule 1971-77 was most frustrating for mohajirs because of its policy orientation against the bureaucracy and big business, along with the Sindhi ascendancy to power and privilege from the PPP's platform. Zia's martial law was welcomed because it 'delivered' mohajir from what was perceived as Sindhi rule. However, the Zia regime caused an influx of Punjabi officers and employees in various government departments, especially in police. Mohajirs' positive attitude towards the army gave way to confusion and controversy. On the one hand, mohajirs dreaded the prospects of the PPP's victory in Sindh whenever elections would be held. On the other hand, the Sindhi nationalist upsurge during the 1983 MRD movement further pushed mohajirs in the direction of Zia who nervously looked around for support in the troubled province of Sindh. Not surprisingly, the emergence of the MQM in 1984 led to speculations about Zia's role in creating that party.

In the context of mohajir intellectual social and political attitudes, the UP Muslims' espousal of Two Nation Theory in British India, despite their acute minority situation in their own province, was non-commensurate with the territorial basis of their cherished goal of Pakistan. This extraterritorial vision of Islam was reflected through their belief in Pan-Islamism and the unity of *umma*. After Pakistan came into being this territorial agnosticism took a leap forward. The mohajirs were neither identified with a specific territorial unit within Pakistan nor keen to develop such an identity. The mohajir-led political leadership in the immediate post-independence period keenly sought to identify Pakistan with the Islamic world. Political loyalties in Pakistan were thus 'externalised' in the name of religion.[62] The mohajirs interpreted the Two Nation Theory in the context of the right of Indian Muslims to migrate to Pakistan. They were deeply involved in the fate of Indian Muslims across the border, got sensitised to their need to get jobs and tried to help them migrate to Pakistan. Just as Muslims of minority provinces in British India looked towards a different geographical region, i.e. Pakistan, for fulfilment of their cultural religious and economic aspirations, mohajirs in Pakistan looked back towards a different geographical region, i.e. India, for helping people from their areas of origin fulfil their

religious, cultural and economic aspirations. Their traumatic experience of migration led to a general deification of the state accompanied by a cult of unity of the nation in the face of the perceived Indian bellicosity, largely at the cost of provincial autonomy, indigenous cultures and local languages.[63] The mohajirs tended to prefer the presidential system to the parliamentary system because the former represented, as they saw it, a sense of unity of authority. The mohajirs' stock-in-trade consisted of sincere leadership, Islamic fervour and national integration, respectively based on a paternalistic vision of the society, enhanced commitment to ideological mobilisation and lack of tolerance for provincial and ethnic aspirations. Various acts of constitutional engineering performed by successive governments, such as the merger of whole of West Pakistan into One Unit and passing of the 1956 Constitution on that basis, followed by the 1962 Constitution which consolidated all effective power in the hands of the president, found a constituency among migrants in general and mohajirs in particular.

A large number of mohajirs tend to identify themselves with the traditional Muslim 'castes' of Syeds, Moghuls, Pathans, and Sheikhs. Even though an absolute majority of them are local converts to Islam, for generations they have been involved in the process of upward status mobility by claiming descent from foreign lands, i.e. historically from outside India such as Middle East and Central Asia and recently from outside Pakistan such as India. The extraterritorial rather than land-based sources of identity have shaped the mohajir personality in Pakistan. In India, the Muslim elite comprised absentee landlords who were essentially city-based, in the midst of a large Hindu peasantry. Similarly, their language Urdu remained an urban phenomena in the midst of a plethora of local languages spoken all around. A parallel can be drawn with mohajirs of today who live in urban areas in the midst of a largely agrarian society in Sindh and who speak Urdu in the midst of a large Sindhi-speaking community.

While the process of identity formation involves differentiation from other communities, it has the indirect outcome of internal application of the identity of the dominant group to the community as a whole. In Pakistan, the mohajir middle class lent its identity to all mohajirs, if not economically at least culturally and socially. This identity was projected self-consciously against the 'feudal' identity of the local elite, which emerged as a source of distinctness and pride to the mohajirs.[64] Historically, the UP Muslims followed the twin policy of seeking guaranteed representation in services for Muslims and appropriating a disproportionately high number of these 'Muslim' jobs for themselves. In the 1916 Lucknow Pact, Muslim minority provinces had got a lion's share of jobs, almost double of their proportionate share, which made a cut into the share of Muslim majority provinces, especially Punjab and Bengal.[65] The claim to a share higher than justified in terms of population on the basis of educational qualifications emerged as a full-blown 'ideology of meritocracy' in post-independence Pakistan.[66]

## Indigenous Revival

While the first quarter of a century after independence saw immense rise in mohajir fortunes, it also contained a somewhat less visible process of their relative decline in political and economic power. We can outline three broad areas of change which affected the mohajirs: One Unit, the 1958 military coup and shift of capital from Karachi to Islamabad. The formation of One Unit was favoured by Punjab as well as the mohajirs of Sindh. The idea was to counter the weight of the Bengalis in the National Assembly of Pakistan represented by its share of 55% in the country's population. The ruthless constitutional engineering which followed huddled Sindh, Baluchistan and NWFP along with the princely states into One-Unit presided over by Punjab in the teeth of opposition from the smaller provinces. For the mohajirs, One Unit promised expansion of their job-circuit in terms of moving out of Karachi and Sindh. In the event, however, it was the Punjabis who made inroads into Sindh,[67] especially as the capital of One-Unit was Lahore not Karachi. Indeed from 1960 to 1970, (W) Pakistan was ruled from Punjab-based federal and provincial capitals Islamabad-Rawalpindi and Lahore respectively. This tremendously boosted the role of Punjab in national politics. Secondly, the 1958 coup put the Punjabi generals in control of key positions in the corporate sector, opening up jobs for their co-ethnics. The shift of capital to Islamabad-Rawalpindi in the vicinity of the army's General Headquarters pointed to the centrality of the armed forces in the new dispensation, largely at the expense of mohajirs. As the federal capital surfaced off the ground, thousands of office jobs, contracts for supplies, transport facilities and vacancies for construction labour became available to people from the neighbouring districts of northern Punjab and southern NWFP. While the vision of the new ruling elite based in Rawalpindi was not exactly landlocked,' it was increasingly more responsive to the demands of the two northern provinces at the expense of the coastal province of Sindh in the south. The mohajirs' feeling of alienation over the widening gap between their declining position and their self-perception as a meritorious community has been discussed with reference to what Ted Gurr defines as "relative deprivation."[68]

The downhill march of the mohajir elite was accelerated by what can be termed as indigenous revival. During the 1970 election campaign, the "*ancient* regime" came under immense pressure from what had been relatively marginal political currents in the national politics. The national elite represented by the migrant bureaucracy, both Punjabi and mohajir, as well as the army, with their support base in the middle class in general had mistrusted populist forces from pre-independence days. They represented a pan-Indian, later pan-Pakistani perspective and condemned 'provincialism' of local politicians. Pakistan was a state infused with a dominant migrant ethos, couched in an ideological framework of the Two-Nation Theory as the *raison d'être* of Pakistan. The ruling elite took pride in the achievements of the Indo-Muslim civilisation over a thousand years and appropriated its symbols such as Urdu language, Moghul architectural monuments and the Indo-Iranian tradition of art. The 1970 election was to change all that. The elite was unable to take into account the massive currents of indigenous revival in East Bengal, Punjab and Sindh. The

Indus Valley overtook the Indo-Muslim civilisation as a source of cultural symbols. Territorial nationalism pushed aside ideological nationalism as the dominant mode of thinking. In Punjab and Sindh, the Bhutto style populist politics introduced a new idiom couched in the power of the masses. Socialism which had been the anathema of the ruling elite was baptised through the Bhuttoist upsurge. Symbols of popular culture like *sufi* shrines emerged as visible sites of congregation utilised for political purposes. New institutions such as the Institute of Cultural Heritage in Islamabad and the existing institutions such as the Institute of Sindhology in the University of Sindh in Jam Shoro showed great enthusiasm in taking up projects of study and development of provincial languages and literatures. The popular refrain was that Pakistan was the home of four cultures, Sindhi, Punjabi, Baluch and Pakhtun. This gradually legitimised the thesis that Pakistan consisted of four nationalities. The new populism flourished at the cost of the cherished worldview of the migrant, military and bureaucratic elites rooted in a unitarian model of politics, classical approach to art and culture, and ideological conception of Pakistani nationalism. In 1970, the state of Pakistan which was originally conceived in non-Pakistan areas finally took root in the territory, languages, cultures and peoples of the country itself. A large section of the relatively unassimilated mohajir community in Sindh stood alienated from this process of indigenisation of the state. They faced the grim choice of adopting one of the four nationalities of Pakistan. A whole new debate started among them about whether they should be considered new Sindhis living side by side with old Sindhis, whether they should assume the status of a sub-nationality within the larger Sindhi nationality or whether they should claim the status of the fifth nationality of Pakistan and thus struggle for a new province of Karachi to be carved out of Sindh.[69]

The Sindhi variety of indigenous revival put a new generation of Sindhi intellectuals and professionals in power under the PPP government. The Sindhi nationalism in Pakistan was born on the day Karachi was separated from Sindh in 1948. It was further accentuated when Sindh was merged with One-Unit, thus overruling the popular aspirations identified with the centuries old historical and cultural identity of Sindh. All along Sindhi served as the most significant symbol of Sindhi nationalism. The fact that 1,300 Sindhi medium primary and high schools were closed down in 1948 led to gross alienation of Sindhis. Instructions at school level beyond the 6th class was to be in Urdu instead of Sindhi. The cause of Sindhi suffered from various setbacks: the 1957 order of the University of Karachi to ban Sindhi as a language of examination; the Hyderabad Municipal Corporation's resolution of 1965 to use Urdu for official work; replacement of Sindhi signboards with Urdu signboards for official buildings; the language riots of December 1970; and finally the language riots in July 1972 on the eve of introduction of the Sindhi Language Bill in the Sindh Assembly.[70] The Bill made teaching of Sindhi compulsory from class 6 onwards and provided for making Sindhi the official language for administrative purposes. In the face of a strong mohajir opposition to the passage of the Bill, Z A Bhutto sought to put the whole question in cold storage by allowing a period of 12 years for non-Sindhis to learn the language. The language controversy reflects the Sindhi nationalist thinking geared towards the goal of cultural preservation against the perceived threat from the Urdu-based culture of mohajirs.

Urdu is largely considered an imperial language, 'employed through the press, Radio and TV as a strangulating monster.'[71] Nationalists often point out that the British officers in Sindh were obliged to learn Sindhi language in British India.[72] A study of the role of educational curriculum in national integration from the Sindhi perspective claimed that: 1) only one fourth of school text-books reflected indigenous Pakistani cultures and their heroes such as poets Shah Abdul Latif and Khushal Khan, while three fourths represented northern Indian cultural symbols such as poets Ghalib and Dagh Dehlavi; 2) that making of Pakistan was attributed predominantly to Muslims of minority provinces, while the role of majority provinces, especially Sindh which voted for Pakistan before others, was ignored; 3) that educational contributions of Sir Syed and Aligarh were eulogised but institutions such as Sindh Madrasah were not mentioned; 4) that the Pakistan ideology which was secular in nature inasmuch as the 1940 Lahore Resolution had acknowledged ethnic identities and provincial autonomy had been increasingly used coterminously with Islamic ideology at the cost of ethnic communities; 5) that the texts of the pre-One Unit period portrayed the role of Hindu and Muslim saints in bringing about religious tolerance, but from the One Unit period onwards, religious bigotry increased due to Punjabi and mohajir influence; and that, therefore, the social studies curriculum in Pakistan was a 'deliberate attempt to de-link Pakistani nationalities from their most recent history.'[73]

The land question was another major source of Sindhi nationalist sentiment. Out of the land brought under cultivation by Ghulam Mohammad, Guddu and Sukhar Barrages, 1.48 million, 0.64 million and 0.28 million acres respectively, ex-military officers and bureaucrats among others – mostly Punjabi but also mohajirs – were allotted 0.87 million, 0.32 million and 0.13 million acres in that order.[74] The Sindhi frustration over their land going into non-Sindhi hands at such a large scale provided a strong base for nationalist politics. The scene in cities was even worse. Sindhi representation at the entrepreneurial level was non-existent, while its share in jobs was extremely meagre. For example, the nationalists claimed that in the late 1960s there were only 1,000 Sindhis out of a million industrial workers, 250 out of 10,000 bank employees and 1 out of 5,000 federal government employees in the province of Sindh.[75]

The Sindhi nationalists claimed to be the inheritors of the great Moen-Jo-Daro civilisation and their homeland Sindh being a time honoured name in history which had attained statehood even before some of the foremost modern nations.[76] The Sindhi viewpoint condemned the use of 'black confiscatory evacuee laws' of the state which were used to snatch lands, towns and cities of Sindh from Sindhis.[77] Sindhi nationalists demanded that if mohajirs had become partners in the Sindhi economy, they should also get assimilated in the society as well.[78] G M Syed, the 'father' of Sindhi nationalism, missed the good old days when Hindus and Muslims were united, driven by their respective Sufist and Vedic sentiments, and condemned Punjab's 'imperialist' rulers, Punjabi interpretation of Islam and Punjabi poet Iqbal's 'fascist' message which, in line with the false views of mohajirs, refused to acknowledge the separate geographical, historical, linguistic, cultural and traditional status of Sindh.[79]

The standard mohajir response was that Sindhi *waderas* were too much given to a life of luxury and Sindhi *haris* were far too condemned to a life of misery to cultivate lands irrigated by Sukhar Barrage; that these lands belonged to the state any way; that officers were entitled to get land because of their services to the nation, and that the mohajir domination in education and services was the product of inability or unwillingness of Sindhis to fill the vacuum created by the departing Hindus.[80] The dominant pattern of mohajir thinking was that there should be an open system of recruitment to educational institutions, jobs, and businesses; that recruitment should be through competition on the basis of merit following the principle of equality of opportunity couched in the classical theory of liberalism. Sindhis were acutely conscious of their limited educational and financial resources and were therefore apprehensive of further opening of the system. Instead they wanted protection through a fixed quota for jobs and services. The quota system for employment and admission to educational institutions had been in place, at least in theory, from 1949 onwards. It contained 20% vacancies for merit, 40% for East Bengal 23% for Punjab, 2% for Karachi and 15% for all others including Sindh, NWFP and Baluchistan. After Bangladesh, the quota was reallocated: 10% for merit, 50% for Punjab, 7.6% for urban Sindh, 11.4% for rural Sindh, 11.5% for NWFP and the rest for Baluchistan, Azad Kashmir and FATA. The quota system which was originally meant for the federal secretariat was now expanded to "attached departments," provincial grants to educational institutions and even public sector corporations.[81] The mohajirs' model was free enterprise, as guaranteed by the constitution, with a belief in the market's sovereignty; the Sindhis depended on 'affirmative action' by the state for legal safeguards against rude competition. The mohajirs wanted nation rather than ethnic community to be the defining category, while Sindhis upheld their ethnic identity close to their heart. The mohajirs behaved in a socially exclusive way despite their proximity to non-mohajir elements across sectors, localities, streets, and squatter settlements. Sindhis demanded cultural assimilation from the mohajirs but, while generally representing the traditional sector, they were hardly able to absorb the much more educated and urbanised mohajirs from the modern sector.[82]

Mohajir-Sindhi Dichotomy

| Mohajir thinking | Sindhi thinking |
| --- | --- |
| State-orientation | Society-orientation |
| Indo-Muslim Civilisation | Indus Civilisation |
| We-deserved-it-all-the-way | They-stabbed-us-in-the back |
| Constitutional freedoms | Legal safeguards |
| Equality of opportunity | Equality by preference |
| Open merit | Fixed quota |
| Competition | Protection |
| Exclusivist behaviour/non-exclusive Dynamics | Assimilationist demands/ non-assimilationist Potential |

## Nativization of a Migrant Community

In the second quarter century after independence, the mohajirs faced the challenge of re-evaluation of some of their long-held notions about the role of language, culture, land, ideology and territory in the context of redefining their identity and protecting their interests. In this process, their social vision wars effectively 'nativized' in the sense that they looked at themselves as belonging to Sindh, and especially Karachi, and considered new migrants as a challenge to their cultural, economic and political interests. During the last half century, Karachi has experienced four waves of migration, comprising mohajirs (1940s-50s), Punjabis and Pathans (1960s-80s), Sindhis (1970s-90s), and foreigners including Afghans, Iranians, Iraqis, Ethiopians, Sri Lankans, Bangladeshis, Burmese, Thais and Philippinos among others (1980s-90s). Migration is the greatest social reality in Karachi. Since it is a continuous process, it has always led to shortage of services in terms of jobs, shuttle transport and civic amenities. The bulk of mohajirs had come by the early 1960s. While whole communities were settled together in Punjab, but the mohajir immigration and settlement in Sindh was relatively individualistic in nature. In Punjab, refugees came *en masse* and were settled within a year or two, but mohajirs continued to come for a generation. Being no more a part of the government's refugee rehabilitation programme, they squatted around the cities, left to fend for themselves. The mohajir elite which was ensconced in privileged positions in the new state failed to provide leadership to the mohajir masses with whom they did not necessarily share geographical, cultural and linguistic ties. Not surprisingly, there emerged a leaderless mass public which was perpetually engaged in a complex bargaining process for survival in various localities.

The mohajir mass public functioned as cannon fodder for movements against both Ayub in the 1960s and Bhutto in the 1970s. It provided street power for alternative leadership whenever it emerged to challenge the incumbent leadership, for example Fatima Jinnah in the 1960s, Asghar Khan in the 1970s and Altaf Hussain in the 1980s. Many mohajirs had experienced a second migration this time from interior Sindh which they fled due to the rising pressure of the militant Sindhi nationalists. Mohajirs squatting in *Kachi Abadis* in a situation of acute residential and income insecurity struggled for provision of tenure and civic amenities. This situation reflected in their frustration with the local government which had the power to reject or neglect their demands at will.[83] The 1977 anti-Bhutto movement provided them with the opportunity to mobilise and organise public activity. An army of trained and experienced mohajir political workers in the late 1970s and early 1980s almost waited for a cause to emerge. The idiom of this cause shifted away from the two traditional sources of mohajir identity formation: Islam and Pakistan.[84] Islam had been appropriated by the very forces which were perceived to be anti-mohajir such as Punjabi-dominated student wings and cadres of Jamat Islami and increasingly the Zia government. Reaction to the perceived clannishness of Punjabi migrant population led to assumption of an exclusivist mohajir identity. As Feroz Ahmad observed, 'Pakistanisation' of Sindh on which the mohajirs had justified their claim to power and privilege was sending its chicken home to roost. Now

it was the turn of the mohajirs, like the urban Sindhis before them, to feel themselves strangers in their own home.[85]

Population Growth in Karachi

| 1941-51 | 1951-61 | 1961-72 | 1972-82 | 1982-96 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 160% | 80% | 77% | 51% | 100% |

Source: 1981 Census Report of Karachi Division (Islamabad, 1984), p 8, and later estimates.

The second wave of migrants represented by Punjabis and Pathans essentially represented 'circular migration,' as opposed to the 'permanent migration' of the mohajirs who represented the first wave; the former kept relations with family back home and visited it at varying intervals. It was estimated that out of 350,000 new inhabitants of Karachi every year, 150,000 were migrants.[86] Punjabi migrants came in the mid-1950s to find jobs in new industrial units and housing projects for refugees from India. This in turn attracted Pathan construction workers, diggers of soil, retail sellers and transport workers. Their settlement pattern represented a process of re-communalisation. The emergent squatter settlements represented a varying pattern of majority-minority relations between Pathans, Punjabis and mohajirs with a sprinkling of the Baluch. As opposed to the first wave of 'political' migrants, the second wave came in search of economic opportunities. They had an 'expanded household' spread over both their city of migration, Karachi, and their area of origin. The unemployment rate among in-migrants in Kachi Abadis was lower than for Karachi as a whole.[87] This showed the dynamism of a migrant-oriented job economy. At least half of the upcountry migrants behaved as working-life migrants tied with home.[88] Unlike the first wave migrants, the second wave migrants tended to keep their upcountry identity and often political loyalties intact. The squatter settlements generally exacerbated their ethnic rivalries.

The government's housing policy left much to be desired. It led to a pattern of informal (i.e. illegal) housing, mainly of two types: unorganised invasions and illegal subdivisions.[89] The former focused on settlements on an empty piece of land, attracting people to build tenements, giving security against eviction and making informal arrangements for basic amenities. The latter involved buying and developing land by 'independent' private persons with no property rights, such as in Orangi which inhabited almost a million people. From the 1970s onwards, the issue of legality gave way to the issue of 'political acceptance' in terms of housing policy. The eviction-demolition strategy was replaced by the recognition of the rights of inhabitants of Kachi Abadis first by the PPP government and then by the Zia government. It reflected a kind of abdication of authority by the state over not only allocation of resources but also adjudication of conflicts.[90] Illegal subdivision of land which involved protection against eviction provided by community 'leaders' became the norm.[91] In this way, the social fabric of communities living on the fringes of the society was kept a hostage in the hands of the 'underworld' elite which in turn bought protection from the authorities through corruption. While the Sindhi middle class still suffered from its teething problems, the blue and white collar job seekers poured

into Karachi from Punjab under Zia's martial law government. By the 1980s, Karachi had a predominantly non-mohajir industrial labour. The twin processes of nationalisation of industry and political mobilisation of labour under the PPP government had led to flight of mohajir capital abroad as well as from industry to trade. The vacuum was later filled by the Punjabi entrepreneurs who felt more confident to deal with labour, especially as they often had close relations with their co-ethnics in important army and police positions.[92] Not surprisingly, the first stirring of mohajir grievances was against Punjabis not Sindhis in the early 1980s.

Pathan migrants were initially on the margins of the new wave, both numerically and economically. The pull factor was the building of roads, buildings, factories, and supply lines of telephone, electricity, water and gas in Karachi. Under Ayub Khan, Pathans developed a stake in the transport sector which expanded in the following decades, both along the national highway from Peshawar to Karachi and in Karachi proper. These commercial elements were to provide the new Pathan economic and political leadership. Their domination over the huge and expanding transport sector was exercised through Pathan owners, managers, operators, drivers and cleaners of tankers, buses, trucks, wagons, taxis and rickshaws. They bought 'security' from the system via regular bribery to police and to the licensing, taxation, registration and excise authorities.

Linguistic Groups in Karachi

| Urdu | Punjabi | Pushto | Sindhi | Baluchi | Hindko | others |
|------|---------|--------|--------|---------|--------|--------|
| 54.3% | 13.6% | 8.7% | 6.3% | 4.4 % | 1% | 11.7% |

Source: 1981 Census Report of Karachi Division, Islamabad, 1984, p 10.

What followed was recruitment of Punjabis into police and other state agencies through an informal and undeclared system of ethnic preferences working against mohajirs. Similarly, tension over the increasing pressure on the road was combined with the reckless speed of the vehicular traffic and rough treatment of predominantly mohajir customers by typically Pathan transporters. Off the road, the mushrooming Kachi Abadis accommodated incoming streams of migrants; from Punjab and NWFP who sought protection from both the Punjabi-dominated police and the emerging underworld of the Pathan drug Mafia. In time, a certain land-Mafia emerged which 'bought' and 'sold' land, 'organised' and 'developed' settlements over that land and let out *katcha* houses to tenants.[93] Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the city was developing a new pattern of ethnic, tribal, even sectarian settlements spread all around the main city. Fierce battles went on for access to the limited resources of employment, civic amenities and physical security. Ethnicity emerged as the dominant theme in the 1980s as the mass of humanity living off the mainstream 'planned' social and political life developed its own rules of game for survival. Ethnic groups were huddled together into informal security structures woven around vested interests such as jobs, houses, security against eviction or bulldozing of illegal tenements and various psychological support mechanisms.

Mohajirs started developing a sense of nationalism about Karachi and Sindh as a bulwark against the Punjabi and Pathan migrants. However, while the emergent mohajir leadership sought to look for co-operation with Sindhis against Punjabis in the mid-1980s, Punjabis reacted by closing their own gap with Sindhis and forming the Sindh-Punjabi Convention Committee which openly opposed such mohajir demands as opening of Khokhrapar border, repatriation of Biharis and recognition of Sindh as a two-nationality province.[94] In this way, the second wave of migration into Karachi and Sindh ended up alienating the first wave migrants, mohajirs, who increasingly assumed a new position of being 'sons of the soil.'

The third wave of migration brought Sindhis into Karachi and Hyderabad. It is somewhat problematic to consider the trickledown of Sindhis into urban Sindh as migration because, first, it was a rural-urban migration within Sindh and second it was limited in numbers. However, it is necessary to attach an explanatory value to this phenomena in two distinct ways: one, re-integration of Karachi with Sindh in an administrative and political sense in 1970 and installation of a Sindhi-dominated PPP government led by a self-conscious nationalist elite led by Mumtaz Ali Bhutto as well as acts such as passing of the Language Bill and protection of the quota system though the 1973 Constitution meant that Sindhi politicians and bureaucrats made their presence felt in the city. Subsequently, allocation of plots of land, permits for import and purchase of construction material and job opportunities generally benefited Sindhis. During the last quarter of the century, the Sindhi dress, Sindhi folk culture, Sindhi programmes on TV and radio and Sindhi nomenclature in general created an impression of the Sindhi assertion on mohajirs. This trickledown has two tracks: one, jobs, through the two decades of recruitment under the quota system and, second, the late arrival of the Green Revolution in Sindh in the 1980s which displaced Sindhi tenants and haris from land and pushed them to Karachi.[95] Their presence, limited but distinct, further exacerbated the latent hostility of mohajirs.

Finally, a fourth wave of migration started in the 1980s when nationals of the neighbouring countries started coming to Karachi. Various factors were responsible for this new development. Internally, the government sought to relax the rules for issuing passports to Pakistani nationals seeking to go to the Gulf when the oil boom started after the 1973 Arab-Israel war. Pakistan wanted to grab the emergent job market and sought to drop procedural hurdles in the way of swift labour transfer. A huge market in manpower transport started east of Arabian sea, extending to India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Burma, Indonesia and Philippines up to South Korea. Karachi became an important mid-way stop on the route to the Gulf often becoming the hub of underground activity surrounding traffic in illegal migration, along with traffic in drug and women from Bangladesh and Philippines.

During the 1980s, the Zia government opened up cross-border movement of Afghan refugees, combined with strategic considerations of winning Western support. The borders of the Pakistani state became increasingly porous. Criminalisation of the

underworld of Karachi picked up speed during the mid-1980s. The internal relaxation in the state security system controlling individual mobility was augmented by economic and political changes in the region as a whole. Thousands of people fled Iran in the wake of Khomeini's revolution, using Pakistan as transit to new destinations abroad. Many Iraqis fled their country during the war in the 1980s. People from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh to Thailand and Philippines travelled to Karachi, sometimes settling down there after having failed to make it to the Gulf.

We can divide 'foreign' migrants into political refugees from Afghanistan Iraq, (Kurds), Iran (Bahais), Burma (Muslims), and Sri Lanka (Tamils) and economic refugees from Philippines, Bangladesh, Thailand, Somalia and Ethiopia. In the beginning of 1995 there were 1,626,324 reported foreigners in Karachi; generally they were estimated at more than 2 million.[96] The presence of illegal migrants in Karachi has caused lowering of wages of unskilled workers and rise in the prices of consumables. Many Afghan refugees, of whom nearly a quarter of a million were reported to be in Karachi have indulged in heroine trade. Attempts to control them led to reprisals in the form of murders or even organised attacks on residential colonies. Many foreign migrants are allegedly involved in attacks on mosques and other violent acts, ostensibly as mercenaries.[97] Often they carry fake identity cards and passports, and participate in elections.

Most migrant groups have followed a policy of lying low in public for the obvious reason of not provoking an adverse reaction from the local population. However, the Afghan refugees have generally enjoyed an undeclared privileged position in terms of social and economic mobility. For nearly a decade, when Zia's martial law government was heavily involved in the Afghan resistance movement, it kept the doors open for incoming refugees from that country. Many of them moved out of refugee camps, travelled to Karachi and started business, especially in the transport sector. A number of them were involved in drug trafficking or arms trafficking or both. The Afghan refugees, unlike their counterparts from other countries, enjoyed the support from their local co-ethnics, Pathans, who were already entrenched in the transport sector but quite a few of whom were also involved in the drug and arms trade. In this way, the Afghan refugees ended up strengthening the Pathan community in its potential to fight the civilian mohajir population in Kachi Abadis. While drastic measures of the Pakistan government brought down poppy cultivation by 80% in the northwestern part of the country, 75% of the opium is now produced across the border in Afghanistan. Pakistan is still used for trafficking of much of the drug produced in that country through the local Afghan-Pathan drug mafia. Their contribution to making Karachi a violent city cannot be over stressed.

