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**Class Struggle is the Key to Combat Chauvinist  
Oppression**

**Facing the National Question on the Cultural Front**

**The Post-War National Question and the Sri Lankan  
Left (Part 2)**

**The Idea of Secularism in a Buddhist State**

**Hill Country Tamil Women: Employment Issues**

**Water for the Jaffna Peninsula**

**Sri Lankan events: Tiger Bogey; Politics of Gambling**

**Electoral Politics and the South Asian Left**

**Re-colonizing Africa**

***Poetry: Malik Sekou Osei, Mahesh Munasinghe***

# To The People Darker than... the Midnight Gleam

*Malik Sekou Osei*

As the world  
pushes  
the  
bright tangerine  
of  
morning,  
for its light  
is more  
than  
beautiful  
but never  
sweet.

As shades men of the night  
face  
East who  
whisper,  
To The People Darker than...the Midnight Gleam  
of failed betters days  
of self betrayal.

As we embrace  
the dance  
of shiftless  
gigger  
our commercialize dance  
of never  
celebrity  
never to  
confront our  
lack of  
standard

*(continued on inside back cover)*

## *Editorial*

The anti-Muslim violence in Aluthgama in mid-June was not an isolated spontaneous event. It was anticipated weeks ahead and it is said that the police failed to act on information provided days ahead of the incident. The likelihood of such incidents has risen in the context of the anti-Muslim sentiment that is being nurtured by Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist parties and militant Sinhala Buddhist fundamentalist outfits, some of which appear to have the support of sections of the state.

Muslims have been targeted by Sinhala chauvinism for over a century and the first act of organized communal violence against the Muslims in 1915 was the only significant communal riot in the country until the anti-Tamil violence of 1958. Business rivalry has often been at the root of animosity towards the Muslims, and gains made by Muslim businesses which took advantage of the oil-based economic boom of the Middle East since the 1970s added to existing envy. Advances by Muslims in education and the professions is also an eye sore to chauvinists in a competitive environment where access to state institutions of higher education is severely restricted by the lack of investment in education.

Although localised incidents of planned violence against Muslims have been reported since the mid 1970s, overall, they were spared the wrath of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism during the three decades of war in the North and East. At times, the chauvinists even pretended to be kind to the Muslims who were persecuted by the LTTE, and the souring of Tamil-Muslim relations in the 1980s and 1990s benefited successive governments pursuing a chauvinist war.

Anti-Muslim feelings targeting Muslim businesses were stirred afresh and with renewed vigour among the Sinhalese early this century. Sinhala Buddhist fundamentalism gained state patronage under the Mahinda Chinthana government comprising an unholy alliance of the SLFP, the parliamentary left, the JVP and the JHU among others, and now enjoys

direct and indirect support of influential people wielding state power. Buddhist fundamentalist militants enjoy the patronage of wealthy sections of the Sinhala elite at home and abroad, and use without hindrance means of modern communication to propagate their message of hate in the name of defending Buddhism.

In recent years, the police have consistently failed to prevent acts of violence by Buddhist fundamentalist gangs against not only Muslim businesses and mosques but also campaigns for peace and reconciliation; and the judicial system has facilitated the settling out of court of cases involving criminal conduct by such gangs. No conciliatory gesture by the Muslim elite has placated aggressive chauvinism, which sees a sign of weakness in every conciliatory move and is acutely aware of the political impotence of the Muslim leadership which clings on to the government out of pure self interest, and has shamelessly helped the government to systematically undermine democracy.

The government is on the defensive in the face of almost universal criticism of its failure to contain the recent violence, which occurred as the UNHRC prepares for its inquiry into offences committed by both the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE in the final stages of the war. A sense of persecution by the "International Community" has been cultivated among the Sinhalese by the ruling alliance and the chauvinist media since the UNHRC adopted its first resolution critical of the Sri Lankan government. The government and the chauvinist media take advantage of that bunker mentality to share blame between Buddhist and Muslim extremists, whereas it has been the Sinhala Buddhist fundamentalists and their sponsors in high places who are responsible. Claims have also been made that foreign vested interests are behind the violence, in order to deflect criticism towards Islamic fundamentalists.