The first wave migrants, i.e. mohajirs resent the second, third and fourth wave migrants, and now consider themselves 'natives' of Karachi and Sindh. They view the Punjabis and Pathans as migrants of fortune who earn in Karachi and send back their earnings to their families upcountry, and invest money there in property and education of children involving a net transfer of resources from Karachi. Mohajirs also object to the

Sindhis' practices of earning in Karachi and spending in the interior. They tend to look at the Sindhis' role as consumers of value as opposed to their own role as producers of wealth in Karachi.[98] They claim that the Sindhis come to Karachi on the strength of the government employment for which the nation in general and mohajirs in particular pay. They also demand that illegal foreign migrants should be repatriated forthwith. The mohajir nationalism took geographical roots in terms of 'permanence' of residence, local spending of local earnings, and identification with the destiny of Sindh to the exclusion of other provinces. The MQM no more wants to eliminate the quota system but seeks to make it proportionate to the mohajir population.[99] Finally, a minority among mohajir had projected the demand for a separate province as long ago as the early 1950s. This demand has been expressed from a public platform by an ever expanding constituency, in 1970, 1972, 1987-88 and during and after the army operation in 1992-94.

Mohajirs: Transition from Migrant to Nativist Thinking

| Migrant thinking | Nativist thinking |
| --- | --- |
| One nation | Five nationalities |
| Nostalgia for place of origin | Struggle in land of migration |
| Identity by extension | New mohajir identity |
| Non-territorial exclusivism | Territorial separatism |
| Right to migrate (from India) | No right to migrate (from upcountry) |
| Anti-quota | Pro-quota |
| Anti-domicile | Pro-domicile |

## MQM: Origins and Development

The sources of new mohajir politics represented by the MQM can be explained with reference to student politics, squatter politics and street politics. Youth was the typical catchment area of the MQM. A large section of the mohajir industrial working class had moved upwards to white-collar jobs as accountants, book-keepers, shop stewards, trade union leaders, organisers of piece-good producing women's networks, job contractors, salesmen, medical representatives and the like. This created immense pressure on the existing educational facilities and the job market. Exactly at that moment in history when political and administrative sources of patronage were shrinking for mohajirs, when the Sindhi-dominated PPP government in Islamabad and Karachi had reactivated the quota system which brought in Sindhis in some numbers and when the Punjabi-dominated army provided jobs to their kith and kin in the expanding public sector, the number of mohajir job-seekers took a quantum leap forward. The two contradictory trends were set on a collision course.

The universities and colleges gave birth to mohajir consciousness. Mohajir students had to contend with student associations organised on linguistic and regional lines, including the Punjab Students Association, Pakhtun Students Association, Baluch Students

Organisation and Jiye Sindh Students Federation. This led to the formation of the All Pakistan Mohajir Students Organisation (APMSO) on 11 November 1978. Many mohajir students had been dedicated workers of the PNA during the anti-Bhutto movement in 1977. The APMSO was a product of the mohajir grievances in terms of non-delivery of promises of the PNA leaders to eliminate the quota system along with more specific frustration over non-allotment of rooms in the student hostel, forcible eviction from rooms when allotted and a brute show of force by rival students groups especially IJT.[100] Over time, the APMSO leadership was alerted to the critical use of weapons by the IJT to ban its entry in various educational institutions in February 1981, followed by the latter's alleged protection by police under the overall patronage extended by the Zia government[101] The MQM leadership and cadres then spread out to work outside the campus and after three years of organisational work formed the MQM. Once martial law was lifted and public activity was restored, the MQM started holding its public meetings. The famous 8 August 1986 Nishtar Park meeting attracted hundreds of thousands of people and started the era of the MQM politics in earnest. The MQM was born out of a perceived conflict brewing over years with Punjabi-dominated student groups in Karachi University and other colleges, with the Punjabi-dominated army now ruling the country and with the increasing number of jobs and businesses going the way of the Punjabis. It reflected a nativist sentiment developing fast in certain sections of the mohajir population which sought to identify themselves with the Sindhis and their leadership in a conscious effort to build a joint Sindhist resistance against the incoming migrants from the upcountry. It objected to the fact that Punjabis and Pakhtuns identified with the interests of their respective provinces and not Sindh.[102]

The mohajirs had been a leaderless community for a quarter of a century. Unlike the Pathan, Punjabi and Sindhi elites which provided political leadership to their respective communities, the mohajir elite represented by the big industrial houses, bureaucracy and professional middle class was committed to its own individual business and bureaucratic careers. The mohajirs had been atomised in the process of migration. As they settled in an alien neighbourhood, their familial, caste, ethnic and linguistic ties got thinned out. Political leaderships elsewhere in Pakistan operated within a structured society organised on the basis of village, faction, caste, tribe and sector and were therefore often fractionalised into splinter parties along those lines. As opposed to this, the mohajir community lacked internal cohesion in the sense of an integrated network of primordial loyalties woven into pyramids of influence in the locality. Ironically, it also meant that it developed a feeling of being an outsider as it increasingly felt equidistant from major ethno-territorial communities identified with the four provinces of Pakistan. Here is a classic case of a moment in history when a community was ready to be born. It required an organisation and a leader to make this happen.

The MQM developed an almost textbook approach to organisation. Its party workers heavily drew on such models as the Soviet Communist Party and, paradoxically, the Jamat Islami of Pakistan. The party literature distinguished between 'natural'

movements such as literary, cultural and social movements which were slow-moving and 'organised' movements which had a clear and united plan of action with all the participants bound to obey the orders of one person. The latter emerges as a strong force, has brighter chances of success and takes a relatively short time to succeed.[103] In the official MQM view, there are four essential elements in the party organisation[104] i) the blind faith in the leader which provides a string, binding different participants of the movement. Not surprisingly, the MQM followers took oath of allegiance to their 'supreme leader' Altaf Hussain and declared that excepting him, 'we do not know any other icon or god.'[105] The MQM created a cult personality for Altaf Hussain by declaring death to whoever turned against him in the movement.[106] ii) People must sacrifice their ego unconditionally for the sake of the grand objectives of the movement. iii) Individualism must give way to collectivism in terms of joint thinking in the direction of a common goal. iv) People must not only be aware of the intellectual foundations of the movement but also demonstrate a very high level of commitment to these principles. This thinking reflected in the commissariat nature of the organisational structure of the MQM which consisted of four levels: markaz, sector, zone, and unit. Office holders at each level carried immense powers of control and coercion over not only their followers in the locality but also the MQM's representatives in the assemblies.

## MQM: Construction of Mohajir Identity

The intellectual foundations of the MQM represent the residual and quintessential thinking of the non-elite and the third generation mohajirs. It is the product of brutalisation in the process of rehabilitation which lent a spirit of defiance and even philistinism. The non-elite character of the MQM leadership gave it a certain level of legitimacy to call itself a party of the poor. It claimed to be the first party in the history of Pakistan to break the spell of the traditional drawing room politics of capitalists and feudals, and bring the poor and middle class leadership into assemblies.[107] It observed that masses could not vote according to their own choice because *jagirdars, waderas, sardars and nawabs* held them down under their cruel and dictatorial system.[108] It wanted to establish a system in the country under which there would be the rule of not the 2% privileged but the 98% poor and middle class.[109] It hoped that the people from the middle, poor and lower classes of Punjab, NWFP, Baluchistan and Sindh would follow the example of the MQM and establish such organisations in their own provinces.[110] On the other hand, the MQM leadership took pains to assure the rich that it did not want to take away their wealth. In its view, the rich were not necessarily bad. It pointed out that the way the prosperous mohajirs of elite residential areas such as the Defence Society, Clifton, and PECHS embraced the MQM should serve as an example for other rich people in the country to welcome the leadership of the poor.[111]

The key words in the MQM's discourse are jobs not reform, political mobilisation, not legislation, 'leadership' of the poor and middle class not distribution of wealth, and generally condemnation of the (non-mohajir) feudal elite not (mohajir) capitalist elite. The

MQM lacks any policy structure, reform programme or legislative proposals in the direction of alleviation of poverty. Not surprisingly, the MQM's self-image as a party of the poor lacks credibility in the eyes of non-mohajirs everywhere who consider it an essentially ethnic party. In the latter's view, the MQM pitted the poor of one community against the poor of the other community across the road, not against the rich from the other side of the city.[112] If the MQM leadership had been rooted in the mohajir working class, it would have developed a class consciousness and policy orientation geared to distribution of wealth and probably an ideological position on the left. However, the typical mohajir self-image was couched in a middle class status and commitment to seeking jobs, especially in the public sector. Its class consciousness, if any, was unrelated with the ways and means of effecting transfer of resources between classes. The MQM can be considered as a policy-neutral, ideologically agnostic and pro-*status quo* party despite claims to the contrary.

The MQM's political thinking revolved around a synthesis of crude moralism, common sense and pamphlet intellectualism. In the context of a grotesque comparison between feudal, capitalist, democratic and socialist systems, it favoured a system based on 'realism' and 'practicalism,' reflecting the geography, culture and custom of a society.[113] In its view, socialism suppresses the spirit of competition leading to frustration; 'unbridled' capitalism leads to greed whereby a rich person considers himself equal to god and others equal to animals; feudalism creates social imbalance and indiscrimination between persons reducing those at the wrong end to a life of slavery, and in a real democracy reflecting the MQM's twin philosophy of realism and practicalism, 98% not 2% people will rule the country.[114] Altaf Hussain generally used a militaristic idiom. He said that every worker should mentally 'arm' himself.[115] He proudly claimed that the MQM had become a reality after years of intellectual training and that its 'forward march' and 'conquests' had produced an earthquake in the chambers of political and religious 'colonels' and 'generals.'[116] He produced a cult of unity among mohajirs and took pride in claiming that MQM had got all mohajirs together by eliminating sectarian and linguistic divisions between them.[117] The MQM has constantly drawn upon the persecution syndrome. Benedict Anderson explains how the nationalist sentiment of a community gains from identification with death if only to transform fatality into immortality.[118] Not surprisingly, the MQM claimed that mohajirs had laid down two million lives for the cause of Pakistan.[119] In fact, the general estimates of mohajir casualties at the time of partition range between 20,000 and 50,000, i.e. 1 to 2.5% of the MQM's figures. The latter also claimed that mohajirs had been discriminated against under the Martial Law Order 114 of 1972, when 1,300 civil servants were sacked, mostly mohajirs.[120] In view of the fact that only a fraction of the dismissed persons were mohajirs, a mere 10%,[121] it is clear that the MQM targeted at mobilising mohajirs on half-truths or blatant untruths. The persecution syndrome has led the MQM to make a case for issuance of licences for arms to mohajirs (and by extension to Sindhis).[122] It has also pointed to gerrymandering of electoral constituencies in Sindh leading to under-representation of mohajirs in elected assemblies.[123] Altaf questioned why should only a Sindhi be the chief minister of Sindh and not a mohajir, as mohajirs accounted for half of the population in the province.[124]

The quota system has been at the heart of the MQM politics. The system of reservation of seats for certain communities had been in place from pre-independence days. Pakistan's first prime minister Liaqat Ali Khan had actually introduced quota for migrants from India.[125] Articles 22 (4) and 38 of the 1973 Constitution make the provision for uplift of the relatively backward areas of the country. After the Sindhi-dominated PPP government took power in Karachi in 1971, more than two decades after its predecessor was expelled from the city, the share of Sindhis in education and jobs re-emerged on the political agenda. Two factors shaped the subsequent legislation on this issue: first, the state continued to consider ethnically defined demands illegitimate; second, the two communities of mohajirs and Sindhis were generally, if not neatly, divided along sectoral lines. Thus, the new quota system operated formally on sectoral, not ethnic lines, even though it was supposed to favour the specific ethnic community of Sindhis. The MQM has taken strong exception to the fact that this system was enacted only in Sindh and not in other provinces where the rural sector is equally under-privileged.[126] It misses the point that the quota system, enacted under the Principles of Policy under Article 38(i) (a) of the Constitution, aimed at removing imbalance in educational opportunities and services between the two communities of mohajirs and Sindhis.

Even apart from the quota system, there were other ways of denying jobs to mohajirs, claimed the MQM. For example, public advertisement for jobs carried the proviso that people from Karachi, Hyderabad and Sukhar, three predominantly mohajir cities, should not apply.[127] Elsewhere, during the interview, they were asked about the place of birth of their fathers in order to determine whether they were mohajirs or not, and thus denied the job if found out to be so. If and when mohajirs were actually recruited, for example in police, they were deliberately subjected to so much drudgery and hardship during the training period that many of them felt obliged to leave the job rather than stay in.[128]

The fate of a quarter of a million Biharis in Bangladesh is a constant reference in the MQM's literature. It has pointed out that these patriotic Biharis had fought for Pakistan alongside the Pakistan military. The military units finally surrendered, were imprisoned in India, and then returned home. Not so Biharis, who continue to languish in refugee camps in Bangladesh, reduced to a life of poverty, hunger and disease.[129] The MQM claimed that the people of the subcontinent had been given a choice at the time of the partition to become citizens of either India or Pakistan and referred to the UN charter which, it claimed, gave that right. It lambasted the government of Pakistan for not accepting its own citizens back into the country.[130] The MQM chose to ignore the real issue at stake, i.e. the perceived result of immigration of Bihars in terms of creating further demographic imbalance against Sindhis, a prospect which the latter resisted with full force.

As Anderson argues, the grammar of ethno-nationalism generally projects three institutions of power: census, map and museum as indicators of the demographic composition, territorial base and ancestral legitimacy of the community respectively.[131]

While dealing with these themes in the reverse order, we can point out a pervasive theme in the MQM's intellectual discourse relating to the feudal basis of the state and society in Pakistan and mohajirs' projected non-feudal background.[132] It claimed that as opposed to the tribal and feudal system prevalent in various places in Pakistan, the mohajirs belonged to the modern industrial period. The MQM took pride in its ability to bring in educated men and women from the masses into the assemblies which had been the preserve of feudal families; its distance from any socialist or communist philosophy; its 'confidence in free enterprise'; and its vision of cleaning the dirty politics of Pakistan.[133] It claimed that it was not possible for mohajirs to assimilate back into the feudal system of a previous era. He complained that Syed's Two Nation Theory which had envisaged all Muslims of the subcontinent as one nation was now applied only to the Muslim majority provinces, thereby excluding people of the minority provinces. He argued that if the movement of a nationality for safeguarding its interests is suppressed, then it changes its direction, just like in the case of the Pakistan movement or Bangladesh movement. The concept of mohajir nationality emerged under the same rule of history. Altaf claimed that mohajir sacrifices rendered for the cause of Pakistan outnumbered those of all others. Also, mohajir services rendered for initial handling and developing of the structure of the state excelled those of others. Similarly, the mohajirs played a dominant role in economic, political, professional, literary, journalistic and artistic fields. Their language Urdu produced the largest number of intellectuals, philosophers, scientists, literary writers, poets, journalists and historians. Foreign literature was translated into Urdu more than into any other language of Pakistan.[134]

The MQM defined mohajirs as those who i) migrated to Pakistan from Muslim minority provinces of the sub-continent at the time of the partition, ii) are not considered to belong to any of the nationalities of Pakistan neither Punjabi nor Sindhi nor Baluchi nor Pakhtun, iii) migrated from those areas of East Punjab whose language and culture was not Punjabi.[135] In this way, mohajirs were defined as Urdu (and Gujerati) speaking migrants settled in Sindh (and elsewhere in Pakistan) excluding Punjabi migrants settled in Punjab or Sindh. The MQM took exception to the fact that the four provinces of Pakistan were constantly being declared as four brothers, excluding those who did not originally belong to any of these provinces.[136] Altaf Hussain declared that the slogan of mohajir nationality was indeed the product of reaction to the slogan of four nationalities.[137] The MQM claimed that the mohajirs had now aligned themselves with the destiny of Sindh and become *de facto* sons of the soil. Not surprisingly, it demanded rationalisation of the prevalent domicile system so that only those locals should be issued domicile who had lived in Sindh along with their whole family for at least 20 years. It defined 'locals' as those who lived a family life, earned, spent, died and got buried in, and linked their interests with, the interests of Sindh.[138]

One of the most important themes in the MQM's political movement is population. Population has implications for jobs, elections, prospects of Biharis' return and the shape of politico-administrative authority in Karachi The MQM claimed that mohajirs constituted 6%

of the population in Sindh and that the 1961, 1972 and 1981 census figures were manipulated to reduce the population of mohajirs by more than half.[139] It postulated that Karachi had 10% of the country's population, so it should be allotted 21.7 National Assembly seats instead of the present 13.[140] It proposed that the census should be carried out by enumerators from a different province under the supervision of the army.[141] Altaf Hussain alleged that pockets of mohajir majority had been divided between different electoral constituencies, condemned the alleged moves to show mohajirs to be fewer than Sindhis and hoped that the Amnesty International and other human rights organisations would conduct a survey of the population in Sindh.[142] In this way, the MQM sought to construct the mohajir identity through projection of its cultural superiority, demographic strength and nativist ambitions.

## MQM: In and out of Government

The MQM's politics from 1986-92 emerged on the political map of Pakistan as the sole representative of mohajirs. This period was one of an upbeat mood in the MQM ranks. All political indicators seemed to go in its favour: the mammoth Meeting of Nishtar Park in August 1986; total victory in the 1987 elections for local bodies in Karachi and Hyderabad, which led to the first taste of power by the MQM cadres, even though at a limited scale; the 1988 general elections when it swept the mohajir constituencies and became a coalition partner with the PPP; and ascendancy to political power as a partner of Chief Minister Jam Sadiq Ali in Sindh after the controversial 1990 elections. The late 1980s and early 1990s represented a period of vibrant cultural and political reawakening among mohajirs, which was both promising because of the perceived access to the state's financial and institutional resources and challenging because of the risk of alienating millions of non-mohajirs living in Sindh. In geographical terms, the MQM gave a new slogan: if you want to live in Karachi, be a mohajir.[143] While individual mohajirs had occupied high positions in the government, bureaucracy, business and even army in the past, it was for the first time in Pakistan's history that the mohajir community expressed its collective will at such a wide scale. The MQM leadership's hobnobbing with the Sindhi nationalist leadership reflected its political stand against the upcountry migrants. The period between the 1987 local bodies elections and the 1988 national elections was marred by a strident mohajir hostility against the Punjabis and Pathans.

The Punjabi settlers in the interior of Sindh had been generally perceived by the Sindhi nationalists as exploiters and occupiers.[144] The former had organised themselves into Sindh Punjabi Abadkar Welfare Association (SPAWA). After the 1972 language riots, a Mohajir-Punjabi-Pakhtun Muttahida Mohaz was formed to protect the interests of the three migrant communities. However, the MQM changed the direction of mohajir politics and decided to join hands with Sindhis in a grand coalition against 'outsiders.' From the time of Bushra Zaidi accident in 1985 when a five-year-old girl was crushed under traffic, followed by the mohajir attacks on the Pathan households in Orangi Town, massacres of rival communities occurred at regular intervals. Many Punjabis and Pakhtuns got alienated from

the rising mohajir power and formed a new party, the Punjabi Pakhtun Ittehad (PPI) on 7 March 1987. The new party demanded that: the Punjabi-Pakhtun settlers should have all the rights enjoyed by other citizens of Sindh and, as per Article 14 of the Constitution, they should enjoy freedom of living, enterprise, property and employment every where in Pakistan.[145] However, the PPI was doomed from the beginning because local Punjabis continued to look outside Sindh for security and eschewed ethnic idiom in general.

The emergence of the PPI can be compared with the emergence of the MQM three years earlier. Both parties acknowledged that they had decided to pursue ethnic politics as a reaction to the prevalent ethnic idiom, the latter to what it considered Punjabism and the former to what it termed mohajirism. The PPI considered the MQM to be a product of the Zia regime; the MQM considered the PPI to be the product of the (Punjabi) police and the (Pathan) drug mafia in Karachi.[146] The MQM lauded the services of mohajirs in political, administrative and economic development of the country. The PPI praised the Punjabi settlers for turning deserts into green fields and gardens, and doing menial jobs such as stone cutting, digging, road building, running the transport, supplying milk, and serving as watchmen, drivers and janitors, thus contributing to making Karachi a beautiful city.[147] The MQM claimed that mohajirs constituted nearly two third of the population in Sindh. The PPI claimed that Punjabis and Pathans constituted one third of it. If one believed these figures, Sindhis would be considered non-existent in Sindh. Both parties demanded issuance of licences to them. Both complained about mal-apportionment. In other words, the ethnic idiom, conspiracy theory and a record of noble services rendered to the state and the local society, and acute demographic consciousness provided the stuff out of which new politics was born.

In the 1988 elections, the MQM and the PPP bagged all mohajir and Sindhi constituencies respectively. Both were based on ethnic nationalisms which flourished on parallel lines and enjoyed monopoly over their respective ethnic electorates. The MQM was still toying with the idea of forming a united front with the Sindhis against the Punjabi and Pakhtun migrants. Similarly, Sindhis were still reeling under the wounds of Z A Bhutto's execution by Zia's Punjabi-dominated martial law government and later military crackdown on the Sindhi activists during the 1983 MRD movement. Even though the MQM and PPP were full of mistrust, suspicion and fear of each other, the two sides chose to form a coalition and signed the Karachi Accord as a basis for co-operation. However, soon their distinct party profiles on the issue of implementation of the Accord led them apart. The MQM complained that there was no government action for repatriation of Biharis from Bangladesh; cases against MQM workers were not withdrawn; its detenus were not released as opposed to the case of the PPP's prisoners; the two-party implementation committee was made redundant; nothing was done about the attempt on Altaf Hussain's life on 9 March 1989, the MQM ministers in the Sindh government were powerless to do anything and the MQM workers had not been provided security against attacks by the rival political parties. The party felt that it had nothing to show to its constituents, especially as it had staked its reputation on the issue of repatriation of Biharis. On its part, the PPP felt

that it could meet the MQM demands only at the cost of losing its Sindhi constituency which was going hysterical on the prospects of being reduced to a minority in its own homeland. An intense debate emerged within the ranks of the MQM and its mohajir constituency in general about the efficacy of joining hands with the PPP. Points of criticism ranged from futility of signing the cumbersome 59-point Accord, not mentioning the word mohajir in it, not showing enthusiasm for elimination of the quota system, trusting the PPP's words without guarantees and getting no binding commitment from the PPP on the issue of Biharis.[148] Soon, the MQM ministers of the Sindh cabinet resigned. After weeks of intense negotiations, the two sides again hammered out a 20-point memorandum on 3 June 1989. Altaf Hussain tried to appease the Sindhi nationalists by declaring that he supported neither division of Sindh nor a separate province in Sindh.[149] However, soon the MQM went public with its grievances against its coalition partner. When Altaf sought President Ishaq's intervention in the Sindh affairs, some PPP leaders condemned the move as immoral and violative of the spirit of the Accord, and denounced the MQM as a terrorist organisation.[150] The downhill march of the coalition culminated in a secret alliance between the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI) opposition and the MQM which was disclosed and signed on 24 October 1989 on the eve of the no-confidence motion against Benazir Bhutto. The new partners agreed on: holding a fair census, repatriation of Bihar, revision of the quota system and opening of the Khokharapar border among other issues.

Unfortunately for the MQM, the IJI had no political clout in Sindh inside or outside the government and therefore no way to satisfy the MQM demands. And yet, the sheer logic of joining hands with a Punjab-based leader Nawaz Sharif provided an opening and an opportunity for the MQM to extend a hand of friendship towards the Punjabis. Till then, Altaf Hussain had been publicly held responsible for the murder of thousands of Punjabis in Sindh.[151] The MQM tried to change that image. Punjabis turned shy of supporting the PPI which increasingly lost political muscle. Altaf also tried to neutralise the Pakhtun hostility by aligning himself with the ANP which had like the MQM parted ways with the PPP and joined hands with the IJI. Once Punjabis and Pathans were 'neutralised,' the new pattern of alignment sharpened polarisation in Sindh between the PPP-led Sindhis and MQM-led mohajirs. The MQM assumed an additional role as the local base of the national opposition, the Combined Opposition Parties (COP) and arranged a grand rally on 26 January 1990, followed by a strike on 7 February in protest against killings in Hyderabad. A frenzy of attacking, killing, wounding, abducting and torturing each other's activists gripped the MQM and the PPP in the following week. The fact that the two sides swapped 27 hostages in the office of the Corps Commander of Karachi exposed their acceptance of army as the final arbiter of local conflicts.[152] As violence increased on the street, so did the army's involvement in civil administration. The army's mistrust of the PPP from Zia's days onwards was augmented by the alleged official corruption and mismanagement, and specifically because of the government's refusal to give powers to the army under Article 245 of the Constitution to apprehend criminals and try them in military courts.[153]

The Pucca Qila incident in Hyderabad on 26-27 May 1990 catapulted the MQM into a position from where it destabilised the Benazir Bhutto government by putting it in direct confrontation with the army. The MQM's militant cadres had been cordoned off by the police and were subjected to firing to stop them from fleeing the place. The army is understood to have 'ordered' the police units to go back to the barracks, released certain MQM activists from police stations and exchanged fire with some policemen on the highway.[154] The general view is that COAS General Aslam Beg (himself a mohajir) took the fateful decision of removing the PPP government on that day.

In the 1990 elections, the MQM expanded its National Assembly seats from 13 to 15. After the IJI government was installed in office, with the MQM as a junior partner in Islamabad and Karachi, the latter's disillusionment with the perceived inaction or unwillingness of the former to act upon their accord soon appeared on the surface. No progress was made on the issue of Biharis, security for mohajir settlements especially in Hyderabad, and jobs for the unemployed mohajir youth. Indeed, the MQM had hoped that their man as Minister of Production and Housing in Islamabad, who had a vast empire of over 70 industrial units in the public sector, would be able to deliver jobs. However, the IJI government's policy of denationalisation and disinvestment combined with a ban on all fresh recruitment to jobs only led to an acute frustration among the MQM ranks on that account.[155]

## MQM: Politics of Violence

The MQM's partnership in the IJI government from 1990-92 represented the golden period of its street power which it had exercised from 1987-88 onwards. All along, it had maintained an iron grip on both public and private activity. Even Parties such as the Jamat Islami were obliged to demonstrate against the MQM's 'reign of terror.' Workers of Edhi Welfare Trust were subjected to rough handling. The press was a special target of the MQM's armed workers who burnt thousands of copies of the daily *Dawn* and stopped its distribution, looted the offices of daily *Jang*, and attacked the houses of journalists. It demanded full coverage of its activities on prominent places in the papers, condemned critical views about the party and sought to punish those who would not oblige. Most of the papers adjusted their policy accordingly. The MQM leadership also issued repeated warnings to the Pakistan Television against what it called misreporting of its activities. The MQM's violence was reflected in the removal of banners from roundabouts and beating of workers of other parties and ransacking of the election offices of opponents.[156] In May 1989, the MQM workers had been involved in a shoot-out at JUP chief Maulana Noorani's *Iftar* party. At the same time, they ransacked the offices of the daily *Jang* in Quetta. Soon after that, various Sindhi nationalist parties as well as the NPP, PPI and SPAWA held a 'stop terrorism' conference, publicly holding the MQM responsible for violence. The MQM was accused of deploying 200 'terrorists' at the zonal office of the party at Fort area of Hyderabad, where a torture cell had been set up and paid for through the exchequer of the Hyderabad Municipal Corporation, and where robberies were committed by the MQM

workers who then deposited part of the loot in the party headquarters for purchase of arms and ammunition.[157] The wave of violence reached schools in Hyderabad where sniper firing killed people and curfew was frequently imposed.

The local police administration was generally hostile against the MQM. In the words of the police chief of Karachi, the 'cold-blood fratricide qualifies MQM as a group bent upon destruction of the country'; the MQM was 'a tool in the hands of RAW or KGB'; its underground activists indulged in sabotage with 'mathematical accuracy'; and it especially targeted police.[158] Later, when the MQM launched a strike on 7 February as an IJI ally to show its muscle – leading to 66 dead and dozens injured – the MQM emerged as a symbol of raw street power. The Sindhi nationalists blamed international agencies for supporting the MQM whom they called a racial and terrorist organisation representing the remnants of the military dictator Zia.[159] Indeed, they objected to the very fact that governments in Islamabad and Karachi sat across the same table with the MQM which in their view had clouded the rights of native Sindhis.[160]

Why did the MQM pursue a strategy of political violence? As long as some sections of the mohajir population stayed outside its fold, the MQM's legitimacy as an exclusively mohajir party remained less than total. These people were called traitors to the mohajir cause, and were sometimes beaten, abducted and tortured to teach a lesson to others. Especially, violence was used against dissidents within the party in the name of discipline conceived in terms of absolute loyalty to the leader. The worker militancy was at least partially the answer to questions relating to ideological bankruptcy and lack of a reformist profile of the party. Mohajirs were still far from integrated into a community because of their different linguistic, geographical and cultural backgrounds. In order to bind them together and put them on the front of the political stage, unity by command rather than by persuasion seemed to be the way out. Relying on the mohajir sense of insecurity as a great ideological resource, the MQM allegedly provoked armed clashes leading to mohajir casualties which then served as a tool for mobilisation. There were too many arms in too many hands in Karachi, for example workers of Jamat Islami, PPI, PPP and most of all the law enforcement agencies, especially police, to let the MQM off the hook. Most of all as long as Benazir Bhutto was in power, the MQM and its allies considered that their best chance to get rid of the PPP government in Karachi and Islamabad lay in convincing the military establishment that she had lost the grip on power and that the country was degenerating into chaos. In 1989-90, street violence became a weapon in the hands of the MQM which now played the local bully for a national level political alliance, with a larger political objective of destabilising the PPP government.

The MQM has consistently acted as a party in a hurry. Its workers' despondency increased as their success in terms of uniting mohajirs on one platform and winning electoral victories in urban Sindh had proved to be of no real consequence. They interpreted their predicament not in terms of limitations of the politico-legal system but in terms of conspiracy of all and sundry. This developed a siege mentality among them. They

wanted to break through the perceived walls of insensitivity, hostility, intolerance and inaction. Altaf Hussain asked people to collect foodstuff and other household items for an imminent siege for six months. He also asked them to sell TVs and VCRs and buy arms. The MQM's armed workers were screened through a vigorous examination of their family background and capacity for unquestioning obedience, followed by an oath of allegiance to Altaf Hussain. The inner group was called *'Halaf Yafta'* (the sworn-in) which contained innermost groups such as *'Kafan Posh'* (shroud-clad), 'Black Tigers' and 'Fighter Force.'[161]

The MQM kept the momentum of its street politics high when it was a partner in Jam Sadiq Ali's government in Sindh from 1990 to 1992. There were numerous incidents of firing between Altaf loyalists and internal dissidents and spraying of bullets on police centres. The party was also alleged to have links with the Indian intelligence agency RAW, as some of its arrested activists 'confessed' to the investigation agencies which recommended to put them on trial under speedy courts.[162] Under Jam Sadiq Ali, the MQM had eight ministers and six advisers in the Sindh government, in addition to the chairmanship of Karachi Metropolitan Corporation and Hyderabad Municipal Corporation as well as two ministers in Islamabad. This share in state power combined with the street power produced a very high level of confidence in the party workers. Moving beyond the rival ethnic groups and political parties, internal dissidents and police personnel as targets of their militant action, they abducted and tortured a serving army officer, Major Kaleem Ahmad. That was the last straw which brought the army into play with full force.

## MQM: In Political Wilderness

On 19 June 1992, the army started the Operation-Clean up in Sindh to restore law and order. The army declared that it had got hold of maps of 'Jinnahpur' or 'Urdu Desh' to be carved out of Sindh including Karachi, Hyderabad and some coastal area as an independent country by the MQM and that it had unearthed twenty two torture cells of the MQM including one in Abbasi Shaheed Hospital. The official statement in the Supreme Court gave graphic pictures of how these cells were used by the MQM for torture and execution, with limbs of victims broken with hot iron rods, bodies chained to walls and given electric shocks and drilling of holes in their legs, among other equally inhuman and barbaric forms of torture.[163] Many of the top leaders of the MQM including Altaf Hussain were declared proclaimed offenders. Many of them, including MNAs and MPAs of the MQM went underground. The latter submitted their resignation from membership of the two assemblies. The army allegedly sponsored a rival faction within the MQM, called Haqiqi, comprising opponents of the Altaf group.

Throughout the army operation from 1992-94, the two sides continued to talk to each other in an effort to reach a formula for cessation of hostilities. With Altaf Hussain in exile, the Haqiqi faction de-legitimised, and thousands of MQM workers involved in criminal cases while underground, jailed or exiled, finally the MQM chairman Azim Tariq surfaced in early 1993 and put together a semblance of high command. He was generally considered

to be acceptable to the army, especially as he distanced himself from Altaf Hussain. However, he was soon murdered. Later, Altaf boycotted the by-elections held in May 1993 on the seats vacated by the MQM members and demonstrated its popularity by default because very few people turned up to vote. On the eve of the 1993 elections again, the MQM presented a 19-point demand agenda as a precondition for participations in polls. It included: rounding up the army operation, withdrawal of cases against Altaf Hussain, allowing the underground MQM workers to surface, withdrawal of support from Haqiqi and a judicial enquiry into the alleged atrocities perpetrated on MQM leaders and cadres.[164] As expected, these demands were rejected and the MQM boycotted elections for the National Assembly. However, it immediately realised that it had failed to deny legitimacy to the elections because the world opinion acknowledged them as free and fair. It then participated in the Sindh Assembly elections three days later and won 27 out of 100 seats. The new Benazir Bhutto government started a dialogue with the MQM, especially as the latter voted for the PPP nominee Farooq Leghari as president. However, each round of talks ended in failure. In June 1994, Altaf Hussain was sentenced by the Suppression of Terrorist Activities Court to a 27 year jail term. In a series of open letters addressed to the armed services chiefs, Altaf Hussain accused the military unit Field Investigation Team (FIT) and 'officials of the armed forces' in general of perpetrating atrocities on mohajirs, extracting bribes from people worth millions of rupees and becoming 'wealthy but devoid of moral fibre and patriotism.'[165]

The MQM leadership projected its own explanation of the army operation 1992-94. It claimed that in fact it was going to transform itself into a Muttahida Qaumi Movement (united national movement) on an all Pakistan basis to struggle for the legitimate rights of all the oppressed people, Punjabi, Pakhtun, Sindhi, Baluchi, Kashmiri and Siraiki, along with solving the problems of Mohajirs. In the MQM's view, this northward expansion of the MQM which would have threatened jagirdars, waderas, capitalists and corrupt generals turned the latter against it who then started a campaign to besmear the image of the party. It alleged that COAS General Asif Nawaz planned to divide the MQM into two or more factions along the lines of the Muslim League, and thus created the Haqiqi faction, then armed it to the teeth and allowed it to freely operate against the main faction of the MQM under official protection. The MQM has constantly referred to emergence of Bangladesh and suggested that non-accommodation of the mohajir interests could similarly lead to separatism. Altaf, in his letters to the service chiefs, made a plea to rescue the remainder of Pakistan and not push the mohajirs further afield. He reminded them that mohajirs in Sindh had been generally considered to be the army's allies, even accused of being agents of the army and Punjab, and that disaffection between the two could only make the enemy happy. He maintained that the 'officials of the armed forces' were only satisfying their egos at the cost of the army's image, that Pakistan army is like an 'occupying force'; that the military unit FIT had extorted millions of rupees in bribes and committed atrocities on the MQM workers; and that officers tried to buy his loyalties with bags full of money.[166]

In December 1994, the civil armed forces took over from the regular army units in Sindh. After the army withdrawal, the MQM revised its strategy. In the spring of 1995, it launched its major attack on the institutions of civil administration and sought to create a law and order situation out in the street in order to destabilise the PPP government. It increased its pressure on the administration through sniper firing, throwing rockets on police stations and engaging army units, Rangers and police in street encounters. The MQM was understood to have 1,500 to 4,000 armed activists and thrice as many street helpers. In July 1995, a new operation was started in Karachi under the supervision of Interior Minister General Babar. It was a co-ordinated effort between elite security and intelligence agencies which used sophisticated monitoring equipment, network of informers, evaluation and corroboration of information acquired through interrogation, intelligence links within the MQM and selective rounding up of suspects instead of the previous large-scale searches.[167] In the first quarter of 1996, 72 MQM workers were killed in 61 'encounters'; the government claimed that out of 2,000 persons killed in 1995, only 55 were MQM terrorists, while 175 were PPP workers and many more were civilians.[168] On its part, the MQM pointed out that thousands of the MQM MPAs and workers were subjected to illegal arrest, extra-judicial detention, death in custody and extra-judicial execution; that the authorities tried to extract confession or false evidence from the MQM workers against their colleagues; and that the Haqiqi faction was provided help to kidnap, torture and murder workers of the Altaf faction. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan in its annual reports noted various examples of armed as well as structured violence against people in Sindh. Similarly, Amnesty International recorded several cases of violation of human rights by the state agencies and demanded their redress.

By the second quarter of 1996 the government had contained the MQM's movement. How did it happen? Seen in the context of a low intensity conflict, it is clear that the MQM was unable to destroy the legitimacy of the elected PPP government at any stage from 1993-96 either at Karachi or in Islamabad. The violent clashes between the Altaf and Haqiqi factions only served to undermine the militancy of the former. As opposed to the MQM's expectations which intensely lobbied human rights organisations in and outside Pakistan, no generalised protest campaign against the government's handling of the MQM emerged in the country. Instead, the MQM itself was largely held responsible for killings in Karachi and was condemned as a terrorist organisation by the media, political parties and even by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. Also, the government was able to put mohajir diaspora on the defensive by pursuing the matter of extradition of Altaf Hussain with the British government. Finally, the government's intelligence operation was the real undoing of the MQM agitation. By June 1996, the current phase of the movement seemed to have run its course, although sporadic incidents of violence can be expected for some time. Of course, the real question remains as to how the mohajir grievances can be met politically and whether all the actors involved, i.e. the PPP government, army, intelligence agencies and the allies of the MQM among political parties, especially the PML and ANP, have the necessary potential and political will to tackle the issue.

# Conclusion

As the year 1996 progressed, the mohajir nationalist movement led by the MQM was largely contained. Political opponents of Benazir Bhutto's government warned that unless a political solution was found, the movement could flare up again. The question arises: what is the nature of the MQM's defeat out in the street? In more general terms, what is the conceptual implication of the rise and fall of ethnic movements? It has been argued that the current scholarship on ethnicity is focused on the rise of ethnonationalism, without incorporating the possibility and the nature of decline in its scope and intensity.[169] An absolute majority of such movements have indeed been contained in the post-war era and there is no definite reason to believe that this trend will reverse in the near future. This trend is visible both regionally – in Indian Punjab and increasingly Sri Lanka within South Asia – and historically as in the case of the Pakhtun, Baluch and Sindhi nationalist movements within Pakistan. Our discussion of the rise of the mohajir movement in this paper provides clear indicators of the potential determinants of its decline.

It is significant that it is the state at the non-policy level which created a situation of ethnic explosion in urban Sindh in the first place. Like New York, Karachi has become a sack of potatoes where different communities have huddled together after ethnic riots, Pathans in Shireen Jinnah Colony, Benaras Colony and Sohab Goth, Punjabis in Green Town, Faisal Colony, Punjab Town and Golden Town and mohajir in Qasbah Colony, Aligarh Colony, Orangi and various other settlements. However, they do so in the absence of a clear ethnic bargain. Various macro-level explosive issues revolving around conflicts between politicians and army, the federalist and provincial forces, the Islamist and secularist elements and, externally, India and Pakistan seriously circumscribed the state's capacity and will to pursue micro-level issues such as urban planning, educational and manpower strategies, rural-urban and inter-provincial migration and investment in physical and mental infrastructure in general. The abdication of policy by the state rendered it inactive and irrelevant. The state-in-the-field was represented by officials at the bottom level who controlled a vast number of transactional activities outside the purview of law.

Ethnicity emerged as the new source of definition and categorisation of interests as well as identity formation, as the state defaulted on various counts such as citizen orientations, legal protection, and security of life and property. In other words, it was not too much of the (Jacobin) state, as primordialists would have us believe, but rather too little of it which mobilised the mohajir community along ethnic lines. Thus, we can maintain that the process of nativization of mohajirs is the product of multiple locational and transactional activities which do not necessarily reflect the state policies. What the MQM has done is put Karachi back on the national agenda.

In this context, we have shown that elite competition was not the major determinant of the mohajir nationalist movement. The mohajir elite trailed behind the non-elite in actual, if not formal, terms. Its stakes in the prevalent privilege system of the

country were too high to turn it radical in any meaningful way. Not surprisingly, the elite was the late, and at best cautious, convert to the mohajir cause. It contributed to the MQM financially, often under duress in the initial stages, and showed sympathy for its grievances. However, no elite mohajirs, generals or brigadiers, federal or provincial secretaries, judges of the Supreme Court or High Court, or office holders of public corporations resigned in protest against the army operation. An acute consciousness about the state's legal, institutional and financial resources kept them tied to the state. The MQM's movement is not state-forming in its tenor, scope or ideology. This is in stark contrast with the Pakistan movement four decades ago which was state-forming in nature and thus attracted the elite to prospects of power and privilege in the new country. In the case of the MQM's movement, the elite continued to sit at the fence and hoped for a good deal for its co-ethnics essentially within the state system of Pakistan.

While the militant expression of the mohajir nationalism may be less visible in the coming months and years, the ethnic tension will continue to define politics of Sindh as far as the 'geographic core' and the 'political core'[170] are represented by the urban-based mohajir community and the Sindhi power elite respectively. In addition, the formidable Punjabi element is represented in Sindh by the industrial elite, land allottees and a large working class, as well as police and ultimately the army. Mistrust between the three communities persists. The MQM accuses Punjab of turning Karachi into a satellite like the British colony of Hong Kong.[171] The Sindhi nationalist looks at the MQM as a US protégé, mohajir as 'a beneficiary of all Martial laws' and mohajirnism as a 'socio-ethical Sin.'[172] Also, in his view, 'Every Punjabi in Sindh was a spy or an informer.'[173]

Under these circumstances, the MQM is likely to retain its large constituency in electoral terms in the short run. As long as political polarisation at the national level between the PPP and PML(N) continues, the MQM as the third largest parliamentary party would be able to play a crucial role. However, failure has its own cost. Once the message of fruitless sacrifices and costly isolation of mohajirs from the mainstream politics sinks in, the vast electorate of this party may fall back on lesser identities based on sectarian loyalties or ethno-geographical origins. As far as policy implications of the mohajir nationalist movement are concerned, manoeuvrability of the government in Pakistan is limited. There is a formidable political structure characterised by a differential pattern of political and economic development: demographic imbalance, with Punjab commanding 60% of the population; disproportionate ethnic representation in the state apparatus; the unstable strategic environment in the region which keeps the army and by default its major catchment area Punjab as the dominant factor in politics; the situation of economic underdevelopment which leaves no surplus for allocation to, and easing tensions between, ethnic communities competing for scarce resources; and an international environment operating at the supra-state level which reduces the state's manoeuvrability in such fields as arms flow, drug trade, capital investment, foreign debt as well as flow of information and education.

The foremost task of conflict resolution starts with the global power structure which must have the political will to match its strategic, economic and infrastructural resources to control the potentially destabilising factors from impinging on the Third World societies. In this context one can mention the large industrial base in the west for manufacturing arms-for-profit which reach activist groups through the porous borders of the Third World states. One can also point to the altruistic basis of developmental thinking among donor countries and institutions which tend to assign priority to underdeveloped regions and groups in these societies. While the current bureaucracies handle the funding and execution of these development projects and skim off a large chunk of these resources, whatever reaches the target group tends to upset the prevalent hierarchical pattern of the society established over time. This engenders conflict. There is need to devise ways and means of offsetting the dysfunctional aspects of the external resource input in the short run. The outcome of democratisation is more or less similar. The input of democracy as an equaliser in rigidly hierarchical societies such as Pakistan has the potential of destabilising the existing power structure unless the civil society provides an opening for specialist careers and private enterprise. On the other hand, the model of good governance entails the risk of focusing on the perceived rational will of the self-serving 'meritocracy' at the expense of the aggregate will of the nation expressed through an exercise in vote. There is need to balance good governance with self-governance. Finally, the state in the Third World and especially in Pakistan must cultivate and uphold legitimacy of its legal and institutional resources such as rule of law, constitutional tradition and juridical equality of citizens irrespective of caste, creed and language as well as improve its 'modern' infrastructure including banking system, educational system and communication system. In Pakistan, the state needs to create a 'public' which has a belief system incorporating the role of society at large along with individual rights and duties. The state needs to create an image of justice, legitimacy and accommodation whereby rival communities can enter into a series of bargains in various fields.

## Notes

1. These figures are drawn from Government of Pakistan, *Economic Survey 1995-96*, Islamabad, 1996; *Pakistan 1995: An Official Handbook*, Islamabad, 1995.

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3. For a discussion of Islamic politics in Pakistan, see Fazlurrehman, "Islam in Pakistan," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Summer 1985.

4. For a discussion of political institutions in Pakistan, see Mushtaq Ahmed, *Government and Politics in Pakistan*, Karachi, 1970.

5. For a discussion of this point, see Luc Van de Goor, Kumar Rupesinghe, and Paul Sciarone (eds), *Between Development and Destruction*, London, Macmillan, 1996, pp 15-16.

6. *The Muslim*, 1 January 1996; *Jang*, 7 February 1996.

7.    *The News,* 12 December 1995.

8.    *Jang,* 7 January 1996.

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10.   *Jang,* 25 February 1996.

11.   Walker Connor, "Nation-building or Nation-destroying?," *World Politics,* April 1972, pp 332-343.

12.   Talcott Parsons, "Some Theoretical Considerations on the Nature and Trends of Change of Ethnicity" in Nathan Glazer and Daniel P Moynihan (eds), *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience,* Harvard, 1975, p 61.

13.   Edward Shils, "Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties," *British Journal of Sociology,* Vol. 8, No. 2, p 142.

14.   Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures,* 1973, p 259.

15.   Anthony D Smith, *The Ethnic Revival,* Cambridge, 1981, p 10.

16.   J D Eller and R M Coughlan, "The Poverty of Primordialism: the Demystification of Ethnic Attachments," *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* Vol. 16, No. 2, April 1993, pp 194-197.

17.   Nelson Kasfir, "Explaining Ethnic Participation," *World Politics, V*ol. 31, p 373.

18.   Reed Coughlan and S W R de A Samarasinghe (eds), "Economic Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict: Theory and Evidence," Introduction, in *Economic Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict,* London, Pinter Publishers, 1991, p 7.

19.   See Paul Brass, "Ethnic Groups and Nationalists: The Formation, Persistence and Transformation of Ethnic Identities" in Peter F Sugar (ed.), *Ethnic Diversity and Conflict in Eastern Europe,* Santa Barbara, 1980, p 29; and Nathan Glazer and Daniel P Mounihan, *op.cit.,* Introduction, pp 14-15.

20.   Paul R Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism,* New Delhi, Sage, 1991, p 8.

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## Glossary

1. Halaf yafta  (sworn-in)

2. Haqiqi (the real)

3. Hari, (the poor Sindhi peasant)

4. Iftar  (meals at the time of ending the fast)

5. Jagirdars (feudal lords)

6. Kafan-posh  (shroud-clad)

7. Katcha  (made of mud)

8. Katchi abadis (squatter settlements)

9. Markaz (centre)

10. Mohajir (migrant)

11. Mujahideen (crusaders)

12. Muttahida  (united)

13. Nawab (title of a landlord)

14. Pakhtanwali  (Pakhtun customary law)

15. Qaumi (nationalist)

16. Riwaj (Baluch customary law)

17. Sardar (tribal) leader

18. Sufi (mystic)

19. Ulema (Islamic theologians)

20. Umma, (the Islamic 'nation')

21. Waderas (feudal lords)

22. Zamindars (landowners)

## Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| ANP | - Awami National Party |
| APMSO | - All Pakistan Mohajir Students Organisation |
| CENTO | - Central Treaty Organisation |
| CP | - Central Provinces |
| ECO | - Economic Co-operation Organisation |
| FATA | - Federally Administered Tribal Area |
| FIT | - Field Investigation Team |
| IJI | - Islami Jamhoori Ittehad |
| IJT | - Islami Jamiat Tulaba |
| JI | - Jamat Islami |
| JUI | - Jamiat Ulema Islam |
| JUP | - Jamiat Ulema Pakistan |
| MNA | - Member of National Assembly |
| MPA | - Member of Provincial Assembly |
| MQM | - Mohajir Qaumi Movement |
| MRD | - Movement for Restoration of Democracy |
| NAP | - National Awami Party |
| NPP | - National Peoples Party |
| OIC | - Organisation of Islamic Countries |
| PECHS | - Public Employees Co-operative Housing Society |
| PIDC | - Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation |
| PML | - Pakistan Muslim League |
| PNA | - Pakistan National Alliance |
| PPI | - Punjabi Pakhtun Ittehad |
| PPP | - Pakistan People's Party |
| RAW | - Research and Analysis Wing (Indian intelligence agency) |
| SAARC | - South Asian Alliance for Regional Co-operation |
| SEATO | - South East Asia Treaty Organisation |
| SPAWA | - Sindh Punjabi Abadkars Welfare Association |
| UP | - United Provinces |

# Ethnic Turmoil in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

## Aftab Ahmed

### Introduction

Politics is a multidimensional phenomenon involving conflict, representation and dialogue. It is the process through which different groups articulate their demands and compete for public resources. It is a process of give and take with winners and losers. It concerns perceptions about the rights and privileges of various groups... [It] is ongoing. Today one may achieve one's objectives or perhaps not, but tomorrow presents both new opportunities and risks, which is why groups seek to institutionalise their agreements on issues through law, policies and methods of decision making.[1] A widespread problem of new nations is that their political boundaries correspond rather imperfectly to any pre-existing cultural unity.[2]

A look at the present-day world scenario reveals localised conflicts of multifarious dimension and intensity in many parts of the world. Almost all of these conflicts owe their origin to perceived or real imbalances in the majority-minority relationship amongst citizen groups in the respective countries. All countries of the world are in some degree heterogeneous. The tendency to think of states as if they were nation-states is highly misleading, for scarcely a state qualifies for the label.[3] Virtually all states are polyglot in the sense that they are multilingual, multi-religious, multiethnic or multicultural. The construction of a well integrated and politically strong state requires the welding of diverse ethnic communities into a unified nation – that is the gradual development of a consensual culture and ideology emanating from a growing pluralist political order. Such a political order must be able to deal with significant changes of a society, be it in the economic, social or cultural realms involving new entrants, new problems and new conditions or countless other kinds of interaction and interdependence.

Although nationalism is a powerful force for political and societal integration, it also has disintegrative and disruptive flip side that can produce substantial problems. For example, in multi-ethnic societies the nationalism of any one/dominant group may lead to discrimination against the other groups. Because nationalism is a sentiment, it has psychological overtones. The psychological drive plays a most significant role in the meaning and development of nationalism.[4] In some contexts it is virtually impossible to distinguish "nationalism" from patriotism or attachment to country or homeland; in this usage, its meaning has nothing to do with racial origin or ancestry or with such obvious cultural attributes as language or religion. In other contexts, "nationalism" is a form of group solidarity or community feeling based on

ethnicity rather than territory; it refers to subjective attachments that demarcate one particular group from the other groups within a total population. "Successful nationalisms finally create a sense of ethnic-cultural unity and of involvement or commitment within the geographic limits of their nations, but that takes time and, frequently, also force (as exemplified by the lack of full ethnic cultural unity in such well established polities as Great Britain, France, Spain etc.). Until such unity is established (and certainly if such organic unity is not – or is no longer – sought, as in Belgium, Switzerland, India) the nation must continue to function, must continue to protect itself from external and internal opponents, and must continue to meet the needs of its citizenry with respect to the facilitation of communication and the conduct of commerce, industry, education, and all other organised societal pursuits."[5]

Ethnicity is an elusive concept and is very difficult to define with precision. Indeed, the definitions and boundaries of ethnicity are fluid. Ethnicity is a condition in part transmitted by birth, through ascribed characteristics. It is also in part an acquired condition, because values, attitudes, language, religion, culture, history, political identification and other key elements of ethnicity are learned. The most important thing about ethnicity is its ability to integrate individuals who meet all the criteria to the exclusion of those who do not, for internal cohesion means boundaries against others.

Viewed from the ethno-linguistic perspective, although Bangladesh is apparently homogeneous, its population contains a variety of smaller ethnic communities whose geographical location in relationship to important national resources far outweighs their demographic significance in the country as a whole.[6] While a good number of these ethnic communities inhabit a number of districts in the northern and north-eastern region and the coastal areas of Bangladesh,[7] the largest of them reside in the region which was once known as the district of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).[8]

The ethnic communities of the CHT commonly known as the *pahadees* seek to preserve their exclusive ethnic identity by means of insurgency[9] if need be, during what has been for them a period of transition[10] from relative isolation to one of increasing incorporation. At the same time the Bangladesh government, reflecting and representing the dominant majority community, the people of the plains of Bangladesh known as the *samatalbashees* i.e. the Bangalees, has been trying to achieve overall national integration and economic development – when necessary even by counter insurgency[11] measures.

In this study we shall attempt an insight into the ongoing ethnic processes of the CHT, delineate the nature and complexities of the problem of political integration of and insurgency in the region, and offer modalities for the resolution of the conflict.

## CHT and East Bengal under Britain and Pakistan

The CHT is situated on the south-eastern side of Bangladesh. It comprises an elongated 5,089 square miles of land strip, primarily hilly, wooded subtropical territory covering about 9% of the total area of Bangladesh. The CHT contain 11 hill ranges, of which four lie in the northern

and seven in the southern areas. The hills range in height from a few hundred to four thousand feet.[12] With a network of rivulets and streams, fed by heavy monsoons and washed by recurring creepers and trees which covers about 52% of the total forest area of Bangladesh.[13]

The population of the CHT according to the 1991 census is 974,445 of which 501,144 (51.43%) belong to different ethnic communities other than the Bangalees whose number is 473,301 (48.57%). It is difficult to trace the ethnic origins of the peoples of the CHT region. While the Bangalees are a mixed group comprising proto-Australoid, Mongoloid, Caucasoid and Dravidian strains,[14] the other ethnic communities of the CHT predominantly belong to the Mongoloid strain.[15] Other than the Bangalees there are about 14 different ethnic communities currently inhabiting the CHT region, namely the Chakmas, the Marmas (erroneously often called the Maghs/Moghs),[16] the Tripuras, the Tanchangyas,[17] the Lushais,[18] the Uchais (also known as the Osuies),[19] the Khumis,[20] the Bawms,[21] the Murangs,[22] the Pankhos, the Riangs,[23] the Chaks (also known as the Saks/A-Saks), the Khyangs and the Mros.[24] They have distinctive ethno-linguistic identity and are markedly different from the people of the plains of Bangladesh – the *samatalbashees*. i.e., the Bangalees in respect of social customs, food, dress, techniques of agriculture and so on.

The religion of the Chakmas, the Marmas, the Tanchangyas, the Murangs, the Mros, the Chaks and the Khyangs is Buddhism. The Lushais, the Bawms and the Pankhos are Christians, and the Tripuras, Riangs Khumis and Uchais are Hindus. While a considerable number amongst the different communities are still animists, a substantial number of Chakmas, Marmas, Tripuras, Murangs, Uchais and Khyangs have embraced Christianity. Historically speaking, excepting the Mros, none of these communities, commonly known as the *pahadees*, are the original inhabitants of the CHT. They have migrated into the region from areas further to the east (Myanmar/Burma) and south-east (Thailand/ Siam and Cambodia). By a careful analysis of the various travel notes, official surveys and reports and statistical and ethnographic accounts it can be conclusively shown that the *pahadees* of the CHT are undoubtedly outsiders.[25] Numerically the largest of the *pahadees* are the Chakmas who inhabit mainly the area now comprising the district of Rangamati. An authoritative Chakma source claims Thai origin for the community.[26] Insecurity of life and property was the principal cause of migration.[27] In the course of the 19th century, the Chief of the Chakmas, the Chakma *Raja* (King), the Chief of the Marmas of the Southern area known as the Bhomong *Raja* and the Chief of the Marmas of the northern area known as the Mong *Raja* had achieved hegemony over the other ethnic communities of the region.

The British were the first to introduce a slow and cautious process of modernisation into the region. The first and most important step that they took was the elimination of tribal warfare. They carefully made planned efforts to evolve a market economy and induce people to give up *jum*[28] cultivation and their unsettled life and adopt cultivation by the plough.[29] The most powerful of the *pahadees*, the Chakmas, who were also culturally the most advanced, extended their influence over the others.[30] The Chakmas who thought of themselves as a sovereign ethnic community stirred up rebellions many times against the authority of the British colonisers.[31] Needless to say, the different communities living in the CHT had also been

subjected to inter-ethnic as well as intra-ethnic conflicts and terrorising raids from outside.[32] To ensure security of and peace in the region, a separate police force called the CHT Frontier Police was raised under Regulation III of 1881.[33]

In the end the British ruled this region under special administrative dispensation. This was codified in the CHT Regulation of 1900.[34] The traditional and primordial sentiments of the ethnic communities were honoured by treating the region as a 'Backward Tract' and under the provisions of the Regulation the administration of the region was carried out indirectly by the Governor-General-in-Council of India, separately from the surrounding areas. Under section 18 of the Regulation, rules were framed to provide limited local self-government to the region. Except for the District Magistrate who was British, all other administrative staff were locally recruited from amongst the *pahadees*. The three *Rajas* were entrusted with the internal administration and management of their respective 'Circles' through collecting taxes and dispensing traditional justice in the ethnic courts. The local government was authorised to exercise the power of a High Court in matters of confirming sentences of death only; the powers of a High Court for all other purposes was vested in the Commissioner. 'Outsiders'/ new immigrants were neither allowed to settle nor purchase land. Migration to the area was virtually prohibited since the required permit was subject to so many preconditions that it was almost impossible to acquire. Under the Government of India Act, 1935, the CHT was declared a 'Totally Excluded Area' outside the provinces of Bengal and Assam. The region and its inhabitants thus remained isolated and aloof from the mainland and the mainstream of national life. This arrangement continued until the creation of Pakistan in 1947.