There is Islamic fundamentalism in Sri Lanka, but it is confined to the Muslim community and targets "deviants" from what it perceives as true Islam. Saudi Arabia is the main promoter of such fundamentalism and has been blamed for past clashes between sections of Muslims. Thus far, the

Muslims as a whole have been cautious and measured in their response to Sinhala Buddhist aggression which has manifested itself as attacks on Islam, mosques, Muslim-owned businesses and Muslim communities. Nevertheless, one cannot rule out imperialist promotion of religious fundamentalism, especially Buddhist fundamentalism, in Sri Lanka since imperialism now uses ethnic and religious differences among the people in a big way to divide the people in many countries.

Thus the challenge facing the country is complex. The Bodhu Bala Sena and other Buddhist fundamentalist outfits are only a part of the threat to the revival of democracy and national harmony. The resolution of the national question based on the principle of the right to self determination offers the only way out of the national crisis.

It is unlikely that the government which relies heavily on Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism for its survival has the political will to curb the escalating fundamentalist mob violence. At the same time, the narrow nationalist leaders of the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people remain victims of their electoral political ambitions. Attempts at united action against chauvinism by Tamil and Muslim leaders have failed to materialize as their aims do not go beyond boosting their respective voter bases and representation in various elected bodies.

Only a progressive alternative to existing forms of narrow nationalism can challenge the growing fascist threat to the fundamental rights of the nationalities and the democratic rights of the toiling masses and defend the fast eroding democratic institutions of the country.

The genuine left has to take the initiative to unite the progressive and democratic forces to mobilize the oppressed people of all nationalities in the battle to reverse the rising tide of ethno-religious chauvinist fundamentalism and defend the rights of the people as a whole against the combined interests of imperialism and chauvinism.

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# **Class Struggle is the Key to Combat Chauvinist Oppression**

*Comrade S.K. Senthivel*

*[The text below is a summary of the talk delivered by Comrade Senthivel, General Secretary of the NDMLP at the May Day rallies of the Party in Jaffna and Vavuniya.]*

The executive presidential regime headed by Mahinda Rajapaksa has invested in chauvinist oppression as its capital to exercise state power, which is implemented in the style of a fascist dictatorship. The regime does not only oppress the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people but also the Sinhalese workers, peasants and other toiling masses. The latter manifests itself in the rising prices of goods and charges, denial of wage increases, and the violation of human and democratic rights.

Under these conditions, Sri Lanka is being plunged into economic, political and social crises of unprecedented severity. Hence the need has arisen for the entire people of the country to unite based on class and national oppression, and mobilize in mass struggles against the regime of the Rajapaksa brothers to secure their basic rights. It is important for the oppressed Tamil people to realize this.

Mahinda Rajapaksa, who is now President with executive powers, when he was Minister of Labour in the cabinet of Chandrika Kumaratunga, sought to pass into law a Workers' Charter. But that was

abandoned because the legislation could not be passed amid resistance from local and foreign capital.

The self same Rajapaksa could have, after securing executive power and a two-thirds majority in Parliament, easily passed into law the Workers' Charter and granted the workers some of the rights of the workers, work security and other concessions. But he could not do it so far. We demand to know why even the bogus leftists who are members of his government are unable to urge it.

Under these conditions, how can we call the present regime a pro-worker government? The Mahinda Chinthana government with its nearly one hundred ministers who enjoy lives of wealth and luxury by starving the entire working class and toiling masses on a daily basis has established itself as a blatantly anti-people government.

That is why there is sustained interest in ruling the country by dividing the people based on race, religion and region. It is to avert class based unity that chauvinist oppression is prolonged in various ways.

The ruling elites, in order to achieve their goal, are posing off as anti-imperialists and patriots. Their ludicrous anti-imperialism is one where they obtain loans under terms laid down by the IMF, the World Bank, Asian Development Bank etc. and subject the people to suffering.