The major problem confronting this region arose on the eve of decolonisation and the eventual partition of India. Concerned about their future the *pahadee* leaders began a series of discussions, negotiations and lobbying with the Congress leadership to determine the status of the region after decolonisation. In this regard the Chakmas who, compared to the other ethnic communities, were more numerous and better educated, took the leading political role. The first political organisation, which originated as a public welfare organisation called the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samiti (Jana Samiti), was founded by Kamini Mohan Dewan in 1916.[35] Although the Jana Samiti was apparently meant to protect, preserve and promote the interests of the *pahadees* in general, it was essentially a partisan organisation because of its Chakma bias. After the announcement of the June Partition Plan on 3 June 1947 the *Rajas* and Jana Samiti began to think seriously about the consequences of decolonisation and the impact that it would have on the CHT region. The Jana Samiti leadership was divided in its opinion about the future of the CHT. Diverse opinions prevailed at that time regarding the political status of the CHT. On the one hand there were the three *Rajas* with their traditional beliefs and primordial sentiments. They were led by the Chakma *Raja* Bhuban Mohan Roy. On the other hand there was the Jana Samiti leadership which was divided into the moderate and extremist factions. The *Rajas* preferred the establishment of pure monarchy in the CHT, the moderates led by Kamini Mohan Dewan the president of the Jana Samiti preferred a constitutional monarchy of the British pattern and the extremists led by Sneha Kumar Chakma the secretary of the Jana Samiti preferred a republican form of government and favoured the inclusion of the region in India.[36]

Despite this division of opinion in the Jana Samiti it was decided that a deputation would go to Delhi to discuss the future of the CHT with the Congress leadership and attract the attention of the government officials. Kamini Mohan Dewan and Sneha Kumar Chakma led this deputation. The *Rajas* also decided to send at the same time a separate deputation to Delhi. The deputation was led by Bhuban Mohan Roy who was paradoxically accompanied by Abany Ranjan Dewan, an influential member of the Jana Samiti.[37] The deputations met the Congress president Acharya J B Kripalini, Sardar Vallabhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad.[38] The three *Rajas* claimed the status of Native States for their respective 'Circles,' which was not much appreciated. Later they proposed the formation of a confederation that would include the CHT region, the Tipperah Hill Tracts (Tripura), Coochbihar and the Khasia territory within the Indian dominion.[39] The Jana Samiti deputation was assured that a special committee formed by the Congress would soon visit CHT to ascertain the genuine popular feeling of the region.[40] The Special Committee of the Congress which visited the CHT in late June 1947 was headed by A V Thakkar and included amongst others Jay Prakash Narayan, Prafulla Kumar Ghosh, Jay Pal Singh, Raj Krishna Bose and Phulban Saha. Sneha Kumar Chakma was co-opted in the Committee to act as an interpreter.[41] The Jana Samiti also formed a Committee to represent its case before the Special Committee of the Congress. The Jana Samiti Committee was headed by Kamini Mohan Dewan and included amongst others Nirod Ranjan Dewan, Bhuban Ranjan Chakma and Ghanashyam Dewan.[42] The two committees held a series of discussions and exchanged their respective views. The Jana Samiti claimed that the CHT should be granted 'the right to exercise the powers of a provincial administration to preserve the distinct "national" culture, custom and characteristic' of the ethnic communities of the region. The Congress refused to accept this position because in its opinion the idea of a district exercising the powers of a provincial administration was inconsistent.[43] The Jana Samiti in the end pleaded for the granting of autonomy to the region so that the ethnic communities living there could 'remain free from the oppression and exploitation of other developed nations.'[44]

The CHT was ultimately awarded to Pakistan.[45] Sir Cyril Radcliffe Chairman of the Bengal Boundary Commission (BC),[46] offered no formal explanation for this. However, in deciding the matter the basic question Radcliffe formulated was: to which State should the CHT be assigned, an area in which the Muslim population was only three per cent of the whole (the Bangalee Hindu population was not even one per cent) but which it was difficult to assign to a State different from that which controlled the district of Chittagong itself.[47] The question was most pertinent. It showed that Radcliffe realised how important it was to retain as much as possible the natural boundaries of the two States in order to ensure satisfactory economic development and growth. In fact, according to Mountbatten's personal report Sir Frederick Burrows, the Governor of Bengal, informed him that the whole economic life of the CHT depended on East Bengal, that there were only one or two indifferent tracks through the jungles of Assam and that it would be disastrous for the people [of CHT] themselves to be cut off from East Bengal.[48]

Pending the publication and implementation of the Radcliffe Award the governments of East and West Bengal were directed to take charge up to the notional boundary.[49] This

notional boundary incorporating the CHT in East Bengal was unacceptable to the extremists of the Jana Samiti who soon came to the identified as the pro-Indian elements of the CHT. The pro-Indians led by Sneha Kumar Chakma refused to pay allegiance to Pakistan[50] and unfurled the Indian flag publicly and officially at the office of the Deputy Commissioner of the CHT at Rangamati on the morning of 15 August 1947,[51] which remained hoisted till 20 August 1947. The pro-Indian faction of the Jana Samiti formed *Pratirodh* (Resistance) *Squads* under the overall supervision of a *Sangram* (Action) *Committee* headed by Sneha Kumar Chakma to resist the installation of Pakistani administration. In an emotionally charged emergency meeting held on 19 August 1974, the pro-Indian elements of the CHT called for an uprising and armed resistance against the Pakistani authorities. The meeting also adopted a resolution which amongst other things declared that 'the CHT shall not abide by the Radcliffe Award.'[52] The futile resistance soon collapsed with the entry of the Baluch Regiment of the Pakistan Army which took control of the region and raised the Pakistani flag on 21 August 1947.[53]

There were a number of other feeble attempts made by the pro- Indian elements to instigate adverse reaction against the CHT's incorporation in Pakistan but these could not make much headway.[54] Immediately after the publication of the Radcliffe award the Pakistan government decided to deal with the matter very firmly. The CHT Frontier Police was disbanded in early 1948 because many of its members joined the *Pratirodh Squads*. The region was put under the control of the East Pakistan Police.[55] Sneha Kumar Chakma and his followers, who could not be reconciled with the turn of events, migrated to India.[56] The moderates led by Kamini Mohan Dewan founded a new political party called the Hill Tracts People's Organisation on 19 December 1950.[57] The party contested the provincial elections of 1954. Its president Kamini Mohan Dewan and vice-president Birendra Kishore Roaza were elected to the East Bengal Legislative Assembly.

The Pakistan government adopted a policy of making efforts to co-opt the ethnic communities of the CHT in the broader 'national' framework. The transformation of the ethnic spirit into civil sentiments, however, depends much on mutual reciprocity for the voluntary acceptance of national norms. With the disbanding of the CHT Frontier Police, Bangalee police personnel and civilians were brought into the region in large numbers. This was followed by an increased migration of the land-hungry Bangalee peasants from the demographically over-burdened *samatal* (plains). The influx of tradesmen and entrepreneurs from the *samatal* adversely affected the fortunes and prospects of the *pahadees*. Relations between the *pahadees* and the increasing Bangalee *samatalbashees* (plainsmen) had always been strained; Bangalees have always controlled the Bazaar trade as well as that related to the extraction of forest products.[58] The resentment amongst the *pahadees* was further heightened with the government's decision to begin the implementation of a plan of gradual industrialisation.[59] Under the Karnaphuli multi-purpose project the Pakistan government with funds from the USAID decided to set up the Kaptai Hydro-electric Plant (KHP), the Karnaphuli Paper Mill and the Karnaphuli Rayon Mill.

Karnaphuli, one of the major streams of the river system of the CHT always attracted official attention for its energy development potential.[60] To set up the KHP, a dam was

constructed at Kaptai on the upper reaches of the Karnaphuli. The plant was intended to produce 120,000 KW of electricity which in combination with existing thermal units of Chittagong, Narayanganj and Dhaka would eventually produce up to 160,000 KW.[61] The Kaptai dam involved 'changes both in the physical environment and in the cultural pattern'[62] of the *pahadees*. It came to be identified as a major catastrophe for them, especially the Chakmas. 'The dam converted a vast hilly region and valleys, hitherto used by the Chakmas for horticultural activities cum gardening, into a network of lakes'[63] which covered '253 square miles, 50,000 acres of settled cultivable land which is about 40% of the district's total cultivable area.'[64] Such a situation had far-reaching consequences on the economy and politics of the region. Nearly 18,000 families that is '100,000 persons, 90% of these Chakma, were displaced' due to the construction of the KHP and it is alleged that the uprooted people were 'never adequately rehabilitated.'[65] However, according to official sources the government took up elaborate measures to compensate and rehabilitate the displaced persons.

The *pahadees* especially the Chakmas allege that the government officials did not act sincerely and many of them were involved in the mishandling of the schemes or misappropriation of funds – whatever was the case, it is they who suffered most. The Chittagong University study shows that 69% of the Chakmas felt that the KHP created food and financial problems for them, 69% complained of inadequate government help for re-settlement, 58% were disheartened because it did not provide any meaningful job opportunities at the KHP and 93% felt that their economic condition had been better before the construction of the KHP.[66] As a consequence '40,000 Chakmas emigrated to the neighbouring Indian states of Tripura and Assam.'[67]

The indignation of the *pahadees* led to serious ethnic tension. Gradually they became suspicious of the intentions of the government and began to accuse the government of destroying their traditional pattern of life. This political campaign was led by a group of young students who represented 'a new wave of Chakma and Marma political identity and consciousness.' The reaction of the Pakistan government was demonstrated in the form by an amendment to the (second) constitution abolishing the special status accorded to the CHT under the Regulation of 1900. Under a gazette notification issued on 10 January 1964 the CHT ceased to be an 'Excluded Area.'[68] The *Rajas* and the *pahadee* leaders strongly opposed the implementation of this amendment. However, the CHT Regulation of 1900 was suitably amended without any prior consultation with them, to provide property rights in land to the settler population. There was massive influx of *samatalbashees* who were predominantly Bangalees which further exacerbated inter-ethnic relationships. Soon the law enforcing agencies and administrative personnel in particular came to be identified as instruments of oppression and coercion. This has contributed considerably to the enhancement of *pahadee* solidarity.

The relationship between the *pahadees* and *samatalbashees* i.e. the Bangalees, was not particularly cordial on the eve of the liberation war. While the newly born nationalist fervour overwhelmingly succeeded in catching the imagination of the Bangalees, the estranged *pahadees* of the CHT were bewildered by the turn of events. Before they could pull themselves

together Bangladesh was plunged into the war of liberation. The *pahadees* in general and the Chakmas in particular remained indifferent to the traumatic events of 1971. The nationalist movement that swept across Bangladesh from the late sixties neither meant anything to them nor did it much appeal to them. The Awami League (AL), the spearhead of the nationalist movement, failed to convey the message of the movement to the *pahadees*.[69] To the *pahadees* the events of 1971 appeared to be merely the rivalry of the contending elites of Dhaka and Rawalpindi which had nothing much to offer them. The *pahadees* hardly considered the liberation war to be of any use to their struggle for emancipation.

The majority of the *pahadees* remained passive throughout the nine months of the liberation war. While a substantial number of them especially the Chakmas, sided and collaborated with the Pakistan occupation army, a significant section of the *pahadees*, specially the newly conscious college-educated young men expressed solidarity with the liberation struggle. But due to the AL's partisan approach and attempt to monopolise the liberation war, most of these young *pahadees* were not allowed to join the *Mukti Bahini* (Liberation Force).[70] The few who joined the war were not later honoured and given recognition for their services and contribution.[71] The Pakistan army succeeded in recruiting nearly 3,000 *pahadees* especially the Chakmas in the paramilitary East Pakistan Civil Armed Force (EPCAF), the *Razakaars* and other militia forces towards the end of the liberation war.[72] *Raja* Tridib Roy[73] and Aung Shwe Prue Choudhury[74] sided with Pakistan. The role of *Raja* Maung Shwe Prue Choudhury was very confusing; often it appeared that he tacitly supported Pakistan but there was no evidence to prove that he actively collaborated with the Pakistan army. *Raja* Maung Prue Sein Choudhury[75] supported the liberation struggle of Bangladesh.

It was in these trying times that a new leadership emerged in the CHT. Manabendra Narayan Larma (Manabendra), a school teacher and lawyer who caught the imagination of the young *pahadee* radicals of the sixties, founded the underground Parabatya Chattagram Upajati Kalyan Parishad (UKP) in 1966. It provided a broad forum for both the radicals and nationalists of the CHT. Manabendra was elected to the East Pakistan Provincial Assembly in 1970.[76] The radical faction of the UKP led by Manabendra founded the underground Rangamati Communist Party (RCP)[77] on 16 May 1970. Manabendra supported the Bangalee autonomists and joined the liberation war in the hope that this would ultimately pave the way for the establishment of an autonomous CHT.[78] The RCP organised its armed cadres under the banner of *Gana Mukti Fouz* (People's Liberation Army).

## CHT in the Aftermath of Bangladesh Liberation

In the aftermath of the emergence of Bangladesh the pro-AL faction of the victorious *Mukti Bahini* entered the CHT with vengeance and carried out a series of reprisals.[79] To make the situation worse for the *pahadees*, after the surrender of the Pakistan army on 16 December 1971, a number of Pakistani soldiers and members of the EPCAF and *Razakaars* took refuge in the CHT and began to harass the administration. The Bangladesh defence forces were directed on 20 December 1971 to 'hunt' them and 'firmly deal with the anti-Bangladesh elements.' In these operations even the air force was used to carryout bombing raids.[80] *Raja* Maung Prue

Sein Choudhury who was appointed adviser to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Mujib) on tribal affairs appealed to the government to ensure safety and security of the *pahadees*. He personally requested Mujib to ask the law enforcing agencies to put an end to atrocities.[81]

Under the umbrella of Indo-Bangladesh Joint Command "the Indian forces swept through the CHT, mopping up Naga and Mizo units [who were provided there by the Pakistani authorities in the pre-liberation period] occupying suspected camps and securing ground of tactical importance."[82] The 1972 Indo-Bangladesh Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Peace provided a basis for such operations relating to trans-border insurgency. "After the withdrawal of its forces from Bangladesh India stationed military helicopters in Chittagong"[83] to help operational missions of Bangladesh Army to keep the CHT clear of Naga and Mizo guerrillas.

On 29 January 1972 a seven-member delegation led by Charu Bikash Chakma (the AL candidate who lost to *Raja* Tridib Roy in 1970) met the President, Prime Minister (PM), Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs and other senior AL leaders to appraise them of the CHT situation and the grievances of the *pahadees*. The delegation appealed to the PM to guarantee the protection of their distinct identity. Mujib assured the delegation that adequate provisions would be made in the constitution to preserve and protect the traditions and cultures of the *pahadees* and all necessary measures would be taken to provide job opportunities for them.[84] On 15 February 1972 another seven-member delegation led by *Raja* Maung Prue Sein Choudhury went to the PM's office to submit a memorandum. It included among others Manabendra and *Rajmata* (Royal Mother) Benita Roy (the mother of *Raja* Tridib Roy). The delegation however could not meet Mujib because he was not available at that time. The delegation therefore left the memorandum containing a four-point charter of demands with the PM's public relations officer. The following were the four points.[85]

1. The CHT shall be an autonomous region and it shall have a legislature of its own.
2. To preserve the rights of the tribal people such statutory provisions in the constitution shall be made which would be similar to the CHT Regulation of 1900.
3. The office of the tribal Rajas shall be preserved.
4. There shall be provisions in the constitution that would prohibit any constitutional amendment or change relating to the CHT.

It was in an atmosphere of deep anguish and distrust that on 18 March 1972 Manabendra founded the Parbatya Chattgram Jana Sanghati Samiti (JSS[86] – the Chittagong Hill Tracts People's Solidarity Association), the first open political party in the CHT. On 24 April 1972 Manabendra submitted 'An Application Demanding the Constitutional Rights of the People of the CHT' to the Constitution Drafting Committee. This application was an elaborate version of the earlier memorandum submitted on 15 February 1972.[87] In the autumn of 1972 when the Constituent Assembly of Bangladesh (CA) was busy framing the constitution, Manabendra, who was also a member of the CA, tried his utmost to convince the members of the CA, who all belonged to the AL, of the need to concede administrative autonomy to the

CHT and to form a separate legislative body there.[88] Throughout 1972 till the enactment of the constitution Manabendra intensively lobbied with the AL leadership and held several rounds of discussions with Mujib in his attempt to safeguard the distinct identity, rights and privileges of the *pahadees*. In one of these discussions, he had an altercation with Mujib who threatened to swamp the CHT with the influx of one million Bangalees.[89] In his utter frustration Manabendra thus spoke in the CA: 'We have not approached [the authorities] as a people seeking compassion. We have come as human beings and therefore as men we have a right to live.'[90]

The CA failed to respond to the concerns of the *pahadees*. To top it all, when the constitution was finally enacted in November 1972, Article 6 provided that: 'citizens of Bangladesh shall be known as Bangalees.'[91] To add salt to the injured pride of the *pahadees*, in February 1973 on the eve of the first parliamentary elections, Mujib in a public meeting at Rangamati declared that the *pahadees* have been 'promoted to [the ranks of the] Bangalees' and asked them to behave as good citizens. He also promised them that his government would preserve the distinct traditions and cultures of the *pahadees*.[92] The idea that they had been made 'Bangalees by promotion' was too humiliating for the *pahadees* and sealed all possibilities of a rapprochement between the *pahadees* and Bangalees. The *pahadee* resentment and indignation was well reflected in one of Manabendra's famous speeches delivered in the course of a parliamentary debate: 'I am a Chakma. A Marma can never be a Chakma, Chakma can never be a Murang, and a Chakma can never be a Bangalee ...I am a Chakma, I am not a Bangalee ... I am a citizen of Bangladesh, Bangladeshee.'[93]

It seems that initially Manabendra and the JSS wanted a negotiated settlement of the ethnic problem to secure the well-being of the *pahadee* communities. But Mujib and the AL leadership were distrustful of Manabendra and the long-term intentions of the JSS. Mujib who took an active part in the Sylhet referendum for its inclusion in Pakistan in 1947 was also aware of the political moves of a section of the then *pahadee* leadership and the Indian Congress. Thus he was more concerned about the territorial integrity of Bangladesh. In pursuing his government's policies in the CHT, Mujib therefore gave top priority to the question of political integration.

Myron Weiner has remarked that 'Integration' may refer to the process of living together of culturally and socially discrete groups within a single territorial unit and the establishment of a national identity.[94] Ethnic unification is one of the means of achieving this. One may here appropriately refer to three subtypes of ethnic unification: ethnic consolidation, ethnic assimilation and inter-ethnic integration.[95] The aim of integration may often conflict with that of toleration towards those who are determined to remain socio-culturally distinct from others. Thus the history of ethnic minorities in 'national' states is full of tragedy, because they suffer forced assimilation.[96] In this context it would be very pertinent to quote from a UN document. In his report on the protection of [ethnic] minorities Capatorti stated:

> The official attitude of States towards minority groups forming part of their
> population can and does vary considerably. It might be said that the two

extremes are represented by the case of recognition in the constitution of the existence of a minority and the absence of any recognition at all. Between these two extremes, however, there are some middle positions: recognition of the basis of special legislation or administrative measures or the simple recognition of private institutions representing the interests of minority groups.[97]

He describes as the 'desirable solution in all cases' that either the constitution or at least special laws should expressly lay down the right of members of ethnic or linguistic groups to retain and develop their own culture and use their own language.[98] Seen from this perspective it can fairly be said that the *pahadees'* claim to the right to safeguard their distinct identity, culture and value system was and is quite reasonable and justified.

## Attempts at National Integration

The Mujib government adopted a policy (enthusiastically advocated also by a section of the army) of massive human settlement[99] of *samatalbashees* especially from the districts of Comilla, Noakhali, Barisal and Patuakhali. The large-scale planning of new re-settlement on a 'paternalistic' model[100] began from late 1973. Free lands were distributed amongst the new settlers and they were provided with police protection. At the same time all efforts were made to strengthen the law-enforcing agencies including the police.[101] Three new cantonments, for the region at Dighinala, Ruma and Alikadam were established.[102] Anticipating such a governmental policy the JSS decided to put up armed resistance against the government. On 7 January 1973, the JSS formed its armed wing the *Shanti Bahini* (SB) from the vestiges of the *Gana Mukti Fouz.*[103]

With the formation of the SB, the independent structure of the JSS and its leadership began to wither away and by the end of 1974 the JSS was virtually taken over by the SB. It was in the midst of such peri-symbiosis that a short-lived splinter group emerged in the JSS. This splinter group formed a separate faction inside the JSS called the Tribal People's Party (TPP) in the middle of 1974. The TPP could not make much headway within the rank and file of the JSS, nor could it mobilise popular support among the *pahadees.*[104] The TPP faction was expelled from the JSS in early 1975. However, the JSS by this time became deeply factionalised[105] and both the JSS and SB soon got embroiled in bitter ideological strife. One faction led by Preeti Kumar Chakma (Preeti) adhered to the cause of what they perceived as their notion of nationalism and the other faction was led by Manabendra and his younger brother Tyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma alias Shantu Larma.

Some time in March 1975 Mujib held a clandestine meeting with Manabendra and assured him that he would look into the problems of the CHT and resolve them 'once and for all' by rectifying governmental policies.[106] Manabendra was not convinced and was hesitant to rely on Mujib's assurances. In April 1975 Mujib formed a Special Committee for the CHT (SCCHT)[107] headed by one of his secretaries Abul Ahsan[108] to make recommendations to the government. The SCCHT did some preliminary work but before it could make any meaningful progress Mujib was overthrown in a bloody military coup in August 1975.

After consolidating his position General Ziaur Rahman (Zia) gave his full attention to the problems of the CHT. He rejected the autonomy demand of the JSS and pursued a tougher policy in respect of the armed insurgents. His regime tried to win over the *pahadees* by accelerating the process of economic development in the region, by reserving seats for *pahadee* students in the universities and other educational institutions, by the setting up of Tribal Cultural Institutes and by the introduction of special radio programmes for the *pahadee* communities. *Rajmata* Benita Roy was appointed advisor to Zia for some time. Later Shubimal Dewan became Zia's advisor for a while and Aung Shwe Prue Choudhury was made a minister of state. Debashish Roy, the young Barrister son of Tridib Roy, was installed as the new *Raja* of the Chakmas in 1977.

At the same time the government embarked on a plan for carrying out the settlement programme more rigorously in the CHT by granting to the *samatalbashees* both land and agricultural inputs.[109] In mid-1979 it was decided to settle 30,000 Bangalee families in the CHT the following year. A sum of Taka 60 million was allocated to the scheme.[110] According to US AID in July 1980 the government decided to settle 100,000 *samatalbashees* in the first phase of the scheme[111] and the Deputy Commissioner of the CHT was authorised accordingly to take necessary action to implement the scheme.[112] There were further plans to settle an additional 500,000 persons in the CHT so that they could act as a 'countervailing force' to the *pahadees.*[113]

Furthermore, the government modernised and expanded the three newly built cantonments of the CHT region. The Bangladesh Army by 1981 was extended in the CHT and full-time Brigades since then have been stationed at Rangamati, Bandarban, Khagdachhadi, Kaptai and Sabuatali. The number of police stations has been increased and in addition a School of Jungle Warfare at Mahalchhadi and a naval base at Dhalyachhadi for the Kaptai lake area have also been established. According to estimates of foreign scholars nearly 55,000 Bangladeshee troops (which includes personnel from the army, para-military, police Battalion and other auxiliary forces) were stationed throughout the CHT in early 1981.[114] A recent estimate shows that there are 230 army camps, 100 BDR camps, 37 Armed Police Battalion (APB) camps, 49 Reserve Police Battalion (RPB) camps, 40 Armed Ansar Battalion (AAB) camps and a host of Village Defence Party (VDP) camps.[115]

The government headed by Hussain Muhammad Ershad continued the policies of the Zia regime and further intensified the settlement programme. While militarisation of the region continued, the government at the same time also carried out secret negotiations with the senior leaders of the *pahadees* and the dissidents of the JSS.

## Development Efforts in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

With the basic objective of accelerating economic development of the region, the CHT Development Board (CHTDB) was established in January 1976.[116] It has a seemingly autonomous organisational structure but is mostly bureaucratic in composition, the real authority being in the hands of the government's Cabinet Division which is in charge of the

general administration of the country.[117] The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is the main co-ordinator of the development programmes in the CHT. The CHTDB projects have been financed bilaterally by Sweden and Australia and by the multilateral agencies UNICEF, WHO and ADB.

UNICEF financed a water supply project and WHO is seeking to eradicate malaria as a part of its worldwide programme. Until 1981 the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) was involved in a £6 million project to plant trees and provided technical training to the *pahadees* in forest industries and road development. This project was part of a much larger afforestation programme involving a longer period. It was discontinued after its termination in June 1981. The Australian Development Assistance Bureau (ADAB) undertook a road building programme to connect Khagdachhadi located in the centre of the Chengi valley with Rangamati 41 miles away and to upgrade the Chittagong-Rangamati road. ADAB budgeted A$11 million for road construction and a technical assistance programme in the CHT but pulled out in 1981 because 'insurgents have made threats against foreign engineers engaged in road construction in the area.'[118] Besides, a few Christian non-governmental organisations like ICCO, CCDB (Christian Council for Development in Bangladesh), Caritas Bangladesh and World Vision are providing funds for small-scale projects.

For the ADB, of all other development tasks in the CHT the most important one had been the conversion of *jum* cultivation to wet-rice cultivation. This form of cultivation is essentially and intimately related to the introduction of the plough in agriculture and agriculture in turn is linked to private property rights in land. The *pahadees*, however, especially the Chakmas (the dominant community), are not familiar with such property rights and ownership. The Chakma *Rajas*, having no right to land, 'by a mere accident of local custom,' treated the persons living on it as private property, thus creating 'human *talooks*' instead of 'hereditary *zamindarees*'[119] which were sold, subdivided and inherited like landed property. The human settlements programme in the region drastically altered this situation, as a result of which changes of far-reaching consequences have taken place in the structure of the *pahadee* economic order and value system. The introduction of the plough on a large scale was therefore vehemently resented by the *pahadees*. Taking advantage of this conservative attitude of the *pahadees*, the JSS/SB stepped up its insurrectionary activities, the farmers being the principal targets. As a countermeasure to this kind of SB offensive, the CHTDB prepared a scheme of *joutha khamars* (collective farms).[120] By 1982, the *joutha khamar* had constituted the most important sector of the CHTDB's development programme involving 60% of the total allocations over the period since its inception.[121] It has been alleged that the *joutha khamars* were organised as 'Vietnam-type' anti-guerrilla 'strategic hamlets.'[122]

Since its inception, according to governmental sources, the CHTDB up to June 1990 had spent Taka 456 crore (1 crore = 10 million) on its development programmes in the CHT. In addition to the national development plans, a special five-year plan (SFP), exclusively for the CHT, was completed in 1990. Under the SFP an extra Taka 50 crore was allotted annually for 17 projects.[123] Compared to other regions the sectoral allocation for the CHT has increasingly been higher during this period. According to an official estimate the total amount CHTDB had

spent up to June 1990 exceeded Taka 15,000 crore. This has undoubtedly stimulated development, created jobs and eased farmers access to markets.[124] The following statistics show the massive development achievements in the region: the CHT now has 9 colleges (of which three are government colleges); 938 primary schools; 33 junior high schools; 62 secondary schools; 9 dormitories, exclusively for the *pahadee* students; 2 residential schools, exclusively for the *pahadee* students; 752.25 km of roads; a 100-bed hospital at Rangamati; 50-bed hospital for each of the districts of Khagdachhadi and Bandarban; 31-bed hospital in each of the six sub-districts and a health complex in each of the other 19 sub-district headquarters.[125] The *pahadees* have been given preferential treatment in employment as well as in the educational sector. Under a quota system seats are exclusively reserved for them in different educational institutions including the universities and at same time they are also allowed to compete with other students for the unreserved seats.

The British government generously funded the entire telecommunication project directly linking the CHT with Dhaka and Chittagong as part of its general 'aid' towards radio-linking all the police stations in Bangladesh to a police central communications headquarter at Dhaka. The electronics giant Plessey Company Limited after an approach from the Crown Agents for Overseas Governments and Administrations got the contract for the project.[126]

Finally the British military mission maintained at the Defence Services Command and Staff College (DSCSC)[127] of the Bangladesh Army at Mirpur, Dhaka, played a significant role in 'providing equipment for dealing with insurgents in the hills east of Chittagong.' The mission which was headed by Colonel Gibson of the SAS (Special Airborne Service) has been passing on their valued 'Malay Campaign' experience to Bangladesh military officers who were subsequently posted in the CHT to tackle SB insurgency.[128]

## Armed Confrontations

Insurrectionary activities of the JSS against the authority of the Bangladesh government which began from mid-1973 gradually increased towards the end of 1974.[129] After the fall of the Mujib regime the Indian authorities contacted Manabendra, who reached an understanding with them and went underground.[130] Later Manabendra crossed the border and took refuge in India and was under tremendous pressure to launch massive guerrilla action against the Bangladesh authorities.[131] It is widely believed that the Indian intelligence officials who were always very keen about the CHT became deeply interested in intensifying ethnic insurgency. Since 1976 they began to provide "active support to the SB insurgents, allowing them to operate from bases in India."[132] A liaison office was set up in the Indian state of Tripura to provide assistance and military logistics to the insurgents.[133] It has been reported that the Indian authorities, especially the intelligence organisation – Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) – has been directly involved in the planning, training and arming of the SB.[134] According to Bangladesh Officials, they 'have definite information regarding this'[135] a charge RAW officials stridently deny. But other authoritative sources assert that it seems indisputable that the RAW maintains links with the rebels though the extent is difficult to gauge.[136] When the SB began its 'military action,' it attacked military and paramilitary personnel and their bases in the CHT, as well as

non-tribal settlers, resulting in hundreds of deaths.[137] Local officials and some foreign nationals working in the area have also been abducted and ransom money demanded. *Pahadees* who oppose JSS/SB activities are targets of selective killings. Contractors, timber merchants and others engaged in different trading and development activities as well as villagers have to pay the SB special taxes. To increase their fund further SB also resorts to other activities like dacoity and looting.[138] Thus the SB activities constituted a real threat both militarily and politically.[139] With encouragement and full logistic support from the Indian authorities the ethnocidal conflict in the CHT continues. Subsequent events demonstrate that for India the actual ethnic conflict in the CHT is of secondary importance. But the SB provides India with an important bargaining chip for other more crucial issues such as the *Farakka Barrage* and the sharing of the waters of the *Ganga* and the *Brahmaputra* river conplex.[140]

The main strategy and tactics of the SB to date are hit and run, ambush and assault of military, paramilitary, police and other auxiliary troops and personnel belonging to the law enforcing agencies. The SB attacks Bangalee settlements, assassinates isolated farmers and kills cattle. It also engages in sabotage activities such as demolition of culverts, bridges and other key components of the communication system and the destruction of government property.[141]

In response to JSS/SB actions the Bangladesh military launched massive combing operations to ferret out the insurgents. It is alleged that in these operations many *pahadees* including women and children have been murdered and imprisoned and some villages have been burnt and looted,[142] an allegation that the Bangladesh authorities have constantly denied. On the other hand the policies of 'grouping villages together in large settlements close to army camps have been largely successful in isolating the guerrillas from the local population.'[143] Because of the turmoil in the CHT a large number of *pahadees* crossed the Indian border and took refuge in Tripura. At the same time there is also evidence which substantiates the allegation that the SB often forces the *pahadis* at gunpoint to seek refuge in the Indian camps to draw the attention of the international media.[144]

The JSS has developed an elaborate organisational network in the CHT. The highest decision-making body is the Central Committee (CC),[145] which usually meets twice a year. The day-to-day party activities are co-ordinated and supervised by the Executive Committee (EC). Under the EC there are four major departments: political, financial, judicial and military. The political department consists of a number of branch committees such as Graam Panchayat, Youth and Students' Forum, Women's Organisation, Jum Chashi Samiti, Katanya (Cutters) Samiti, Information and Publicity Wing, Family Welfare Section and so on. The judiciary is headed by Central Judicial Committee (CJC).[146] It consists of two sub-committees – one dealing with Civilians and Civil Affairs and the other with Military Discipline and Related Affairs. There are a number of local judicial committees too. These committees settle land disputes and other issues.

The military department is responsible for the SB. According to government sources, the guerrillas in the SB never exceeded 3,000 but the SB itself claims this figure to be around 15,000. The SB consists of three units, namely Armed Guerrilla Force, Medical Wing and the

Production and Distribution Team. The Armed Guerrilla Force has two other auxiliary Wings: Women's Regiment and the Village Militia. Shantu Larma is at present the Supreme Commander and Sunil Chakma the Field Commander of the SB.

For the convenience of military operations the SB divided the entire CHT into six major sectors, each bearing the name of a *samatal* district as its code name: Jessore sector (Maatiranga, Kaokhali and Rangamati areas), Dhaka sector (Ruma, Ruhanchhadi and Alikadam areas), Boguda sector (Langdu area only) Sythet sector (Dighinala, Paanchhadi, Mohichhadi areas), Rangpur sector (Naikonchhadi, Bilaichhadi and Manikchhadi areas) and Comilla sector (Jurachhadi, Barkal and Kaptai areas). These sectors are divided into sub-sectors and the sub-sectors are further divided into several zones. All the sectors are connected to each other through an elaborate intelligence network.

## Towards a Negotiated Settlement

The first serious attempt by the government to seek a political solution to the CHT problem was made in 1980. In July 1977 the Zia government formed the Tribal Convention (TC) to reach an understanding with the *pahadees*. The TC acted as a consultative body of the government which also established contacts with the JSS/SB leadership. The TC was led by amongst others the *Rajas* of the CHT, Charu Bikash Chakma, Shantimoy Dewan and Aung Shwe Prue Choudhury. In October 1980, Charu Bikash Chakma the secretary of the TC put forward a four-point proposal purportedly to improve the situation in the CHT:

1. Regional autonomy under which the head of administration in the district, a Chief Commissioner, would be the GOC of the 24th Infantry Brigade at Chittagong.
2. The formation of a Tribal Affairs Ministry which would be under the control of the Chief Commissioner and would act in an advisory capacity to existing government departments.
3. Formation of a Special Secretariat reporting directly to the President.
4. The creation of an administration responsible to a Regional Council of 60 representatives.

The proposals of the TC laid the basis for hard negotiations with the insurgents. Authoritative sources now agree that Zia sincerely wanted to solve the CHT problem politically.[147] However, a section of the military and bureaucracy was not very happy with the progress. Indeed many amongst the *pahadees* are of the opinion that 'amongst other reasons the tribal problem was a factor that led to his [Zia's] death. There was an atmosphere of dialogue in his period. But it failed because of a conspiracy by certain government bureaucrats.'[148]

Sneha Kumar Chakma, the leader of the 1947 abortive rebellion, formed an organisation at Agartala called the Buddhist Minority Protection Committee (BMPC) in the early 1980s which began a communal hate campaign against Bangladesh authorities. The BMPC laid emphasis on the Buddhist identity of the *pahadees* (45% of whom are non-Buddhists) and

accused the government of religious intolerance. The BMPC along with the JSS allege that the Bangladesh government has launched a programme of Islamisation of the CHT and forced conversion of the Buddhists. They refer to the construction of Mosques in the area as evidence of their allegation.[149] It is alleged that the BMPC is actually a covert organisation whose main responsibility is to maintain liaison between a section of the CHT Buddhist monks and Indian authorities directly connected with the CHT insurgency, especially the Border Security Force (BSF) and RAW.[150] The BMPC's communal hate campaign however became counter-productive because a section of JSS dissidents, mostly of non-Buddhist origin, began to resent the Chakma dominance of the JSS. In his utter frustration Sneha Kumar Chakma is on record as saying: 'the Pakistani rulers were too far away to pay much attention to the CHT, so whatever action they took was never intense. But with the formation of Bangladesh things changed. The problem of the tribals automatically assumed much more importance.'[151]

The Ershad regime offered a series of general amnesties to the CHT insurgents and revived the TC to establish contact with them, especially the JSS/SB leadership in exile. Initially the response to the amnesties was not very encouraging but gradually the insurgents responded and many surrendered to the authorities with their arms. At the same time refugees from the Indian camps have also returned in good numbers and they were rehabilitated under a government scheme.

Through a series of protracted negotiations the government succeeded in making a dent in the broad unity of the JSS followers in particular and the *pahadees* in general. Senior and elderly persons like Charu Bikash Chakma, Chai Thowai Roaza and Shantimoy Dewan, who were organisers of the JSS in its formative days, disassociated themselves from the SB. The Marmas and Tripuras became very resentful of 'Chakma dominance.' To them 'the jungle war was essentially a "chakma show" to perpetuate their ethnic hegemony over other communities of the CHT.'[152]

Ershad formed a high powered National Committee for the CHT (NCCHT) which was headed by Air Vice-Marshall (Rtd.) A K Khandakar, the Minister for Planning. The NCCHT held six rounds of talks with the JSS/SB in an effort to find some accommodation. The JSS now presented a new five-point demand (a drastically modified version of its previous five-point demand), which if implemented would be tantamount to virtual liquidation of Bangladesh authority in the CHT. The original five-point demand stipulated the following:

1. Regional autonomy within the constitutional framework of Bangladesh and a separate legislature for the CHT.
2. Restitution of all lands taken by Bangalee immigrants since 1970 and a total ban on further immigration.
3. Inclusion of provisions in the constitution guaranteeing the preservation of indigenous cultures and identities.
4. Freedom of movement and communication within the district.
5. Freedom from official harassment.

The new modified five points (which in reality contain 30 points) of the JSS include the following demands: provincial status for the CHT with full provincial autonomy and a separate provincial legislature; all subjects except defence, foreign affairs, currency and heavy industries to be vested in the provincial government, removal of all settlers who had arrived in the CHT since 17 August 1947; establishment of a separate bank for the CHT; repatriation and rehabilitation of those who migrated to India in the 1960s, with full compensation; military cantonments in the CHT to be dismantled in phases and the renaming of the CHT as Jumma Land.[153] It goes without saying that it is indeed very hard for any government to acquiesce to these demands. The NCCHT therefore resorted to a second course of action. It began negotiations with the non-JSS open leadership of the *pahadees* especially the newly educated young men and senior members of the JSS who disassociated themselves from insurrectionary politics. The NCCHT reached an agreement with the non-JSS leadership on the basis of a nine-point Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU included the following:[154] setting up of autonomous *sthaniya sarkar parishad* (local government council) for each of the three hill districts; re-demarcation of the three hill districts; the local affairs including the maintenance of law and order, education, health and local tax/rent collection to come under the purview of the proposed *parishad;* the *parishad* to have a police force with authority to appoint persons from constable to Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI), higher ranks being appointed by the central authority; the *parishad* to consist of 30 members two-thirds of these to be elected/nominated by the *pahadees* and the rest to be elected/nominated by the Bangalees residing in the CHT; one chairperson for each hill district to be elected from amongst the *pahadees;* and necessary measures to be taken for the modification, annulment or implementation of the CHT Regulation of 1900.

The JSS hardliners were very bitter about the MOU. They dubbed the local leaders as puppets, collaborators and traitors and rejected the deal as a 'hoax created by the government to evade real political solution.'[155] In a series of outrageous armed actions they killed a number of prominent *pahadee* leaders including Shantimoy Dewan,[156] convenor of the Rangamati Tribal Leaders Committee and Chairman of Rangamati Sadar Upazilla (sub-district) and abducted at least ten other *pahadee* leaders who were signatories to the peace deal.[157] This infuriated the *pahadees* and the isolation of the JSS hardliners and SB was thus complete.

On 28 February 1989 the *Jatiya Sangsad* (National Parliament) adopted three Bills providing for the constitution of the *Parbatya Zilla Sthaniya Sarkar Parishad* – PZSSP (Hill District Local Government Council) – for each of the three hill districts of the CHT.[158] The *parishads* new 22 powers included appointing of police and approving or prohibiting the transfer or sale of land. Elections to the *parishads* were organised in June 1989. The SB in vain tried to put up a resistance against the creation of the new PZSSPs. The moderates and the educated youths seized the opportunity and mobilised mass support in their favour. They formed the *Nagorik Pratirodh Committee* (NPC-Civic Resistance Committee) to resist SB actions.[159] They took the view that 'if properly implemented, the autonomy granted [to] the three district councils in the CHT is not bad.'[160] The *parishads* have been installed although the 1900 Regulation has still not been officially repealed. So far fourteen of the 22 powers enumerated in the PZSSP Acts have

been transferred to the *parishads*. The slow transfer is due to rivalry between the *parishads* and the previous administrative structure.

The SB stepped up its guerrilla operations after the PZSSP elections, but because of their isolation it has become increasingly difficult for the insurgents to stay in the CHT. They have taken permanent shelter in the Indian refugee camps. Significantly enough, after the fall of Ershad, the JSS hardliners raised the demand for the annulment of the PZSSPs but were snubbed by the local people. They did not succeed in winning the support of the major political parties either. After a meeting with members of the three PZSSPs on 30 December 1990 the Acting President Shahabudin Ahmed declared that the PZSSPs would continue to function.[161]

Several initiatives were taken to reopen negotiations between the government and the JSS/SB. Hangsha Dhwaza Chakma, a former member of the Khagdachhadi (Sadar) Union took the initiative to establish the government's contact with the JSS/SB. With the approval of both the government and JSS/SB a six-member liaison committee (LC) was set up at the end of October 1991.[162] Some time in November 1991 the JSS proposed the formation of a high-powered Parliamentary Committee to sit in the presence of a Minister.[163] However, in December 1991, once again bypassing the *Jatiya Sangsad*, the government appointed an eight-member committee headed by Brigadier Sharif Aziz.[164] The committee could not make much progress.

In her visit to India, Khaleda Zia the PM of Bangladesh availed of the opportunity of raising the issue of insurgency in the CHT during her talks with the Indian PM and reached agreement for speedy repatriation of all Bangladeshee ethnic refugees to Bangladesh in full safety and security. The Joint Communiqué dated 28 May 1992 and issued accordingly, mentioned that the Bangladesh side agreed to set up a representative political level committee that would encourage the refugees to return. The Indian side assured that its authorities would co-operate fully in the process of repatriation.[165]

The Bangladesh government formed a nine-member representative political committee for the CHT (RPCCHT) on 9 July 1992 with five MPs of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), one each from three opposition parties – AL, Jamaat-e-Islami and the Workers' Party of Bangladesh – and the Communication Minister, Oil Ahmed, as the Convenor.[166] The opposition at first refused to work on the committee because the CHT region was not represented. Later, after the inclusion of an AL MP from Khagdachhadi (replacing another AL MP), the opposition changed its earlier stand. The LC began a series of shuttle negotiations between the JSS/SB and the government to prepare the ground for formal talks between the two sides.[167] The JSS/SB finally agreed to sit with the RPCCHT.[168] Talks between the RPCCHT and the JSS have so far been held in Khagdachhadi on 5 November 1992, 26 December 1992, 22 May 1993, 14 July 1993 and 18 September 1993. In these talks the JSS presented a third version of its five-point demands incorporating some fresh ones and moderating some earlier ones (the newly revised five-point demands actually contained 47 points). The following are the main points:

1. To grant special administrative status to the CHT with constitutional guarantee.
2. To grant regional autonomy to the CHT with a Regional Council.
3. The Regional Council to discharge substantial executive authority through an Executive Council.
4. To give constitutional recognition to 10 ethnic communities of the CHT (this excluded the Tanchangyas, the Riangs the Uchais and the Mros whom the JSS/SB refuses to recognise as separate independent ethnic communities).
5. Creation of a separate Ministry for the CHT Affairs.
6. Reservation of three parliament seats for each of the three hill districts.
7. Establishment of a separate police force for the CHT.
8. To convert CHT into an administrative and political unit taken together with Rangamati, Khagdachhadi and Bandarban districts.
9. Eviction of all Bangalee settlers settled in the CHT since August 1947.
10. Renaming of the CHT as *Jummaland.*

Following negotiations, a truce has been enforced in the region. A sub-committee headed by Rashed Khan Menon MP (Workers' Party) has held several rounds of talks with the JSS/SB leadership but as yet could not make much head way. The sub-committee held the last negotiations on 12 July 1995. The latest extension of the ceasefire ended on 30 July 1996. The ceasefire is largely holding, a good number of ethnic refugees have returned who were provided with a package of incentives, concessions and economic support. Upendra Lal Chakma, the convenor of the *Jumma Sharanarthi Kalyan Parishad* (JSKP – Council for Jumma Refugees' Welfare) appears to play a dubious role which merely help to increase the frustration and miseries of the refugees and creates greater impediment to repatriation. The JSS however have not given up its guerrilla tactics of harassing the military. Taking advantage of the ceasefire, the SB has resorted to ambush, raids, sniping and laying of booby-traps. Despite casualties the Bangladesh military is still maintaining its patience.

## Ethno-Nationalism and National Integration

The present situation of ethnic turmoil is ironically the creation of the ruling Bangalee elites. The Bangladesh movement which originated as a protest movement eventually culminated in an armed struggle through a protracted phase of resistance. But during this entire period the movement suffered from ideological poverty. The populist ideology of Bangalee nationalism espoused by the AL and the political elites was and till to date remains vague, ambiguous and amorphous. Successive regimes of Bangladesh in their efforts at nation-building sought to create cultural monism notwithstanding the schism of Bangalee and Bangladeshee concept of nationalism. This by implication means that the dominant Bangalee culture is to be imposed over the other cultures existing in Bangladesh.

In February 1973 on the eve of the first parliamentary elections, as mentioned earlier, Mujib in a public meeting at Rangamati declared that the smaller ethnic communities have been "promoted to [the ranks of the] Bangalees" and asked them to behave as good citizens.[169] Twenty years later his daughter Sheikh Hasina continued to harp on the same tune by asserting

that "there are no differences between the *pahadees* and Bangalees, we are all Bangalees."[170] This may be termed as one of the worst kinds of depressant offered as a political therapy to the ethnic communities of the CHT who are passing through the most agonising period and is most resentful and indignant.

Apart from the machinations and instigations of extra-territorial forces, successive governments of Bangladesh through mishandling and mismanagement of various sensitive issues have instilled in the perception of the *pahadees* that their right to exist as free communities was under threat and eventually shall cease to exist. This has led them to intensify insurrectionary politics in the region. Over the period of years many developments have taken place. Governmental changes have taken place in Bangladesh. JSS became deeply factionalised and Manabendra has been assassinated as a result of this factionalism. The SB too has been split and many non-Bangalee ethnic community members have left their hearth and home in CHT and crossed over to India or into the interior of CHT. Some refugees have come back, many are still returning, at the same time a misguided section of the SB is trying hard to hold the refuges as hostage. Insurgents are being killed or captured, huge quantities of arms and ammunitions have been recovered and many insurgents have also surrendered to the Bangladesh authority; yet very little light is visible at the end of the tunnel. The casualty figures both in insurgency and counter-insurgency is enormous.

The assimilationist policy or the 'melting pot' strategy of the ruling elites of Bangladesh will not bear the desired fruit, given the geopolitics of the zone. Only an accommodationist policy that would promote 'Cultural Democracy and the Right to be Different' can ensure peace and harmony in the society and durability of the Bangladeshee political system. It should be realised that membership in the body politic (including multi-ethnic ones) i.e. political citizenship, is incomplete without being supplemented by social citizenship that is welfare-state entitlements and cultural citizenship that is the rights and privileges of cultural benefits and self expression. An enduring 'partnership of communities' only can guarantee such a dispensation.

Ethnic communities in many countries are differentially treated with respect to rights and special measures are designed to make it possible for the communities to preserve their distinctive identity. In this context due importance should be given to the inference that rights which belong to individuals may go to them either as individual human beings or as members of a group/community. At the same time it should also be emphasised that in a pluralistic political order ethnic communities ought to be considered, foremost, as potential or actual right-and-duty bearing unit.[171] In such an order, ethnic communities are some times treated as political units within countries both through territorial delimitations and separate electoral rolls. Thus communities are accorded representation in the various institutions of the State.

A resolution of the UN Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, for example, speaks of minorities, that "wish for a measure of differential treatment in order to preserve basic characteristics which they possess and which distinguish them from the majority of population"; it says that " differential treatment of such groups of individuals belonging to such groups is justified."[172] Convention on the Elimination of

All Forms of Racial Discrimination stipulates that parties "shall, when the circumstances so warrant, take ...special ...measures to ensure the adequate development and protection of certain racial groups or individuals belonging to them for the purpose of guaranteeing them the full and equal enjoyment of human rights."

The wisdom of the Bangladeshee political elites should encourage them to demonstrate the willingness to accept the principle of 'unity in diversity' which characterises a civil society and a pluralistic political order.

The ethnic communities of the CHT region are the victims of the inevitability of social change that has led to the emergence of gross inequality amongst the ethnic groups. The political differences between the newly educated youths and the established leadership serve to perpetuate, accentuate and reinforce the inequalities. Access to government, to education and to the modern amenities of life has impeded the JSS appeal for separatism.

The failure of the SB lies in its inability to understand the transformation that has taken place in the CHT over the years. Under the thrust of development programmes, the university and college student turned politician, the government technocrats and the radicalised school teachers are a new emerging stratum of power brokers manipulating the *pahadees* to pursue their political and career ambitions. This stratum in order to achieve power and wealth has to cease being too much of a *pahadee* but they must also continue to dominate the *pahadee* masses in one form or another. Thus their 'former' ethnic identity becomes useful legitimation for their political ambition and their knowledge of the terrain becomes an instrument of manipulation. The leadership that has emerged through the PZSSP elections bear testimony to this fact. The internecine squabbling and killing among the contending factions may well have left the JSS/SB crippled. But it also goes without saying that unless there is a more generous response from the government and the ethos of a hurt ethnic sentiment is honourably accommodated within the constitutional framework of Bangladesh, the CHT will ever remain a potential breeding ground for national discord.[173]

The problem is a political one and it cannot be solved by development programmes alone which aim to bring the *pahadees* 'into the mainstream.' There is no denying the fact that the prevailing situation in the CHT is still one of terror and intimidation. It is virtually an occupied territory. However one may try to blame 'Indian spying' or other interference, the situation will not change unless a process of demilitarisation of the region begins immediately to create the preconditions for peace and a political solution. Fortunately, there is a growing awareness among the dominant Bangalee community about what is going on in the CHT region.

We would now like to focus our attention on the issues that can reasonably be resolved within the framework of Bangladesh constitution.

A real halt to more immigration can be a good starting point. The land issue and the question of acceptance of settled immigrants has to be resolved by working out a viable

compromise in a manner that would promote peace, harmony and goodwill not only in the CHT but also in the rest of the country.

At the very outset we would like to clarify our stand on two basic issues, namely, the structural character of the state and the indivisibility of state sovereignty. These are non-negotiable. Bangladesh is a unitary state and this is one of the basic pillars of her constitution, and therefore whatever adjustments and accommodations are to be made, has to be within this framework. The military is integral to national defence and national security efforts – it is the armed institution to defend independence and sovereignty. Therefore when we speak of demilitarisation in the language of the general public or the academics, what we essentially mean is demilitarisation of civil administration and public life. This in no way means the dismantling of defence establishments from any area or complete withdrawal of the military deployed for the maintenance of territorial integrity.

Bangladesh is a unitary state. Given the schisms and cleavages within the society, even such a unitary state can be restructured under an accommodative dispensation entailing a decentralisation of power. But under the best of circumstances the transformation of a unitary state into a more decentralised regime is one of the most challenging tasks facing any political elite. To borrow Morris-Jones's expression and improvising it suitably to adapt to the Bangladesh context, one may think to consider nurturing of what may be termed as 'bargaining unitarism,'[174] where a dominant ethnic community would not be able to unilaterally impose its will with utter disregard to the cultural values and perceptions of the smaller ethnic communities – at the same time under this dispensation 'the smaller ethnic communities would have a greater stake to ensure successful working of the political system – representation in various state institutions such as, for instance, the National Council for Environment, National Economic Council etc. would increase the stakes of these communities and set in motion hard competitive bargaining. A serious study on this calls also the involvement of the members of the academia.

A consensus amongst all the political parties of the country is a must for a solution of the problem. The CHT issue should be kept outside political rivalries through an honest agreement in the greater national interest.

The first constitutional measure that may be taken in good earnest is to declare Bangladesh a multi-ethnic state by amending Article 1 of the constitution. The original Article 6 of the constitution stipulated that "the citizens of Bangladesh shall be known as Bangalee." This caused serious resentment among the ethnic communities of Bangladesh especially among those of the CHT. Under the fifth amendment, the word "Bangalees" has been substituted by the word "Bangladeshees." This was a unique contribution of General Ziaur Rahman in resolving Bangladesh's identity crisis. It should be noted here that the post-1975 regimes had been espousing the concept of Bangladeshee nationalism. But till to date the intrinsic meaning of Bangladeshee nationalism and the connotation of the expression "Bangladeshee" remains undefined. The original Article 9 of the constitution elaborated on the concept of Bangalee nationalism (which intrinsically carried a dangerous extra territorial implication). The new

Article 9 under the fifth amendment deals with altogether a different subject having no relationship with nationalism. It is high time that one recognises the reality that Bangladesh is a multi-ethnic state and that the Bangalees together with the 14 ethnic communities of the CHT and other smaller ethnic communities of the northern, north-eastern and coastal regions of Bangladesh form the multiethnic Bangladeshi Nation. The incorporation of a new Article in the constitution stipulating the above reality shall go a long way in the healing process and honourably accommodate the ethos of a hurt ethnic sentiment.

Adequate provisions can be incorporated in the constitution under Article 65 to provide for permanent reserved seats in the *Jatiya Sangsad* for representation of the different smaller ethnic communities of Bangladesh.

The Special Affairs Division in the PM's Office can be transformed into a ministry and renamed as Ministry of Ethnic/Community Affairs (*Janajati/Janagoshthi Mantranalay*); alternatively a *Council of Advisers on Ethnic/Community Affairs* of the PM may be formed comprising of representatives of the smaller ethnic communities.

It is now understood that a plan of creating new administrative divisions is very much being contemplated by the Bangladesh government, the creation of Sylhet Division being the latest in this exercise. A comprehensive plan of creating new divisions with territorial readjustments, to be renamed as Counties (retaining the nomenclature of *bibhag* or by giving a new name – *probhag* in Bangla) may be undertaken in good earnest. The number of counties and their names may be constitutionally guaranteed under a schedule under Article 59. Under this arrangement the CHT region can be transformed into a Division/County.

The CHT may be accorded a special status of a 'distinct society' (*bishista samaj*) with constitutional guarantee, and a Divisional/County Council for the CHT under the Commissioner, with supervisory and co-ordinating role may be formed. But the claim of the JSS (which in essence is a Chakma biased organisation) to rename the CHT as *Jummaland* does not merit consideration. However, whether the inhabitants would at all prefer a separate new name for the CHT region, may be ascertained by providing separate ballots for each of the ethnic communities residing there and by considering each ethnic community as one political unit.

The CHTDB may be converted into the CHT Development Authority (CHTDA) under the jurisdiction of the Division/County Council. The establishment of *Parbatya Chattagram Unnayan Bank* (PCUB) i.e. CHT Development Bank merits special consideration.

In matters of sensitive legislations such as family laws etc. and development projects affecting the CHT, the 'social mapping'[175] technique may be applied. Policies aiming at income generation among the ethnic communities should be formulated and implemented with priority; at the same time massive urbanisation programme should be carried out by municipal administration. Improvements may be made on the *Parbatya Zilla Sthaniya Sarkar Parishad (PZSSP)* of the three hill districts by suitably amending the Acts. Selective NGOs with the

concurrence of the Special Affairs Division/Ministry of Ethnic/Communities Affairs may be encouraged to engage in developmental activities in the CHT.

Cultural/Community Councils may be set up to promote inter-ethnic co-operation, harmony and peace through the cultivation of basic levels of trust, cohesion and acceptance of common values and goals.

Adequate compensation should be provided to the ethnic communities for losses suffered during the insurgency. Permanent structural arrangements should be made to cope with refugees rehabilitation scheme.

The willing former activists of the SB should be absorbed in the VDP through appropriate measures and anew Integrated Civic Defence Force (ICDF) should be raised to contain future insurrectionary probabilities.

The claim that the non-Bangalee ethnic communities are the original inhabitants and indigenous to the CHT is not historically true and the migratory movements of the Bangalee settlers dates back to as far back as the first quarter of the 18th century.[176] Therefore the question of acceptance of settled immigrants has to be resolved by working out a viable compromise. A halt to fresh immigration can be a good starting point. Regulatory measures to monitor migratory matters may be worked out without being adversely prejudicial to the fundamental rights granted by the constitution. The political normalisation programme must include legalisation of the JSS or any other political parties or organisations representing the *pahadees* or the Bangalees. Finally, the entire package has to be ratified by the *Jatiya Sangsad* and a referendum should be held in the CHT to legitimise the political solution of the problem.

The efforts made by the government since 1991 is heartening and commendable. So far the government has succeeded in ensuring a ceasefire and relative peace in the CHT region. The internecine squabbling and killing among the contending factions of the JSS, the withering away of its non-Chakma support base and the adverse relationship with its extra territorial patrons has forced the JSS to realise the futility of its insurgency and to sit around the negotiating table.

In the final analysis only negotiations can end this ethnocidal conflict and pave the way for the restoration of normalcy in the region. It should be realised that negotiations mean overcoming conflict with agreement, but many negotiations also lead to new co-operation rather than simply ending old conflict.

# Notes

1.  R J Thompson and J R Rudolph Jr., "The Ebb and Flow of Ethnoterritorial Politics in the Western World" in R J Thompson and J R Rudolph Jr. (eds), *Ethnoterritorial Politics, Policy and the Western World,* London, 1989, pp 7-8.

2.  J A Fishman, "Socio-Linguistics and the Language Problems of the Developing Countries" in J A Fishman, C A Ferguson and J D Gupta (eds), *Language Problems of Developing Nations,* New York, 1968, p 6.

3.  W Connor, "Ethnic Nationalism as Political Force," *World Affairs,* Vol. 133, September 1970, pp 91-98; Connor, "Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying,?" *World Politics,* Vol. XXIV, April 1972, p 320; Connor, "The Politics of Ethnonationalism," *Journal of International Affairs,* Vol. XXVII, No. 1, 1973, pp 1-2.

4.  See L L Snyder, *The Meaning of Nationalism,* New Brunswick, 1954, pp 40-54, 69-72, 89-109, 127-128, 155-160.

5.  Fishman, *op.cit.,* p 7.

6.  P J Bertocci, "Resource Development and Ethnic Conflict: The Case of Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh" in M S Qureshi (ed.), *Tribal Cultures in Bangladesh,* Institute of Bangladesh Studies, University of Rajshahi, 1984, p 345.

7.  These include the Mandis (also known as the Garos) the Hajongs, the Mundaris (also known as the Mundas) the Khashias, the Jaintias, the Saontals, the Rajbangshees, the Rakhines, the Meitheis (also known as the Manipuris), the Oraons (also spelt as Urangs), the Kochs, the Mahatus (also known as the Mahats), the Mahilis and others.

8.  The three sub-divisions that comprised the erstwhile district of the CHT have now become three separate districts of *Rangamati, Khagdachhadi and Bandarban.*

9.  "Insurgency" is a form of armed action which involves a protracted struggle combining irregular military tactics with psychological and political operations to produce a new ideological system or political structure. See J Baylis, "Revolutionary Warfare" in J Baylis *et.al.,* (eds), *Contemporary Strategy: Theories and Policies,* New York, 1975, p 134.

10. D E Sopher, "The Swidden/Wet Rice Transition Zone in Chittagong Hills," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers,* 54, 1964, pp 107-126.

11. Military operations carried out against insurgency involving an interlocking system of action on different planes which "drains the water from the fish" and isolates the insurgents from the general public.

12. See M Ishaque (ed.), *Bangladesh District Gazetteers: Chittagong Hill Tracts,* Dhaka, 1971, pp 1-4 and R I Chowdhury *et.al., Tribal Leadership and Political Integration: A Case Study of Chakma and Mong Tribes of Chittagong Hill Tracts,* Faculty of Social Science, University of Chittagong, Chittagong, 1979, mimeo, pp 24-25.

13. N Ahmad, *A New Economic Geography of Bangladesh,* New Delhi, 1976, pp 106-110.

14. See A H Dani, "Race and Culture Complex in Bengal" in P Bessaignet (ed.), *Social Research in East Pakistan,* Dhaka, 2nd edition., 1964, pp 113-136.

15. For details see T H Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein: With Comparative Vocabularies of the Hill Dialects,* Calcutta, 1869; E T Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal,* Calcutta, 1872; W W Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal,* VI, London, 1876; R H S Hutchinson, *An Account of the Chittagong Hill Tracts,* Calcutta, 1906; L S S O'Malley, *District Gazetteer of Chittagong,* Calcutta, 1908 and P Bessaignet, *Tribesmen of the Chittagong Hill Tracts,* Dhaka, 1958.

16. The Marmas are also known as the Mongs. They hate to be called Maghs/Moghs which means robbers, pirates, anarchists etc. and which does not belong to the Marma vocabulary. A large number of Marmas also reside in the districts of Cox's Bazaar, Patuakhali and elsewhere and are known as the Rakhines.

17. The Chakmas do not recognise them, they are considered as a branch of the Chakmas.

18. Also known as the Mizos. The Lushais were once also known as the *Kukis* (see Hunter, *op.cit.*, pp 59-60). According to a *Report on the Census of Bengal* [cited in Satish Chandra Ghosh, *Chakma Jati (Jatiya Chitra O Itibritta)* (in Bangla), Calcutta, 1909, pp 7] – 'The word *kuki* is really a generic term used by the people of the plain to denote the hillmen, other than Tipperahs and Chakmas.' According to Lewin all those who were considered as 'wild,' 'hill people' were called *kukis*, Lewin, *op.cit.*, p 38. In fact all the aborigines or the original tribes of the CHT were designated by the word *kukis* until the end of the nineteenth century,' Ishaque, *op.cit.*, p 64.

19. The Tripuras refuse to recognise the Uchais whom they consider to belong to one of their sub-groups.

20. They belong to a section of the Shendus who migrated to eastern and north-eastern India.

21. They resent the Bangla appellation 'Banjogi' which is also often erroneously considered as a separate independent ethnic community along with the Bawms. See H Rashid, "Some Notes on the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Its Tribes" in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan*, XII, I, 1967, pp 172-173.

22. Murangs are also wrongly called the Mros. But many ethnographers consider them to be two independent ethnic communities. For an incisive discussion see L Bernot, "Ethnic Groups of Chittagong Hill Tracts" in P Bessaignet (ed.), *Social Research in East Pakistan*, pp 156-161. Some consider the Murangs to be an offshoot of the Tripuras.

23. The Riangs are considered by some ethnographers as a section of the Tripuras.

24. The Mros though marginalised and very small in number are the only original inhabitants indigenous to the CHT.

25. See E T Gait, *A History of Assam*, Calcutta, 1906 and J P Mills, "Notes on a Tour in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1926" in *Census of India, 1931*, V, (I), 1933, p 515. For a brief account of massive migration affecting the entire Indo-China region in the 13th and 14th centuries see G E Harvey, *History of Burma*, London, 1925.

26. Biraj Mohan Dewan, *Chakma Jatir Itibritta* (in Bangla), Rangamati, 1969, p 80. See also Noaram Chakma, *Parbatya Raj Lahari* (in Bangla), CHT, 1962, p 29.

27. Noaram Chakma, *ibid.*, p 22. See also Madhab Chandra Karmi Chakma. *Sri Sri Rajnama* (in Bangla), Chittagong, 1940, pp 28-31.

28. For details about the nature of *jum* cultivation see A P Phayre, "Account of Arakan," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, X (2), 1841, pp 702-704. See also Sopher, *op.cit.*, F K Khan and A L Khisa, "Shifting Cultivation in East Pakistan," *Oriental Geographer*, 14, 1970 and R F Watters, "The Nature of Shifting Cultivation: A Review of Recent Research," *Pacific View Point*, I(I), 1960.

29. See Hunter, *op.cit.*, pp 91-93.

30. As late as 1876 the other ethnic communities/tribes were still described as: 'purely savages and unamenable to civilisation.' See Hunter, *op.cit.*, p 49.

31. The CHT was ceded to the British East India Company by Nawab Mir Kasem under an agreement signed on 27 September 1760. For details of the Chakma rebellions against the British authority see Suprakash Roy, *Bharater Krishak Bidroha O Ganatarik Sangram* (in Bangla), Calcutta, (2nd

edition, 1972) pp 66-71. See also Ratanlal Chakrabarty, "Chakma Resistance to Early British Rule" in *Bangladesh Historical Studies*, II, 1977, pp 133-156.

32. See Suprakash Roy, *ibid.*, pp 254-257 and Hunter, *op.cit.*, pp 18-21, 63-66. These communities had also been constantly subject to raids from other independent communities living further eastward. See T H Lewin, *Fly on the Wheel or How I Helped to Govern India*, London, 1912, pp 190 and 290. For better administration and management of revenue the region was made a separate district in August 1860 under Act XII of 1860. However, ethnocidal skirmishes and raids as well as free movements of different communities continued until the late 19th century.

33. The CHT Frontier Police Regulation was adopted on 7 December 1881. Excluding the commanding and senior British officers, all other subordinate police personnel in the newly established police force were local recruits from amongst the members of the *pahadees*.

34. The Regulation was enacted on 1 May 1900.

35. There appears to be some confusion and controversy about the year of the founding of the *Jana Samiti*. Some mention 1917, others mention 1920, but the autobiography of Kamini Mohan Dewan points fairly firmly to 1916. See Kamini Mohan Dewan, *Parbatya Chattalar Ek Deen Sebaker Jiban Kahini* (in Bangla), Rangamati, 1970, pp 112-117.

36. See Kamini Mohan Dewan, *ibid.*, p 150.

37. *ibid.*, p 251.

38. *ibid.* The exact dates on which these deputations met the Congress leadership are not mentioned in Kamini Mohan Dewan's autobiography, but from the narration it can be ascertained that it was some time in the third week of June 1947. The deputations did not succeed in meeting the Government of India officials and they made no contacts with the Muslim League.

39. See Aggavansa Mahathero, *Stop Genocide in Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Calcutta, 1981, p 3. See also Amnesty International, *Bangladesh: Unlawful Killings and Torture in the Chittagong Hill Tracts*, London, 1986, p 4.

40. See Kamini Mohan Dewan, *op.cit.*, p 252.

41. *ibid.*, p 253.

42. *ibid.*, p 254.

43. *ibid.*

44. *ibid.*, pp 255-256.

45. The award was made in the report of the Bengal Boundary Commission (BC) dated 12 August 1947 and published on 17 August 1947. See *The Statesman*, 17 August 1947.

46. The BC was formed on 30 June 1947. See *The Statesman*, 1 July 1947. For details on the deliberations of the BC and representations made to the BC by the Indian Congress and the Muslim League see Aftab Ahmed, "Ethnicity and Insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts Region: A Study of the Crisis of Political Integration in Bangladesh," *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol. 31, No. 3, November 1993, pp 36-37.

47. See the 'Bengal Boundary Commission Report' in *India Office Records (IOR), L/PO/433*, pp 310-311.

48. *ibid.*, p 248. See also L Collins and D Lappiere, *Mountbatten and the Partition of India*, Dhaka, 1982, p 178.

49. *IOR-L/PO/433*, p 249. See also 'Viceroy to Governor of Bengal,' 13 August 1947 in *IOR-R/3/1/157*, pp 219-221.

50. See Kamini Mohan Dewan, *op.cit.*, p 256, Kamini Mohan Dewan was so disappointed by the activities of Sneha Kumar Chakma and other pro-Indian elements that in utter helplessness he resigned from the Jana Samiti, *ibid.*, p 257. For his moderate views see *ibid.*, pp 257-260.

51. See *An Account of Chittagong Hill Tracts*, published by the [Parabatya Chattagram] Jana Sanghati Samiti (JSS) – Chittagong Hill Tracts Peoples Solidarity Association – often erroneously translated as the United Peoples Party of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, CHT, 1982, pp 3-4.

52. Author's personal interview with a number of *pahadee* leaders (hereafter, Pahadee Leaders, *Personal Interviews)* who prefer to remain anonymous. See also JSS, *ibid.*, p 4.

53. JSS, *ibid.*

54. In one such incident one Pratul Chandra Dewan was seen openly distributing leaflets and handbills denouncing the incorporation of the CHT in Pakistan. He was later taken into custody. See Kamini Mohan Dewan, *op.cit.*, pp 268 and 270.

55. Pahadee Leaders, *Personal Interviews.*

56. J Sengupta, *Eclipse of East Pakistan*, Calcutta, 1963, pp 63-4. Sneha Kumar Chakma crossed into Agartala of the adjoining Tipperah Hill Tracts of India (See Kamini Mohan Dewan, *op.cit.*, pp 261 and 267). He 'rushed to New Delhi to beg that the area [CHT] be allowed to remain part of India. But nothing came of it' (cited in a special report by Ramesh Menon, "Chakmas: Shattered Lives," *India Today*, 15 March 1987, p 34). Sneha Kumar Chakma continued to live at Agartala where he died on 10 July 1987.

57. Kamini Mohan Dewan, *op.cit.*, p 294.

58. For early British accounts of the economic havoc caused by the Bangalee moneylenders and land-grabbers see Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein*, pp 16-28.

59. The ethnic communities considered this to be a 'blue-print' to drive out the non-Muslim population from their homeland 'in the name of industrialisations,' see JSS, *op.cit.*, p 5.

60. The possibility of capturing the flow of the Karnaphuli was explored as early as 1906. See K S Ahmed, "Hydro-electric Development in Pakistan," *Pakistan Geographical Review*, 11(2), 1956, pp 30-35 and N Ahmad, *An Economic Geography of East Pakistan*, Oxford, 2nd edition, 1968, pp 231-234.

61. Completed in 1961, the KHP has operated to date with an installed generating capacity of 80,000 KW, considerably less than originally projected but nonetheless 25% of the total electricity output of Bangladesh. See N Ahmad, *A New Economic Geography of Bangladesh*, pp 123-124.

62. R I Chowdhury *et.al.*, *op.cit.*, p 127.

63. *ibid.*

64. See A Mey, *The Economy of Shifting Cultivation in Bangladesh*, Berlin, 1978, mimeo, p 3.

65. *ibid.*

66. R I Chowdhury *et.al.*, *op.cit.*, (table 7.1).

67. A Mey, *op.cit.* Another reason for the emigration of the Chakmas was due to their psychological disposition. The Chakmas were offered resettlement in the Kassalong valley but they were not enthusiastic about it. The offer of resettlement in the Sangu and Matamuhuri valleys was most unattractive to them because they considered these areas to be inhabited by communities who in their opinion were more 'primitive' and 'hostile.' For details on all these points see D E Sopher, "Population Dislocation in the Chittagong Hills," *Geographical Review*, 53, 1963, pp 337-362.

68.  Ishaque, *op.cit.*, p iii.

69.  In the general elections of 1970, of the two seats of the National Assembly that the AL lost, one was in the CHT which was won by Tridib Roy, the Chakma *Raja*. AL also lost the two Provincial Assembly seats of the CHT. One was won by Manabendra Narayan Larma and the other by Aung Shwe Prue Choudhury – both with the support and blessings of Tridib Roy.

70.  See Sri Uttaran, "A Genesis of the Movement of Chittagong Hill Tracts and its Future" in *Dosh-i-November Tirashi Smarane* (In Remembrance of 10th November 83-a bilingual anthology), JSS, 1985, p 38. Even K K Roy (uncle of Tridib Roy) who was an AL candidate in the Provincial Assembly elections of 1970 was arrested after he crossed into India.

71.  See Siddhartha Chakma, *Prasanga: Parbatya Chattagram* (in Bangla), Calcutta, 1986, p 47.

72.  See Sumitra Banerjee, "Bangladesh's Persecuted Tribals" in *Sunday*, 21 October 1981 and Kazi Montu, "Tribal Insurgency in Chittagong Hill Tracts" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 6 September 1980.

73.  After the liberation of Bangladesh, he became Pakistan's permanent representative at the UNO. Despite several overtures from Mujib he refused to come back and accept the reality of Bangladesh. Mujib even sent his [Tridib Roy's] mother *Rajmata* (Royal Mother) Benita Roy and uncle K K Roy to persuade him to agree to become Bangladesh's permanent representative at the UNO. He remained loyal to Pakistan. See *Arthaniti*, 4 (30 and 31) 1988, 9 and also Siddhartha Chakma, *op.cit.*, pp 127-128.

74.  He joined the civilian cabinet of the Pakistan occupation army and was arrested after the liberation war. He was released in 1973 under the general amnesty. Zia made him a minister of state.

75.  He was appointed Advisor on Tribal Affairs to the Prime Minister after the liberation of Bangladesh.

76.  To contest the Provincial Assembly elections the UKP activists formed the *Nirbachan Parichalana Committee* (NPC) in 1970 and Manabendra was nominated as its candidate. The NPC contested the elections of a 16-point programme which amongst other things sought regional autonomy for the CHT.

77.  The party accepted Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse Tung's thought as its political creed.

78.  Author's personal interview with Manabendra Narayan Larma 21 May 1974 (hereafter Manabendra, *Personal Interview*). A fairly reliable Chakma source, however, gives a different version. According to this source Manabendra failed to provide leadership to the *pahadees* and come up with a clear-cut stand on the liberation war. He neither opposed nor supported the liberation efforts. His role was ambivalent. See Siddharta Chakma, *op.cit.*, p 38. Pankaj Dewan a co-founder of the RCP later differed with the leadership and joined the para-military EPCAF, Siddharta Chakma, *ibid.*, pp 101-102.

79.  For more on this see Aggavansa Mahathero. *op.cit.*, p 7. See also *Far Eastern Economic Review* (*FEER*), 2 August 1980.

80.  Personal Interview with an officer of the Field Intelligence Unit (hereafter OFIU, *Personal Interview*) who was then involved in some of these military operations and who prefers anonymity.

81.  Author's personal interview with Birendra Kishore Roaza, 3 December 1980.

82.  See S M Ali, *The Fearful State: Power, People and Internal War in South Asia*, London, 1993, pp 33-34; 38-39.

83.  *ibid.*, p 39.

84.  Manabendra, *Personal Interview*.

85. *ibid.* It is a verbatim translation from the original memorandum.

86. The JSS in reality was an open front of the underground RCP. The entire RCP leadership was inducted into the JSS convening committee.

87. Author's personal interview with Dr. Kamal Hossain, 23 September 1980, (hereafter Kamal Hossain, *Personal Interview*).

88. See the statement of Manabendra in the CA in *Gana Parishad Bitarka (GPB)*, 2(9), 25 October 1972, pp 292-4.

89. Author's personal interview with Abdul Malek, Additional Commissioner of Chittagong Division, 11-13 March 1989 (hereafter Abdul Malek, *Personal Interview*). See also S K Datta-Roy, "Appeal From Rangamati: Can India Save Bangladeshi Tribes,?" *The Sunday Statesman*, 12 April 1987.

90. *GPB, op.cit.*, p 293.

91. The article was subsequently amended by the fifth amendment to the constitution when Zia came to power. Under the amendment the word 'Bangalee' was substituted by the word 'Bangladeshee.'

92. See *The Bangladesh Observer (BO)*, Dhaka, 7 February 1973. See also *Purbadesh* and *Ittefaq* of the same date.

93. *Jatiya Sangsad Bitarka (JSB)*, 1(6), 23 January 1974, p 292.

94. M Weiner, "Political Integration and Political Development," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, March 1965, p 52.

95. For an incisive discussion see V I Kozlov, "Problems of Identifying Ethnic Processes" in R E Holloman and S Arutiunov (eds), *Perspective On Ethnicity*, Hague, 1978, pp 391-392.

96. J H Bodly, *Victims of Progress*, California, 1975.

97. F Capatorti, *Study on the Rights of Persons Belonging to Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*, New York, 1979, UN Document E/CN. 4/Sub. 2/384/Rev./1.

98. *ibid.,* p 96.

99. Human settlement has been defined as the "development of viable communities on a new or unused land through the introduction of people." See United Nations, *The Community Development Approach to Land Settlement*, Department of Social Science and Economic Affairs, New York, ST/SOA/63, 1966, p 1.

100. *ibid.,* p iii.

101. Interestingly enough, more than a hundred years back Hunter wrote the following about the characteristics of the police in CHT: "The machinery for the protection of person and property in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, although called by the name of police is *essentially a military force* trained and expensively armed, so as to serve as a protection to the District against raids from the tribes further east" (emphasis added). See Hunter, *op.cit.*, p 98.

102. See T Maniruzzaman, "The Future of Bangladesh" in A J Wilson and D Dalton (eds), *The States of South Asia: Problems of National Integration* (Essays in Honour of W H Morris-Jones), C Hurst, London, 1982, p 270.

103. See Chinmoy Mutsuddi, "Parbatya Chattagram Ashanta Keno?" (in Bangla), *Bichitra,* 13(2), 25 May 1984, p 22.

104. Pahadee Leaders, *Personal Interviews.* A reliable *pahadee* source informed the author that the TPP splinter work originated as the first alleged attempt of the Indian intelligence agency to initiate a process of infiltration and recruitment within the JSS and SB.

105. For details on factionalism, schism and personal rivalry within the JSS which ultimately led to the gruesome murder of Manabendra see Aftab Ahmed, *op.cit.,* pp 50-52.

106. Abdul Malek, *Personal Interview.*

107. Kamal Hossain, *Personal Interview.* See also *Arthariti, op.cit.*, p 13.

108. Former Bangladesh ambassador to Washington, he was also the first Secretary General of SAARC.

109. Maniruzzaman, *op.cit.*

110. Amnesty International, *op.cit.,* p 23. When the first phase of the programme began, each new settler family was allotted five acres of land, Taka 3,600 and provisions, *ibid.,* p 24.

111. *ibid.*

112. A secret memorandum from the Commissioner of Chittagong Division to government officials of other districts stated that: "it was the desire of the government that the concerned D[eputy]C[ommissioner]s will give priority to this work and make the programme a success." See the secret memorandum-Memo No. 66(9)/C signed by Saifuddin Ahmed, Commissioner of Chittagong Division, dated 4 September 1980. See also the secret letter – Memo No. 1025(9)/C signed by Ali Haider Khan, Deputy Commissioner of CHT, dated 15 September 1980.

113. Maniruzzaman, *op.cit.*

114. For details see W Mey, "Genocide in Bangladesh: The Chittagong Hill Tracts Case," paper presented at the 7th European conference on Modern Asian Studies, London, 7-11 July 1981. See also Brian Eads, "Massacre Feared in Bangladesh," *The Observer,* 15 March 1981.

115. A Senior official of the 24th Division at the Chittagong Cantonment who prefers to remain anonymous.

116. For detail analysis on its structure and working see M M Huq, "Planning and Development of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board," *Development Review,* 1(2), pp 124-137.

117. M M Huq, *op.cit,* pp 127-128.

118. Ian Gilmour (Lord Privy Seal) cited in Anti-Slavery Society for the Protection of Human Rights, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Militarization, Oppression and the Hill Tribes*, London, Indigenous Peoples and Development Series, Report No. 2, 1984, p 40.

119. See *Selections from the Correspondence on the Revenue Administration of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, 1862-1927*, Calcutta, 1929, p 119.

120. These *joutha khamars* are known by a number of names - *shanti graams* (villages of peace) for the Chakmas, *bodo graams* (large villages) for the Marmas and Tripuras, and the *guchchha graams* (cluster villages) for the Bangalees. Furthermore, there was a 'grouping programme' under the name of *jukta graams* (joint villages) and *adarsha graams* (ideal villages) as part of a pacification programme code named *maitree* (friendship) programme.

121. M M Huq, *op.cit.,* p 130. See also Anti-Slavery Society, *op.cit.,* p 41.

122. See S Kamaluddin, "A Peace Offensive in the Hills," *FEER,* 2 May 1980. "A responsible local government official admitted to the existence of 59 'Compact Villages' in late 1981, as part of a 'pacification' programme" (cited in Bertocci, *op.cit.,* p 356)

123. See D Davis, "Self-rule Offer to end 20 Year of Bloody Conflicts: Four Rays of Hope," *FEER*, 23 March 1989, p 22. In fact Taka 263 crores had been spent when the SFP was completed.

124. *ibid.*

125. Abdul Malek, *Personal Interview.* See also Davis, *op.cit.*

126. Anti-Slavery Society, *op.cit.*, pp 57-58. This agency was also responsible for most British defence sales to the notorious *Savak* of the late Shah of Iran.

127. The DSCSC was set up with the help of eight senior British military officers in 1977. See B Hartmann and J K Boyce, "The Hill Tracts" in *The Nation*, 15 December 1979.

128. Anti-Slavery Society, *op.cit.*, p 58.

129. See Chinmoy Musuddi, *op.cit.*

130. *ibid.*, p 23.

131. *ibid.*

132. See the Report of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, *Life Is Not Ours: Land and Human Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh,* IWGIA, Copenhagen, May 1991, p 16.

133. Abdul Malek, *Personal Interview.*

134. See P Niesewand, "Dacca Sees India Behind Raids," *Guardian,* 11 November 1981.

135. S Bhaumik, "Peace is Still a Far Cry! Guns Continue to Boom in the CHT," *Sunday*, 21 April 1991.

136. B Lintner, "Autonomy plan to Appease the Rebels: Intractable Hills," *FEER*, 5 April 1990.

137. Amnesty International, *Bangladesh: Unlawful Killings*, p 5.

138. S Kamaluddin, "A Tangled Web of Insurgency," *FEER*, 23 May 1980. See also J Alam, "Hostility in the Hills," *Holiday*, 11 May 1980 and Sumitra Banerjee, *op.cit.*

139. See N Maxwell, *India: The Nagas and the North-East,* London, Minority Rights Group, Report No. 17- New Edition, 1980, p 14.

140. Cited in B Lintner, "Isolated Force," *FEER*, 5 April 1990.

141. Abdul Malek, *Personal Interview.* See also Davis, *op.cit.*, p 21.

142. For details of one incident only (25 March 1980) see the report on the press conference addressed by three opposition MPs – Shajahan Siraj, Upendra Lal Chakma and Rashed Khan Menon published in *Ganakantha, Sangbad* and *BO*, 26 April 1980. For details of other such incidents see Hill Students Union of Rajshahi University, *Sfooran* (in Bangla) Biju (New Year) Collection: 3, 1988, pp 20-26; JSS, *Persecution of Human Rights in Chittagong Hill Tracts,* September 1987; Amnesty International, *Recent Development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and AI Concern,* London, 1980, pp 1-11; and W Mey (ed.), *Genocide in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh,* IWGIA, Copenhagen, 1984.

143. B Lintner, "Isolated Force," *FEER*, 5 April 1990.

144. See the statement of the Tripura Upajati Samiti in *The Statesman,* 18 October 1988.

145. It is very difficult to ascertain the varying size of the CC because with the holding of party congress the size also changes. At the last congress of the JSS held at Ulchhidi Bot-tala, Teoratan Nagar camp (Tripura) during 2-14 May 1990, a new 25-member CC was elected.

146. The CJC is a mobile body. It passes various sentences including death penalty on persons – a non-*pahadee* as well as a *pahadee* – accused of treason or collaboration with the law enforcing agencies.

147. Siddharta Chakma, *op.cit.*, p 128.  See also P Niesewand, "Uphill Problem of Chittagong Tribesman," *Guardian*, 29 July 1981.

148. Swadhinata Dewan, "Brihattar Parbatya Chattagramer Ashontosher Itibritta," *Laadei* (in Bangla), Biju (New Year) collection: 2, 1984, p 37. According to a reliable source preferring anonymity, the classified report of MI 3 on the CHT made a similar observation.

149. There is no denying the fact that along with the *samatalbashees*, a good number of Muslim preachers also settled in the area. But Muslim preachers as well as Christian missionaries had been there for more than a century. This in no way proves that there is a forced conversion programme. Mosques in the area even a century back were built under the direct patronage of the famous *Rani* (Queen) Kalindi who not only generously contributed to a Mosque fund but also financed Muslim festivities.  See Satish Chandra Ghosh, *op.cit.*, p 111. Francis Buchanan during his visit to the CHT as a part of his mission to southeast Bengal in April 1798, met a Chief Po-mang Kaung-la Pru who had 20 Hindu and more than that number of Muslim servants. His *Dewan* or Minister was a Muslim. See Willem van Schendel (ed.), *Francis Buchanan in Southeast Bengal (1798): His Journey to Chittagong, the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Noakhali and Comilla*, Dhaka, 1992, p 89.  Buchanan also found a large  presence of Bangalees all over the CHT.

150. Author's personal interview with a senior JSS leader who prefers to remain anonymous (hereafter JSS Leader, *Personal Interview.*)

151. Sneha Kumar Chakma cited in Anti-Slavery Society, *op.cit.*, p 47.

152. JSS Leader, *Personal Interview.*

153. Curiously enough the JSS/SB resurrected the mostly forgotten name of *Jum Banga* (*Joom Bungoo* in the old spelling) with slight modification. From the late 17th century the territory now comprising the CHT was occasionally referred to as *Jum Banga* (that part of Banga or Bengal which engages in the *jum/joom* cultivation).  See for instance the letter of the Revenue Board (Letter No. 1499) written to the Chittagong Divisional Commissioner on 10 September 1866 where reference to *Jum Banga* is made (cited in Satish Chandra Ghosh, *op.cit.,* p 71.)  See also the *Appendix* in A M Serajuddin, "The Chakma Tribe of the Chittagong  Hill Tracts in the 18th Century," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1, 1984, p 95.  (Here the CHT is referred to as *Joom Bungoo*).

154. See A Murtaza, "CHT: Nine Points vs. Five Points," *Dhaka Courier* (*DC*), 5(1), 12 August 1988.

155. See Q I Tahmina, "CHT: Clouded Sky with Silver Lining," *DC*, 5(15) 18 November 1988; *idem*, "CHT: Agreement in Sight," *ibid.*, 5(16), 25 November 1988; A Murtaza, "Chakma Raja Parting Company with Tribal Leaders," *ibid.*, 5(17), 2 December 1988.  See also JSS, *Bangladesh Sarkar Kartrik Noi Dafa Ruprekha Bastobaayoner Prekshapate Jana Sanghati Samitir Jaruri Bibriti* (The Urgent Statement of the JSS in the context of the Implementation of the 9-point outline of the Bangladesh Government), dated 19 November 1988.

156. A Murtaza, "CHT: Death of a Moderate," *DC*, 5(21), 30 December.  See also Davis, *op.cit.*, p 21 ("SB have killed more than 1,100 of their fellow tribal people, half of whom were themselves SB members").

157. A Murtaza, "CHT: Stalemate in Talks Continue," *DC*, 5(27), 10 February 1989.

158. *BO*, 1 March 1989.

159. *Ittefaq*, 4 March 1989.

160. For a moderate view see Strota Ranjan Khisa, an exiled Chakma newspaper editor cited in Lintner, *op.cit.*

161. *BO*, 31 December 1990. Earlier the other district councils were dissolved. The argument for retaining the three PZSSPs was that they have been elected by the people (members of district councils of other areas are appointed).

162. The committee members are Hangsha Dhwaza Chakma (convenor), Nakul Chandra Tripura, Mathura Lal Chakma, Ananta Behari Khisa, Mohammad Shafi and Kya Sue Prue.

163. JSS Leader, *Personal Interview*.

164. Other members of this committee were Additional Divisional Commissioner (Member secretary); a representative of the GOC 24th Division; Vice-Chairman of the CHTDB; Kya Sue Prue, former MP from Bandarban; Gnanendu Bikash Chakma, Member Rangamati PZSSP; Manindra Kishore Tripura, Member Khagdachhadi PZSSP.

165. See *Daily Star* (*DS*), Dhaka, 29 May 1992.

166. *ibid.*, 10 July 1992. The committee later included Kalparanjan Chakma MP of AL from Khagdachhadi replacing Abdul Matin Khasru of the AL.

167. JSS Leader, *Personal Interview*.

168. See *DS*, 8, 18 and 29 September 1992.

169. *BO*, 7 February 1973. cf. also *Purbadesh* and *Ittefaq* of the same date.

170. *DS*, 28 April,1992.

171. For more on this see V V Dyke, "The Individual, the State and Ethnic Communities in Political Theory," *World Politics*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 3, April 1977, esp. pp 343-345.

172. E/CN. 4/ Sub. 2/40/Rev. 1 (June 1949), 2. cf. E/CN 4/641, 25 October 1951.

173. In this connection the policy-makers of Bangladesh should ponder over what Brezenski really meant when he told the *New York Times* that his famous 'arc of instability' begins at Chittagong in Bangladesh (cited in Hartmann and Boyce, *op.cit.*)

174. In describing the Indian federation, Morris-Jones characterised it as a 'bargaining federation,' see W H Morris-Jones, *The Government and Politics of India*, London, 3rd edition, 1971, pp 150-156.

175. For details on this see G Cochrane, *The Cultural Appraisal of Development*, New York, 1979, p 46. cf. also Kottak's ideas quoted in E H Greely, "Project Development in Kenya" in E C Green (ed.), *Practising Development Anthropology*, London, 1986, p 245.

176. See *Proceedings of the Committee of Revenue*, 6 May 1784.

# Ethnicity and the Political Economy of Malaysia and Singapore

James V Jesudason

## Introduction

Both Singapore and Malaysia have been regarded as highly successful cases of economic development. Singapore, along with South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong had, by the early 1980s, made its imprint as an "economic miracle" in its rates of growth. Malaysia has followed suit as an emerging Newly Industrialised Country (NIC). Both are multiethnic societies, in which a dominant party has ruled for over 30 years. In Malaysia, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), a coalition of ethnic parties, dominated by the Malays, has governed since independence in 1957, while in Singapore, a tightly organised party without a distinct ethnic constitution, has ruled since 1959. In a world pessimistic about the ability of societies to manage their ethnic relations, Malaysia and Singapore appear quite successful in coping with the many conflicting demands of ethnic, political and economic management.

The other salient issue which both cases bring up is whether democracy is possible in multi-ethnic societies that are trying to achieve political stability and economic growth. While the ruling parties in Malaysia and Singapore subject themselves to regular elections, the political environment has been so designed as to give decisive advantages to the dominant party. In cross-national compilations of indexes for freedom and democracy, Malaysia and Singapore are often categorised as neither democratic nor undemocratic. Despite their increasing levels of economic growth and development, their political systems seem to have remained frozen in a "semi-democratic" state. Is this the price that multi-ethnic nations have to pay for achieving the goals of stability and development, or is ethnicity merely used as a pretext for constricting democracy?

The ways ethnicity, economic development and democracy are interlinked in Malaysia and Singapore can best be understood in terms of how the respective regimes have institutionalised power in society. The Malaysian regime is characterised as based on an ethnic patronage model and the Singaporean one as an ethnically-contained model. An ethnic patronage regime seeks to mobilise a particular ethnic group as its main basis of support, and in doing so, uses state resources (financial, legal, and administrative) to provide selective and targeted benefits to a particular ethnic group. In the Malaysian system, one ethnic group – the Malays – is not only numerically dominant, but enjoys a special or

privileged status in the polity and the Constitution. The ability to harness an ideology of "ethnic protection" has been a critical pillar of support for the ruling coalition.

In the ethnically-contained system, ethnicity is managed and controlled by the state to minimise overt ethnic demands. Unlike the ethnic patronage system, the ethnically-contained system constricts ethnic mobilisation, particularly when ethnicity is expressed in the form of autonomous political party and interest group organisations. This system can take the form of the regime professing ethnic neutrality or instituting corporatist arrangements to selectively activate ethnicity for various regime goals. Some scholars have argued that Singapore moved from a policy of ethnic neutrality in the 1960s and 1970s, where the state's concern was to remain symbolically neutral *vis-à-vis* ethnicity, to an ethnic corporatist system in the 1980s, where ethnic organisations were instituted to serve certain economic and political goals of the regime (Brown, 1994).

It should be pointed out that the terms "ethnic patronage" and "ethnic containment" are not meant to be used as polar opposites; they are employed only to highlight different tendencies between Malaysia and Singapore. One should not be surprised to find either certain corporatist features in Malaysia or certain patronage relationships in Singapore.

The argument advanced here is that the mode of governance in Malaysia and Singapore has been critical in shaping the economic process, as well as the nature of civil society. The systems of ethnic patronage and containment produce important variations as well as broad parallels in both countries.

*A Synopsis of the Main Themes:*

1.  In both Malaysia and Singapore, economic growth and stability have been underpinned by the dominant party that is able to contain ethnic conflict. In Malaysia's system of ethnic patronage, the ruling party, as a patron for the majority ethnic group, has been able to secure the compliance of minority groups – the Chinese and Indians – to accede to the symbolic and political dominance of the former. In Singapore, the hegemonic party, the People's Action Party, has contained ethnicity as a political force through rigid control of overt ethnic demands.

2.  In both systems, economic growth is a major priority because of the political benefits it brings to the regimes. Without easy recourse to a cultural base for political support, legitimacy for the Singaporean regime pivots on delivering continual improvements in living standards. In Malaysia, the ethnic patronage system, often justified by the need to elevate the economic status of the less endowed Malays, has resulted in modifications to the free market, sometimes pronounced, but never to the point of fundamentally hurting capitalist development.

3.      In both systems, neither the state nor the market becomes the sole arena for mobility among ethnic groups. With Malaysia's more intractable ethnic problems, preserving the long-standing role of the market has allowed for political stability and economic development.

4.      Civil society has not flourished in both societies despite high economic development. In Malaysia, ethnic and religious schisms create obstacles for furthering democracy, although the existence of autonomous ethnic organisations and parties permits a higher degree of political pluralism than in Singapore. Singapore's constricted civil society is less the product of ethnic divisions than state- initiated corporatist structures and controls over public debate. The regime's pre-emptive attempts to shape identity formation leave civil society with few cultural resources to assert independence from the state.

5.      There are signs of change in how both regimes are treating ethnicity. In Malaysia, the patronage system appears to have become too unwieldy, interfered with the new requirements of global competition, and become a source of major internal divisions in the dominant party. The language of politics has become de-ethnicised somewhat. In Singapore, there appears to be greater stress on ethnicity. The government's employment of ethnicity does not threaten ethnic disintegration because of the ability of government to control ethnicity for particular purposes. These include combating Western influence, facilitating trade with China through common linguistic and cultural bonds, and using ethnicity to solve certain political and socio-economic problems.

## Historical Roots of the Ethnic Patronage and Ethnic Containment Systems

It might seem obvious that the ethnic composition of both societies is sufficient to explain their political systems. The Malays have on the average been poorer and less commercial than the Chinese. So it might seem that it is natural for the majority group to use the state for ethnic protection in Malaysia, while an ethnically neutral state does not harm the large Chinese majority in Singapore. There is some truth to this argument, but demographics is not determinative. There is nothing demographically inevitable that both systems would be governed by dominant political parties which have not suffered from a turnover of power for more than 30 years. One could imagine several axes of competition in the polity than those that have actually developed. Singapore could have seen routine competition between a Western and Chinese-educated elite or between socialist and market orientations. In Malaysia, a left-wing, more Chinese-based alternative to the current regime could have developed as well.

In this section I want to trace the development and nature of the People's Action Party of Singapore, and the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) which has governed Malaysia in coalition with subordinate non-Malay ethnic parties. Their policies and orientations are very much the products of their early mobilisational strategies and

organisational features as parties. They are both dominant parties that are able to pursue goals they deem important, and yet their basis of support and ethnic orientations are quite different.

*People's Action Party (PAP)*

The PAP is a tightly organised party that is insulated from direct class and ethnic pressures. The party has created a powerful state whose preferred mode of linking state and society is through corporatist mechanisms. It has an impressive ability to define and pursue its idea of the national interests – which is the promotion of economic growth, and keeping politics within the bounds of technocratic problem-solving. The party controls and employs ethnicity for selected purposes, but it constricts the development and airing of autonomous ethnic political demands. The PAP does not mobilise existing identities or cultural institutions for support, but reshapes and absorbs them. Policies have been enacted to replace the many dialects spoken by the Chinese population with Mandarin, and in the process equating the speaking of Mandarin with Chineseness. National identity is strenuously promoted, but so is ethnic identity – as long as it is confined to linguistic accomplishment and promotes "Asian values" but not if it leads to ethnic political loyalties and demands (Brown, 1994).

The ability of the PAP to create a powerful state can be attributed to three critical factors, the foremost among which has been the commitment on the part of a group of Western-educated men, led by Lee Kuan Yew, to build a modern society using power in a top-down manner. Lee Kuan Yew's statement made in 1950 at the Malayan Forum in England has deeply informed modern Singapore politics: "...the continued existence of the new Asiatic states depend upon whether they are able to carry out long overdue reforms; whether they can without the communist religion do all that the communist state can do for the masses" (Chan, 1989:70). In another context, Lee has said: "...if I were in authority in Singapore indefinitely, without having to ask those who are governed whether they like what is being done, then I have not the slightest doubt that I could govern much more effectively in their own interests" (Selvan, 1990:294). The command features of Singapore are to a large extent the outgrowth of the elite's view that an authoritarian system devoted to collective well-being is a realistic and compelling way to rule.

Secondly, there has been the ability of the PAP to distance itself from immediate ethnic and social class pressures which stemmed from a tight party organisation that eschewed factionalism and recruited its cadres very selectively. This organisational practice was part and parcel of the way the PAP came into power. The PAP was formed in 1954 by a Western-educated, elite to press for independence. The politics of Singapore in the 1950s, on the other hand, was dominated by a series of externally-oriented nationalisms fuelled by ethnic collective sentiments (Willmott, 1989:584). Particularly powerful was a strong Chinese nationalism, left-wing and communist in inspiration, having its origins in political developments in China, but directed against British rule in Singapore. The PAP's Western-orientation – Lee Kuan Yew in fact has lamented how de-culturalised he once was

– did not place it in an advantageous position to mobilise the emerging anti-colonialism based on cultural sentiments. Shrewdly, the PAP consciously chose to ally with extreme militant radicals rather than moderate labour leaders. This alliance was born out of mutual self-interest. The illegal Malaysian Communist Party needed the English-educated as a political front, and Lee realised that political success depended on the allegiance of the Chinese-educated, whose loyalty was with the militant organisations (Turnbull, 1977:253).

It is from this alliance that the organisational features of the PAP were to take root. In 1957 the Western-educated leadership was nearly voted out of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the party. The government, fearing the communist threat, arrested militants in the PAP Central Committee and PAP branches, as well as trade unions, students, and journalists. Thereafter, the moderates consolidated their hold over the party and instituted a cadre system of different ranks, admitting only literate, adult Singapore citizens, and hence excluding most students and China-born working-class members. Only full cadres could vote for the CEC and in a Catch-22 scheme, cadre membership had to be approved by the Central Committee (Turnbull, 1977:266).

The leadership of the PAP hence developed into a very tight bond that preferred close-door settlement of policies than open discussions in the party or legislature. Relationships with the larger cultural base were always tenuous, and as a mobilisational party the PAP sought performance and economic and social achievements as its *raison d'être*. It was this promise of solving acute housing shortages and high unemployment that thrust the PAP into power in 1959, initially with backing from the labour movement.

The nature of its organisational structure and historical experience resulted in a distrust of factions, and its own internal discipline and unity of purpose led it to perceive other parties as either irrelevant for Singapore and/or, more harshly, as disruptive agitators. Lacking the ability and desire to appeal to Chinese cultural sentiments, the PAP saw the tasks of nation and state building in largely non-ethnic terms.

The third factor that allowed for the emergence of the strong state was the absence of strong societal resources to resist it. This is substantiated by the following extracts from Migdal (1988:269):

> Have some common historical conditions led to the emergence of strong states? Again, the importance of massive societal dislocation, which severely weakens social control, stands out as a necessary condition in all cases. Societies must be weakened before a new distribution of social control is possible. All these cases of relatively strong states have occurred in societies in which major social disturbances rocked existing structures within the last half-century.

Singapore was unique as a society, because it was formed largely by immigrant groups. When Raffles acquired it in 1819, it had only about a thousand inhabitants. The society began with colonisation, as groups streamed in from China, the Malay Archipelago,

and India. The colonial state preceded ethnic communities. The groups did not have a pre-existing sense of indigenous rights or cultural claims on the land preceding the creation of the state. The origins of the society in migration and colonialism were destined to rule out strong local bosses that could easily resist state encroachment. The groups that came to Singapore were socially dislocated from the beginning. The societies and cultural institutions that came into being sought to carry out an economic and cultural life in a "place" called Singapore and these were not designed to assert an independent territorial, social, or cultural claim against the expanding colonial state. The other factor that contributed to state hegemony was that Singapore, like Thailand and unlike other Southeast Asian countries, became independent before the development of nationalism. This allowed the state to fashion the national identity of the population, leaving them with few alternative identities to press on the state.

Before independence, the population's cultural and historical sense of itself was located elsewhere in the societies of their origins. Although there was much working-class and ethno-nationalist agitation in Singapore after World War Two, the frustrations of the population stemmed less from irresolvable or historically-based differences in ideology and culture and more from a set of economic deprivations and political uncertainties. In such a situation, power could easily accumulate to the party that could mesh identity and territory, as well as provide basic economic security to a population suffering from chronic unemployment.

Singapore continued to suffer from political and economic dislocations after the attainment of self-rule in 1959, again facilitating the emergence of a powerful state under the PAP. The "traumas" that Singapore faced included "confrontation" with Indonesia, which objected to the formation of Malaysia; racial riots in 1964 precipitated by tense relationships between Malaysia and Singapore; the ejection of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965; and the planned withdrawal of the British military base in 1967, jeopardising both Singapore's defence and its economy (the military bases constituted 20% of GNP). In each of these episodes, the steady hand of the PAP provided direction to the population.

The three factors outlined above constituted key conjuctural factors in the making of a strong state. Specific events mattered too, such as the shrewd manoeuvres and harsh measures the PAP employed to undercut its opponents. The opposition also helped the PAP's cause when the left-wing Barisan Socialise party, which came into being when the PAP split into two over merger with Malaysia, boycotted the 1968 elections. This allowed the PAP to win every seat in the general elections of 1968, 1972, 1976, and 1980, gaining between 69 to 75% of the vote (Milne & Mauzy, 1990:65).

What was extraordinary about the PAP was its purposiveness and thorough pragmatism. To facilitate merger with Malaysia, the government made Malay the national language and a compulsory subject for all school children. After the break-up, Malay became optional but was still retained symbolically as the national language. In a largely Chinese society, the Constitution recognised the "special position of the Malays as the indigenous

people, although this would apply more to certain special opportunities, such as free university education for qualified Malays, than to rights" (Milne & Mauzy, 1990:62). This ability of the PAP to be above narrow ethnic demands, particularly those emanating from the Chinese-educated population, and to manipulate symbols when it met certain goals could only be possible with a powerful and autonomous state.

## United Malay National Organisation (UMNO)

A coalition of political parties has ruled uninterruptedly in Malaysia since 1957. Unlike the PAP, however, the parties of the dominant coalition are distinctly ethnic or regional in nature. Prior to 1974, the dominant coalition, the Alliance Party, comprised the UMNO, the Malayan Chinese Association and the Malayan Indian Congress. With the weakening of the Alliance party in the 1969 elections, followed by bloody racial riots in May of that year, a more assertive UMNO undertook to restructure the political system to reflect its interests more strongly. The original coalition was broadened to 9 political parties under the banner of the National Front (*Barisan Nasional*), and was dominated by the UMNO. The UMNO's priorities and interests have set the tenor for Malaysian politics. As an ethnic party the UMNO has tolerated the formation of other ethnic parties, and has given them a legitimate role to assert ethnic demands, provided the "special position of the Malays" is not openly questioned. It has been quite willing to forge broad coalitions with ethnic or regional parties that accept the terms set by the UMNO.

The origins of the ethnic nature of politics can be traced to the different cultural claims of the various groups to the territory of Malaysia. Although there was no political entity representing the Malay nation prior to British colonialism, the communities and states that established themselves in Peninsula Malaya did belong to a fairly distinct civilisation and culture. When immigrant groups from China and India streamed into the society under colonial rule, there gradually emerged a deep conflict of rights. Muhammad Ikmal puts it nicely as a conflict of rights based on the historical sovereignty of the Malay peoples and the rights claimed by immigrant groups based on the principles of popular sovereignty (Ikmal, 1992:276). Singapore was better able to escape this problematical relation between culture and territory because of the sparse settlement there, but in Malaysia the question of cultural precedence became a vital matter of politics.

Malay groups showed a long-standing concern with colonial domination and the increasing alien presence. It took various forms such as Islamic reformism and radical pan-Indonesian nationalist sentiments, but neither became mass movements. The most successful group that began to organise a pan-Malay reaction against alien encroachments was the aristocratic elite. This stratum was closely associated with British rule, and turned to colonial officials for protection. They asked for more jobs for English-educated Malays in the administration and for the reservation of land for the peasants. These pleas were made in response to the fact that by 1931 the Chinese and Indians accounted for 41.5% and 22.2%, respectively, of the population, reducing the Malay stock to a mere 34.7% (Steinberg, 1987:332). The immigrants were beginning to possess Malay peasant land and were

clamouring for more jobs in the bureaucracy. The roots of the UMNO were in this aristocratic class, who saw their role as protectors of the Malay community. The UMNO emerged only after the war, when the British enacted the Malayan Union scheme in 1946, extending full participatory rights to large numbers of the immigrant group. This was, of course, a threat to the Malay notions of their rights and a betrayal of their interests by the British. The aristocratic elite mobilised Malay opinion throughout the land to fight the scheme, resulting in the formation of the UMNO in 1946. Within 18 months the scheme was abandoned and in 1948, the Federation of Malaya Agreement, which had stricter citizenship provisions, was enacted.

The rise of the UMNO fundamentally shaped Malayan politics in a number of ways. First, it posed a strong alternative to the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), which was clearly the most significant organisation to emerge in the immediate aftermath of the war. The communist party was closely associated with the Chinese, who constituted the urban working class. With the UMNO becoming an important source of loyalty for the Malays, the MCP was never able to get much Malay support. Its subsequent defeat by British forces sealed the fate of class-based ideologies, paving the way for the articulation of various interests in the form of ethnic politics. Secondly, the presence of the UMNO as an ethnic party triggered the formation of Chinese and Indian ethnic parties by wealthy and conservative leaders of the ethnic communities. Even the lower classes of all ethnic groups gave support to ethnic parties, especially those employing an ideological mix of ethnicity and populism.

As a party, the UMNO differed from the PAP in important ways. The UMNO's origins was in the mass mobilisation of the Malay population. The net cast by UMNO was a wide one, bringing together Malays from different states. The only unifying factor was the "protection of Malay" interests. The UMNO as an organisation incorporates village leaders, school teachers, royalists, Islamicists, small businessmen, tycoons, and bureaucrats. The organisation of the UMNO begins with thousands of branches leading up to about 2,000 divisions, and at the apex is the supreme council. There have been times, particularly under the first prime minister, when the leadership acted independently from the desires of the rank and file, basing his authority of tradition. But in general the leaders were circumscribed by the interests and orientations of the wider membership. The UMNO's broad concern with protecting Malay interests does not negate independent centres of power within the party. Internal jockeying for power and the formation of cliques and alliances are quite pronounced. Unlike the PAP, which carefully selects and grooms its cadres and higher leadership, rank and file support is necessary to become an UMNO notable. The patronage of the prime minister often matters at the highest levels, but by and large the leaders of the UMNO have important power bases in their states and regions. Powerful leaders outside the UMNO with a mass following are often co-opted into the party to enhance its popularity and vote-getting ability.

In spite of a strong executive like that headed by Mahathir, the UMNO as an organisation is not able to define a narrow set of economic and social goals within certain

broad ethnic and religious parameters. This feature again cuts into the UMNO's ability and desire to rule the society in a corporatist way, since this arrangement presupposes that the rulers have focused technocratic goals. The diverse centres of power within the UMNO results in a more internally differentiated structure than the PAP. The internal diversity of the UMNO allows for greater tolerance of disagreement within the ruling coalition and willingness to allow autonomous groups to form.

## Economic Development and Ethnicity

Both Singapore and Malaysia have generated high growth rates over an extended period of time. The average annual growth rate of GNP per capita between 1965 and 1990 was 6.5% in Singapore and 4.0% in Malaysia. No country with the exception of Botswana and South Korea has matched Singapore's achievements, while only a handful have done better than Malaysia (*World Development Report*, 1992:219). There are important differences between Malaysia and Singapore – such as the highly urban nature of Singapore's population, its small size, and lack of any natural resources – making it fatuous to ask which country has done better. What is more interesting is to inquire into how the system of ethnic patronage and the system of ethnic containment affect development priorities, and the consequences they have for the society's ethnic groups.

In Singapore, economic development has largely been planned without much regard to ethnic pressures. The priority has been maximal economic growth, and nearly all key institutions, including universities and state enterprises, are shaped and co-ordinated to promote growth. The economic fate of ethnic groups is essentially left to the market. This makes it difficult for ethnic groups whose members tend to be concentrated in the lower classes, such as the Malays and to a lesser extent the Indians, to catch up with the Chinese group. However, the bargain for them is that high growth and intensified effort should allow for high absolute increases in income.

In Malaysia's system of ethnic patronage, the position of the ethnic groups *vis-à-vis* each other matters politically. The leaders of the majority group, the Malays, pay much attention to the average income and share of wealth of the ethnic groups. Malaysia's growth process is based on treading a careful path between two potentially conflicting objectives: the maintaining of the patronage system to gain political support and laying the conditions for economic growth. The interesting feature of the UMNO's economic policies is that ethnic patronage has not gone to extremes, but has been managed in a way which does not jeopardise economic performance over the long term.

The PAP's strategy of ethnic containment meant that it could be relied on any ethnic base for political support. Its links with the working class was also tenuous since this class gave its primary loyalty to leaders to the left of the PAP. In the early 1960s, the PAP undertook to demobilise left wing unions and engineer the development of a trade union under its control called the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC). Through government suppression of its rival, the NTUC emerged from a minority movement in 1961 to a

majority by 1965 (Chan, 1989:77). In 1969, the notion of a symbiotic relationship between the NTUC and the PAP was promulgated (Vasil, 1989:160) and an corporatist industrial relations structure developed.

The close relationship between the union and the PAP did not prevent the introduction of tough laws against striking, and the constriction of issues over which workers could negotiate with management. After its ejection from Malaysia, Singapore policy-makers embarked on a switch from industrialisation based on the Malaysian market to the rigorous promotion of export-oriented industrialisation using multinationals. The deal for the workers was to curb their short-term interests in exchange for the benefits of future economic growth. Worker interests were to be safeguarded through participation in various government policy-making institutions and in tripartite bargaining frameworks. The result was that there were no strikes between 1977 and 1985, and only one in 1986. Unemployment, which stood at 13.2% in 1960 had reached full employment levels by 1972 (Chia Siow Yue, 1989:254).

The PAP started out without a ready-made ethnic or working class base. The party rejected making appeals to short-term interests. But to solve long-standing problems such as high unemployment and acute housing shortages the party wanted a high degree of control over politics. Needing to control and yet needing support in elections, it was imperative that the PAP brings quick and sure results. This would enable it to come up with an ideology that linked the party to the national interest, and not to any particular group. Performance and national interest became interlinked.

The PAP strategy did not depend merely on high growth. The perceived benefits to the population of such a strategy would take a long time to gel. Accompanying growth policies was an expanded effort to build schools, clinics, and hospitals. The cornerstone of the government's social policy was its housing policy. Massive housing estates were built with the goal of providing affordable dwellings. Land was acquired from wealthy owners at discount prices, and village communities and squatter areas cleared to make way for public housing. In 1960, 9% of the population lived in public housing but by 1990, 85% did so (Department of Statistics, 1990:16). The PAP brought a fundamental change to the role of government. The Singapore Improvement Trust of the colonial government built 23,000 units in its 32 years of existence while the PAP had built twice that number in 5 years after coming to power (Chan, 1989:77).

The housing programme cannot be understood as just providing an amenity because it was a conscious ideological and political measure as well. There was an immense push for the population to buy their own dwellings. The leaders strongly believed that it would give the population a stake in the country, leading them to eschew economically ruinous populist politics which would hurt property values. This strenuous push for home ownership resulted in Singapore having the highest ownership rates in the world, with 90% of the population owning their homes in 1990, up from 58.8% in 1980 (Department of Statistics, 1990:31).

One of the unique features of the economy of Singapore is its high dependence on multinational corporations, particularly in manufacturing. In the mid-1980s, foreign firms employed half the work force, produced 70% of total output, and made up 80% of total investment commitments in manufacturing (Deyo, 1991:54).

The government's concern with rapid growth led it to seek those actors that could best respond to its economic goals. After separation from Malaysia, it was clear that only an export-oriented industrial strategy could work since Singapore had neither a large market nor natural resources on which to base its economic growth. The encouragement of industrial exports in the mid-1960s coincided with the trend of multinationals relocating in lower wage countries.

The government in Singapore was not encumbered politically from vigorously promoting US and Japanese companies. The local business class was involved in banking, *entrepôt* trading, and natural resource-based activities in Malaysia. It was weak in manufacturing. To nurture its development would have been a slow and uncertain process. In addition the PAP's strategy of ethnic containment meant that it was not important for the party to cultivate local Chinese capitalists. There was an uneasy relation between the PAP and Chinese businesses. On the one hand, the PAP's initial democratic socialist orientation alienated the local business and professional elite of Singapore. Some members of the elite had to part with their land and property at below market prices for the housing programme. Many of the Chinese business class also openly supported Chinese language and culture, and this did not sit well with the non-ethnic basis of the PAP. Some wealthy merchants and traders, to PAP's chagrin, supported the left-wing parties, sometimes only because they fielded Chinese-educated candidates. (Willmott, 1989:584).

The private sector, as a result, has declined in importance in manufacturing. Despite complaints from the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the 1970s that local capital was being squeezed by multinationals and government enterprises, the government could afford to ignore their demands. If there was any worry about foreign dominance, the state undertook to be the counterweight. One of the most interesting features of Singapore was the salient role of state enterprises in the economy, numbering five hundred or so wholly and partly owned companies. The largest banks, such as the Post Office Savings Bank and the Development Bank of Singapore are state-owned and controlled. So are the major property developers, and transport companies in shipping, internal transport, and airlines. The state is involved in trading, investment and the media. The unusual aspect of these enterprises is that they are all expected to be profit-oriented and are run on the latest management techniques and efficiency criteria. Many enterprises were set up to go into areas where the private sector would not, but the strong statist premise of the PAP – that the state only represented the national interest as opposed to private sector sectarian interests – was probably a factor too.

It should be pointed out that the relationships among the state, local business, and multinationals are not set in concrete. They have shifted according to economic

circumstances but always with the view to meeting the overriding goal of growth. After the 1985-86 recession, which was exacerbated by multinationals pulling out and not investing to the accustomed degree, a major rethinking of policy occurred. New attempts were made to promote promising local enterprises in areas which allowed for exports in niche markets and in high technology. Some analysts have credited this change to the increasing political influence of local capital, and the weakening of state control in a complex economy (Chalmers, 1993:67). This view, however, does not take into account how the state itself has acceded to the change because of its concerns about sustaining growth. The new realisation was that continued high rates of income growth could not just rely on multinationals. A capable local sector supplying high quality products to multinationals would lock them into the Singapore economy, and make them less footloose. There was also the belief that some local firms had reached a level of sophistication where some government help (in the form of loans and advice rather than protection) could make them become industrial exporters.

Singapore's GNP per capita in 1990 was US $11,160. What is interesting is that the high level of income has been based on heavy reliance on multinationals. To keep multinationals interested in Singapore at these relatively high income levels, productivity has to keep up with wages. This constant effort at boosting competitiveness is a remarkable aspect of the way institutions work in Singapore. Workers are encouraged to work in Quality Control Circles, Work Improvement Teams, identify with their companies, and to constantly upgrade their skills. Educational institutions are tailored to supply increasing levels of technical and managerial skill in the attempt to match skill levels in the developed world at lower costs. The infrastructure of the country is constantly upgraded and extended so that no bottlenecks occur. The system works at projecting skill and infrastructural needs many years ahead, and working to realise them. Planning is based on anticipating rather than reacting to the needs of foreign companies, and detecting emerging market and investment opportunities abroad. This anticipatory and co-ordinating role in the ultimate comparative advantage of Singapore compared to lower cost competitors.

Turning to Malaysia, the fundamental difference there is that its governmental institutions are not fine-tuned to produce maximum growth. The PAP's difficulty in relying on an easily available cultural base made performance a key claim to legitimacy. The UMNO's claim to be an ethnic protector rang a chord with large sections of the Malay population. Its assertion of Malay political and symbolic hegemony was an "in-built" source of support. The political imperative for a growth maximising strategy was lacking. Nonetheless economic development was regarded as important for ethnic peace, and policies ensured that a sufficient quantum of investments came from multinationals and to some extent local Chinese capital. The ethnic patronage system, unlike in many other third world countries, did not degenerate to the point where administrative and economic logic were sacrificed for the personal benefit of a narrow circle of clients. While disproportional benefits have gone to the elite *politicos* and bureaucrats, and their allies, the leaders of the UMNO have been under pressure to deliver healthy economic growth rates.

The disciplining forces that have kept the system of patronage under check have varied over time. Initially it was the result of the independence bargain, where the UMNO leadership felt bound to honour Chinese interests in the preservation of the free market. In the 1960s the moderate leadership, under Tengku Abdul Rahman, seemed content to legitimise the UMNO on the basis of securing Malay symbolic and political hegemony. Foreign companies and Chinese businesses were left relatively unhampered in the pursuit of their businesses.

However, the state did hold back on vigorously pushing for capitalist development, fearing it would benefit the non-Malay and foreign capitalists rather than the petty business class or the rural sector, where Malays predominated. Economic growth averaged a respectable 5% in the 1960s, but it was below the country's potential, considering its rich natural resources, good infrastructure, and capable administrative system. This growth did not create sufficient higher paying jobs in the urban sector, which made it especially difficult for poor rural Malays to improve their incomes. The result was that the bottom 40% of the population suffered from absolute decline in their living standards between 1957 to 1970 (Snodgrass, 1980:81).

At the same time, the Malay middle class, especially bureaucrats and small businessmen, were beginning to agitate for a greater economic role for themselves. Malay ownership of shares in limited companies was a mere 2%, compared to 37.4% for the Chinese, and 60.7% for the foreigners (MTR SMP, 1973:86-87). Thus, the compromise premised on the main ethnic groups having their own sphere of influence was called into question. The PAS, UMNO's rival, attacked the party for selling out Malay interests, while opposition non-Malay parties excoriated the Malayan Chinese Association for acceding to Malay political and symbolic hegemony. There was a noticeable weakening of support for the UMNO and the Alliance Party in the late 1960s, culminating in race riots in 1969.

To recover its weakened political position, UMNO, after 1970, vigorously asserted its role as the ethnic patron. The New Economic Policy (NEP) 1970-90 was formulated to dramatically increase Malay capitalism and Malay participation in the modern urban economy. The share ownership of Malays was to increase from 2% to 30% in the 20 years, while the foreigners' share was to decrease from 60.7% to 30% and the Chinese share to increase marginally from 37% to 40%. The UMNO rejected the position that maximising growth would be the best way of increasing the standard of living of all ethnic groups. This would have been the Singapore model, but the UMNO did not have the capacity to be autonomous from its Malay base – indeed many powerful figures in the party probably wished to benefit personally from an activist ethnic policy. There was also concern that if Malays merely became employees to non-Malays as they urbanised, ethnicity and class would overlap dangerously and threaten political stability. Ghazali Shafie, a major figure in the new orientation, argued that it "would not be conducive to national unity to have the urban-rural split replaced by an employer-employee split." (*Straits Times*, 6 March 1971)

The NEP necessitated new powers for the bureaucracy and an expansion of resources available to the state, through increased borrowing and taxation. New controls were placed on foreigners, and regulations forced many companies to provide ownership and employment opportunities to Malays. New state enterprises were established to act on behalf of Malay interests, and a new class of Malay capitalists were to be incubated through government financial and administrative support.

Such a policy had all the dangers of undermining the economy because of state activism. Yet there were a number of offsetting safeguards. The first was the fear of ethnic conflict if the anticipated economic transformation imposed excessively high costs on the non-Malays who constituted more than 40% of the population. The policy would be based on an economic growth rate of 8% to ensure that no group would suffer absolute losses.

But equally important, the UMNO had a mass base of 60-65% of the Malay population. Borrowing from Mancur Olson's logic of organisational dynamics, an encompassing organisation (with a large membership base) would hurt its own members if it tried to undermine market logic for temporary benefits, since its members' fortunes are tied to the overall state of the economy (Olson, 1982:53). In other words, it might pay for a small interest group to undermine overall efficiency and growth to gain selective benefits for its members, but not for a mass-based party. This logic indeed curbed the UMNO from departing too much from economic rationally.

From 1970 to the mid-1980s, the government vigorously pursued the game of ethnic balancing. Malay share ownership increased from 2% to 17.8% in 1985. But serious problems started creeping in. Ownership regulations and over-zealous controls slowed down the pace of foreign and domestic investment. There was much bickering between the state and Chinese businesses. Numerous state enterprises did poorly, and only a small proportion of Malay small businessmen was successful. At first these problems were not visible. The discovery of oil brought in huge revenues. The government was able to borrow heavily from foreign sources, increasing the public deficit from 3.9% of GNP in 1970 to 16.3% in 1985. These props kept growth rates high.

In 1985 and 1986, growth reduced to a trickle as world recession exacerbated the internal weaknesses of the Malaysian economy. Unemployment in 1987 came close to 10%. Many small Malay businessmen were wiped out by the recession. In the climate of low economic growth, racial tensions heightened. Low growth was beginning to cause internal divisions in the UMNO as the patronage system began to function less effectively. Groups that were hurt by the recession were beginning to look for alternative party leaders. All the classic signs of the UMNO's policies producing diminishing returns were becoming apparent.

Going by the example of debt-ridden countries, Malaysia could have still borrowed more before all options dried up. Indeed a few top cabinet ministers argued that the 30% wealth ownership target could be met, and there was no need to modify government policies. But from 1986, the government began a major re-orientation in its policies which

considerably de-regulated the economy. Foreign investment conditions were relaxed and onerous demands on Chinese businesses were removed. By late 1987 the economy had improved considerably, and the more liberal environment paved the way for a big wave of capital investments from East Asian countries.

The system of ethnic patronage did allow for economic rationality. However, unlike Singapore's approach of constantly anticipating the needs of global capital, Malaysia tends to work on a more reactive principle. Changes and improvements are made – in infrastructure, regulations, economic strategies – when there is an impending crisis or obvious need. The result is a piecemeal approach to problem solving. Malaysia lacks the ability to co-ordinate a variety of institutions for high growth. For example; investment regulations that are clearly hurting the economy, have been changed to promote growth, but there have been few attempts to improve the quality of tertiary educational institutions, which are very much affected by ethnic considerations. The use of key institutions such as universities, administrative agencies, and state enterprises for patronage would be anathema in Singapore because it would seriously affect the country's comparative advantage in co-ordination.

Both the models of ethnic patronage and ethnic containment have some interesting consequences for the ethnic groups. Singapore's approach of leaving the fate of ethnic groups to the market has caused the minority groups, particularly the Malays, to lag behind the Chinese. In 1980, the average Malay household income was 73.8% of the Chinese income, while the Indian household income was 93.4%. In 1990, the divergence has increased. Malay and Indian household income was 69.6% and 88.9% respectively of Chinese income.

Table 1 on the distribution of occupations by ethnicity also reveals that the Chinese have enjoyed greater mobility to higher level jobs in management and the professions compared to the Malays and Indians. These widening gaps between the ethnic groups have sometimes led minority groups to claim that there is discrimination in the job market and to disclaim the notion that Singapore is a meritocracy. Yet the voices of protest have been muted. Part of the reason might be the difficulty of making open ethnic demands in Singapore. But what is also important is the rapid growth of absolute incomes among all the ethnic groups in Singapore.

Table 1
Distribution of Occupations by Ethnicity, 1990 – Singapore

| Occupation | Chinese | | Malays | | Indians | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1980 | 1990 | 1980 | 1990 | 1980 | 1990 |
| Professional & Technical | 9.0 | 17.5 | 4.8 | 6.6 | 8.8 | 12.0 |
| Administrative & Managerial | 5.2 | 9.6 | 0.5 | 0.9 | 3.6 | 5.4 |
| Clerical | 16.0 | 13.4 | 14.3 | 15.3 | 13.8 | 11.9 |
| Sales & Services | 22.6 | 14.0 | 20.8 | 14.2 | 28.5 | 12.9 |
| Agricultural & Fisherman | 1.9 | 0.3 | 2.3 | 0.2 | 1.3 | 0 |
| Production | 38.6 | 38.3 | 54.2 | 54.8 | 36.0 | 51.3 |

Source: Department of Statistics, 1992.

Table 2
Household Income Differences between Ethnic Groups
in Singapore, 1980 and 1990

| Monthly Household Income ($) | Ethnic Group of Head of Household | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | | Chinese | | Malays | | Indians | | Others | |
| | 1980 | 1990 | 1980 | 1990 | 1980 | 1990 | 1980 | 1990 | 1980 | 1990 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Below 1,000 | 57.6 | 16.0 | 56.9 | 15.7 | 67.7 | 17.0 | 61.6 | 16.7 | 23.2 | 16.6 |
| 1,000-1,499 | 16.7 | 13.6 | 17.1 | 12.8 | 17.5 | 18.7 | 15.3 | 14.4 | 7.8 | 10.8 |
| 1,500-1,999 | 9.6 | 13.5 | 9.9 | 12.7 | 8.5 | 18.3 | 8.8 | 14.2 | 7.2 | 9.3 |
| 2,000-2,999 | 8.6 | 20.1 | 9.1 | 19.6 | 4.8 | 23.4 | 8.1 | 21.6 | 14.6 | 16.4 |
| 3,000-3,999 | 3.5 | 13.0 | 3.6 | 13.3 | 0.9 | 11.6 | 3.0 | 13.0 | 13.1 | 11.8 |
| 4,000-4,999 | 1.7 | 8.2 | 1.6 | 8.6 | 0.3 | 5.6 | 1.3 | 7.4 | 10.6 | 8.9 |
| 5,000 & Over | 2.3 | 15.6 | 1.8 | 17.3 | 0.3 | 5.4 | 1.9 | 12.7 | 23.5 | 26.2 |
| Average ($) | 1,228 | 3,076 | 1,213 | 3,213 | 896 | 2,246 | 1,133 | 2,859 | 3,225 | 3,885 |

In Singapore, with higher incomes, there has been a broad equalisation of many forms of assets amongst the ethnic groups. In particular, home ownership has gone up considerably amongst all the ethnic groups, with the Malays making remarkable progress.

Table 3
Home Ownership in Singapore, 1980 and 1990

| Type of Dwelling | Total | | Chinese | | Malays | | Indians | | Others | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1980 | 1990 | 1980 | 1990 | 1980 | 1990 | 1980 | 1990 | 1980 | 1990 |
| Total | 58.9 | 90.2 | 62.0 | 90.2 | 49.9 | 94.1 | 42.3 | 85.2 | 56.4 | 78.0 |
| HDB Dwellings | 60.8 | 91.7 | 62.4 | 91.5 | 53.5 | 95.0 | 54.0 | 88.2 | 70.8 | 91.5 |
| Private Houses & Flats | 72.0 | 87.2 | 76.4 | 89.0 | 35.3 | 90.0 | 55.6 | 79.1 | 44.4 | 59.3 |
| Others | 46.1 | 63.6 | 51.6 | 67.0 | 41.3 | 54.5 | 15.2 | 42.1 | 33.3 | 50.0 |

Note: 1990 data are based on 10% sample.
Source: Department of Statistics, 1992.

While they tend not to own private houses and condominiums, Malay ownership of public housing (HDB dwellings) is the highest amongst the ethnic groups. The model of ethnic containment, which relies heavily on the market as a determinant of a person's life chances, appears to widen income disparities on an ethnic group basis, but in compensation, individuals are able to enjoy generally large increases in absolute income.

There are some contrasting patterns in Malaysia. In 1970, average Malay household income was 44.4% of the Chinese, but in 1990 it had increased to 58.8%. The vigorous attempts of the government to move Malays into the urban sector, pressure firms to

attempts of the government to move Malays into the urban sector, pressure firms to employ Malays at executive levels, and to vastly increase their intake into local and foreign universities have closed the gap between Malays and Chinese. Starting off in 1970 with less commercial and educational skills than the Chinese, government intervention has been indispensable in equalising inter-ethnic differences in income. The case of the Indians is instructive. They were also less commercially-oriented than the Chinese but did not enjoy government patronage and support. Their average household income compared with the Chinese fell from 77.6% in 1970 to 75.9% in 1990.

The Malays have experienced noticeable progress in the professional and technical category of the occupational structure between 1970 and 1990. Their share of administrative and managerial jobs has also increased from 24% to 33.3%.

Table 4
Distribution of Occupation by Ethnicity in Malaysia, 1970 & 1990

| Occupation | Malays | | Chinese | | Indians | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1980 | 1990 | 1980 | 1990 | 1980 | 1990 |
| Professional & Technical | 4.2 | 9.2 | 4.6 | 8.1 | 5.3 | 7.9 |
| Administrative and Managerial | 0.3 | 1.4 | 1.3 | 4.3 | 0.5 | 1.7 |
| Clerical | 3.2 | 14.3 | 6.8 | 10.9 | 6.7 | 8.6 |
| Sales and Service | 19.0 | 18.3 | 47.0 | 29.1 | 32.3 | 24.1 |
| Production | 7.7 | 23.1 | 20.6 | 33.7 | 10.0 | 37.6 |
| Agricultural | 65.2 | 37.4 | 18.9 | 13.5 | 44.1 | 19.7 |

One of the most striking aspects of Malaysia's occupational structure is the noticeable rise of Malay corporate executives. Few were seen in 1970 but now numerous Malays work at high levels in large state-linked companies and the private sector. A capitalist class has also come about chiefly through close connections with the UMNO. The visibility of both these groups has changed the once-held view that the "Chinese control the economy," and has lessened Malay animosity toward the economic situation of the Chinese. While the system of ethnic patronage did not produce the type of growth that Singapore experienced, it has closed the ethnic gap between the two main ethnic groups. Given Malaysia's ethnic structure, this task probably helped to diffuse an important cause of ethnic conflict.

## The Problem of Civil Society in Malaysia and Singapore

Both Singapore and Malaysia are dominant party systems. Both the UMNO and PAP have been effective in pursuing deliberate policies of social and economic change. The ruling parties subject themselves to elections, which they routinely win. These parties dominate and control their political systems in ways which give them a decisive advantage, but they do have popular support.

Table 5
Electoral Performance of PAP and the Opposition, 1959-91

| Election Popular Year | Seats Contested | Seats won by PAP | Seats won by Opposition | % of vote for PAP |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1959 | 51 | 43 | 8 | 53.4 |
| 1963 | 51 | 37 | 14 | 46.6 |
| 1968 | 7 | 58 | - | 84.4 |
| 1972 | 57 | 65 | - | 69.0 |
| 1976 | 53 | 69 | - | 72.4 |
| 1980 | 38 | 75 | - | 75.5 |
| 1984 | 49 | 77 | 2 | 62.9 |
| 1988 | 70 | 80 | 1 | 61.8 |
| 1991 | 40 | 77 | 4 | 61.0 |

Table 6
Electoral Performance of the UMNO, the National Front and the Opposition, 1957 to 1990

| Election Year | Seats contested | Seats won by UMNO | Seats won by National Front | Seats won by Opposition | Votes (%) vote for NF |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1959 | 104 | 52 | 74 (Alliance) | 30 | - |
| 1964 | 104 | 59 | 89 (Alliance) | 15 | - |
| 1969 | 103 | 51 | 66 (Alliance) | 37 | - |
| 1974 | 114 | 61 | 104 | 10 | - |
| 1978 | 113 | 69 | 94 | 20 | 57.2 |
| 1982 | 114 | 70 | 103 | 11 | 61.0 |
| 1986 | 177 | 83 | 148 | 29 | |
| 1990 | 180 | 71 | 127 | 53 | |

The strong position of the PAP and the National Front in Parliament have allowed them to design laws and institutions that make it difficult for their opponents to function. The Constitution is readily amended by two-thirds majority, making the Constitution an arsenal of rule rather than a check on government. Both societies have the Internal Security Act which allows for detention of persons without trial for subversive activities. In practice, the definition of subversion lies in the hands of the government and the act has been used occasionally against political opponents. In Malaysia the Sedition Act proscribes any questioning of the special position of the Malays. Opposition candidates in Singapore are carefully scrutinised for the slightest wrong-doing, and some have lost their jobs and professional licenses for acting improperly.

The government control of the media in both countries is also very tight. Opposition views have few outlets to reach the population. The main newspaper in Singapore declares its support for the government, rejecting the model of the liberal press in the West. In Malaysia, the main newspapers are owned by government parties and

individuals connected with certain political leaders. Under the threat of getting the annual licenses revoked, the press practices a high degree of self-censorship.

The chances of a strong opposition developing to challenge the ruling governments are remote. Opposition parties have great difficulty recruiting professional candidates in Singapore. In Malaysia the opposition is fragmented into ethnic and religious parties none of which can win individually. At the same time, the opposition parties do not have the ability to come up with a coherent platform that appeals to the diverse population. In short the institutional advantages accruing to the government and the internal problems of the opposition have kept both political systems frozen in a semi-democratic condition.

There are important differences between Malaysia and Singapore as a result of their respective ethnic patronage and ethnic containment strategies. The ethnic patronage system recognises ethnic parties and organisations. There is hence a higher degree of pluralism in Malaysia. The Chinese chambers of commerce and Chinese language teacher associations are able to defend their minimal interests. There is more inter-ethnic argument in Malaysia, although it is kept within bounds by stringent laws.

Up to very recent times, internal pluralism of the UMNO made it more tolerant of differences in the political system. Thus, for example, organisations representing middle class interests, often non-Malay in membership, do oppose the government on human rights issues, environmental policies, and economic priorities. They are permitted to exist, although their impact is minimal and media access to their activities is limited.

The PAP on the other hand seeks to weaken autonomous ethnic demands. The first major move to defuse ethnicity was the drastic alternation of residential patterns. Ethnic enclaves were torn down and their residents relocated in public housing. Malays were split up so that they could not form a voting bloc. The Housing Board presently ensures that ethnic congregation does not occur by rules specifying the ethnicity of a person to whom an apartment owner must sell his unit. Electoral constituencies have also been altered by introducing the Group Representative Constituency. In these super constituencies, there are four candidates from each party that act as a team, one of whom must be a person from a minority group. This arrangement dilutes the voice of the minority politician but ensures that the community is represented.

The lack of ethnic pluralism in politics is matched by a very low degree of pluralism in the rest of the system. The PAP is a highly corporatist organisation. Ethnic organisations exist but these are sanctioned by the state, and the PAP leaders act as patrons to them. No organisation, whether these are professional association or middle class interest group, openly disagree with the government without some form of retaliation. Open confrontation is seen as going against the principles of consensus in an Asian society.

Given their current levels of economic development, civil society is relatively weak in Malaysia and Singapore. It is unlikely that groups in civil society can coalesce to provide

an alternative to the way politics is carried out. We are unlikely to see any fundamental challenge to the position of UMNO and the PAP even with greater economic development. This goes against the grain of many theories that predict further democratisation and liberalisation with economic growth. Such theories have not considered how hegemonic parties are able to derive much legitimacy from subjecting themselves to the electoral process and managing the economy successfully. As elected regimes, they are not as despised as non-elected authoritarian regimes, and are able to derive some democratic legitimacy. Successful economic management, in addition, makes a larger number of groups identify with the regime. Whatever differences there are between the state and the upper and the middle classes are not fundamental enough to cause these classes to mobilise for a political alternative. Even in Malaysia, where some tension exists between the state and Chinese businesses, there is more convergence than divergence in their interests. The middle classes, in the last instance, want a growth-promoting regime, and any alternative party must be able to convince them of their ability to do so.

The lower classes have also been weak politically in Malaysia and Singapore. In Singapore, the workers belong to the government-controlled National Trades Union Congress, and are not able to articulate an independent political position. In Malaysia, the working class has been weak historically after the destruction of the communist party. The ethnic parties have had little reason to court the working class because of their reliance on ethnic mobilisation. With the rise of a multi-ethnic working class with industrialisation, it would be interesting to see if the government begins to adopt the corporatist model of working class control.

I see the multi-ethnic nature of Malaysian society as the chief obstacle to the development of civil society in Malaysia. It has been very difficult to form multi-ethnic organisations. Ethnic organisations are able to temporarily coalesce in pursuit of short-term interests, such as to oppose a particular government policy and to form an alliance against the government at elections, but they soon disintegrate. One source of division has been the intractable issue surrounding the ethnic group's "place" in society. This issue has been removed from debate by Constitutional protection of Malay primacy. There is a conspiracy of silence among the population not to enter into open discussions over this impasse. The relative lack of horizontal alliances amongst groups is part of this "conspiracy" not to enter into relations that will sooner or later cause divisions.

In Singapore, the corporatist state organises so much of social life that there is little space for the development of autonomous groups. Moreover corporatism in Singapore is inclusionary and not exclusionary, often bringing important benefits to the population. Ethnic self-help groups are given money by the government to solve real problems of the community. The workers in NTUC can point to benefits their union has brought them. Singapore's system of corporatist controls works in Tocquevillean fashion.

It likes to see the citizens enjoy themselves, provided that they think of nothing but enjoyment. It gradually works for their happiness but wants to be

sole agent and judge of it. It provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilities their pleasures, manages their principle concerns, directs their industry, makes rules for their testaments, and divides their inheritances. Why should it not entirely relieve them from the trouble of thinking and all the cares of living? (Tocqueville, 1969: 692).

It is unlikely that civil society in Singapore has the ability to articulate an alternative vision of politics. For historical reasons, civil society has been weak. The present developmentalist single-mindedness reinforces the position of state organisation over society. I can envisage greater consultation between leaders and society in the future over matters outside the technocratic realm of economic competitiveness or the imperative of political control. Finding "political spaces" for discussion will not be easy. In Singapore, the government links so many issues to the economy. In broaching, say, the subject of women's rights, one is steered into discussions of the role of the family in school performance, and welfare provision for the elderly, and so on. The paternalistic framework will remain as long as economic growth is a general public good. An alternative from of politics can only come about in a very gradual manner as civil society begins to find its own voice and develops other concerns and interests that are not shaped by the state.

## Transferability of the Malaysian and Singaporean Models

It would, indeed, be reckless to suggest that the Malaysian and Singaporean models can be readily transferable to other multi-ethnic societies. Both systems developed out of unique historical peculiarities and conjunctures, in which differences in geography, demography, and cultural circumstances were crucial. Clearly Malaysia and Singapore cannot serve as models for direct emulation. Nonetheless there are some general insights that could be gained from their policies and practices. Despite internal tensions, both models have been successful in achieving steady, even high, economic growth and political stability. Not many multi-ethnic societies have been as fortunate.

The Singaporean model of ethnic containment is premised on a powerful state and a party that is above sectional interests. The regime recognises ethnicity but diffuses and manipulates it to serve particular goals. I think what is most interesting about Singapore is that it works on the principle that ethnicity will persist, and hence it is better to channel it in ways that do not threaten political and economic goals. The formation of ethnic self-help groups represents an innovative program that allows for the development of ethnic leaders and organisations, but they are made to focus inwardly on the needs and problems of their group. This appears to be a provocative option for governments – the diffusion of ethnic political claims by turning them inward. Ethnic competition takes the form of mobilising the resources and energies of the ethnic group to solve internal problems rather than group competition for largesse from the state.

Singapore's other innovation in diffusing ethnicity is the establishment of Group Representative Constituencies (GRCs). Multi-ethnic representatives share a constituency, leading them to think in national rather than narrow ethnic terms. The danger of this

scheme is that it undercuts the ability of minorities, particularly if they are severely disadvantaged, from articulating major demands, but it has the virtue of curbing majority domination as well. The single member constituency tends to politicise ethnicity, particularly in societies where ethnic groups are territorially concentrated. Rather than thinking that British parliamentary arrangements are inviolate, there appears to be much room for tinkering with principles of representation as one means of reducing the salience of politicised ethnicity.

Finally, Singapore is unique amongst Southeast Asian economies in its extent of reliance on multinationals. Multinationals have allowed Singapore to achieve a high standard of living. While one could argue that multinationals have some detrimental effects on local enterpreneurship, I think it is useful to consider how multinationals can help mitigate ethnic conflict over economic apportionment. The Malaysian case is also relevant in this regard. Multinationals are a useful buffer in conflicts between ethnic groups over the distribution of the economy. Multinationals tend to provide employment to a wider cross section of the population compared to ethnic firms. As outsiders with high bargaining power, multinationals also help in disciplining policy-makers from over-politicising the economy. Such politicisation tends to occur when enterpreneurship is weak, and the state plays a promotional role. Multi-nations are a source of investment funds that are outside the framework of ethnic, economic and political bargaining.

The Singapore system of ethnic containment presumes a powerful state that can act independently. This capacity is missing in most societies where ethnic contention is salient. Malaysia's model is perhaps more appropriate for a wider range of multi-ethnic societies where the majority group wants to assert its political dominance. Where minority groups do not acquiesce, the only viable alternative is to rely on some version of the Singapore model. Yet the Malaysian case does provide helpful insights into how the assertion of majority rights can lead to economic and political stability. Firstly, the attempt to assert Malay political predominance was linked to broader socio-economic goals, rather than pure chauvinism. One aim was to see Malays fully participate at all levels of the modern economy so that class divisions would not be reinforced by ethnicity. It was rightfully feared that such an overlap would produce further political instability and ethnic tensions in the future. This purposeful strategy has yielded some positive benefits. The creation of a more confident Malay middle and entrepreneurial class has diminished somewhat the language of *bumiputra* rights, and given more credence to a non-ethnic approach to economic policy-making.

Malaysian ethnic politics also never severely curtailed the market. This allowed for the preservation of a "dual system of mobility" in which the minority groups had important avenues for mobility outside the state. Despite the enactment of many state regulations for the purposes of ethnic re-structuring and patronage, basic market mechanisms were never severely dismantled.

In short, the assertion of majority or indigenous rights must, it appears, be channelled into longer lasting benefits for the economy and society. Taking a chauvinistic

position, whether motivated by a sense of right or self-interest, only provides short-term benefits and is potentially destabilising. It is also an illusion for a mobilising politician to think that a secure and long-standing political base can develop from the pure pursuit of ethnic patronage. Malaysia is instructive in this regard as well. There are limits to ethnic patronage because it will hurt the nation's competitive position. The patronage system also leads to internal factions in the leadership. It works best when it is providing benefits to a clientele that is starting from a low economic base, but when expectations increase, the patronage system, needs to move toward delivering general economic growth and to resemble the system of ethnic containment.

The systems of ethnic patronage and containment appear to have worked well in the framework of semi-democratic conditions. Such conditions have made it possible for ruling parties to govern over long periods of time, producing consistent, and often effective, policies of ethnic management. The cost has been limiting the development of civil society and further democratisation. It is quite obvious that there are ways to increase the role of civil society and public opinion without hurting the benefits that the two models have generated. Clearly, state elites have constricted democracy for enhancing their own power and preserving their freedom to act without actually serving a public purpose. Yet, advocates of democracy need to ask themselves how a more competitive political system can avoid the over-politicisation of ethnicity and economic processes, which will surely jeopardise ethnic peace and economic growth.

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