The regime of the Rajapaksa brothers has embraced members of the UNP, the LTTE, the fanatically racist JHU and the so-called old left to rule the country, and is claiming for itself a two-thirds majority. They are all together in raising their hands against the workers, peasants and other toiling masses. But they are unprepared to support or to urge a solution to the national question, which continues to be the main problem of the country. At the same time, they are unable to prevent the havoc created by the Buddhist fundamentalist Bodhu Bala Sena. The reason is that this organization has the backing of individuals with influence in the government.

Meanwhile the Tamil leaders, who are unprepared to unite with potential allies based on a common programme to oppose the chauvinist oppression by the regime of the Rajapaksa brothers, are at loggerheads

with each other for the sake of posts and politics of supremacy, and continue to conduct themselves in reactionary ways.

The leaders who once invited India and paved the way for tragic losses to the people are now in waiting for the arrival of the US and counting on the UN and the UNHRC in Geneva to facilitate it. They try to create the impression that the actions of the UN and the Geneva resolutions are favourable to and supportive of the oppressed Tamil nationality as well as other nationalities suffering oppression.

But what are behind these are the hands of the US which is the common enemy of the people of the world and its conspiratorial schemes. That is why the US and other Western countries are shedding crocodile tears for the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Mahinda Rajapaksa is with China in the rivalry between US imperialism and China, which is now developing into a big power. He thereby seeks to project himself as an anti-imperialist.

The truth is that China is no more a socialist country and lacks anti-imperialist content. Under the conditions, the Tamil leaders, unable to find the means to develop a correct political programme through which they could resist the Rajapaksa regime, resort to seeking refuge in the US, the UN and the UNHRC.

Past experience provides adequate testimony that this approach will, undoubtedly, lead the Tamil people along the path to destruction. Thus, it is essential that the entire toiling masses should on this May Day, the day of international struggle, think in terms of taking a new political path.

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# Facing the National Question on the Cultural Front

*Comrade K Thanikasalam*

Sri Lanka's national question is more than a century old and came into the open with the anti-Muslim riots of 1915. Elections to the Legislative Council were marked by ethnic and caste rivalries as well as religious rivalries. These got worse after the setting up of the State Council in 1931. Sinhala Buddhism and Hindu revivalism were political forces challenging colonial rule. Ethnic identity only helped the elite of each community to tighten their grip on community leadership.

The call for independence was inspired by the Indian national movement, and first found expression in a resolution by the Jaffna Youth Congress founded in 1931. The call for independence was taken up nationally by the left movement and not the so-called Sinhala or Tamil nationalists. The colonial regime granted independence without a struggle and handed power to its loyalists who formed the UNP.

Communal politics that took shape in the pre-independence years developed into full fledged discriminatory communal politics in the post-independence years. What started as planned colonization of the Eastern Province in the post-World War II years preceding independence in 1948 designed to alter the ethnic distribution in the Eastern Province has now become forced occupation of land in the North and East with the support

and active involvement of the armed forces. Colonization has become a particularly sensitive political issue in the post-war situation because of the eviction of Tamils from their lands in the North and East, which denies many of the war affected people of means to livelihood.

The Citizenship Act of 1948 deprived the Hill Country Tamils who were the second largest ethnic group of the country of their citizenship and parliamentary franchise. The Tamil nationalist Ilankaith Thamilarasuk Katci (a.k.a. Federal Party) was born as a result of this legislation and called for the restoration of citizenship to the Hill Country Tamils.

The Sri Lankan government through negotiations persuaded India to accept a majority of the Hill Country Tamils as citizens. But most of them had lived in Sri Lanka for many generations and were reluctant to settle in India. It was communal harassment combined with drought conditions in the 1970s that persuaded a sizeable section of the Hill Country Tamils to settle in South India. It took prolonged political agitation of the remaining population to secure citizenship, mostly in 1988 and completely in 2003.

The Official Language Act of 1956 (a.k.a. the Sinhala Only Act) was an insensitive piece of legislation that denied Tamils their language rights. Prime Minister SWRD Bandaranaike realized his error and tried to correct it by negotiating with the Federal Party. An agreement called the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact was reached. It dealt satisfactorily with most issues of language rights as well as systematic Sinhala colonization and offered devolution of power through District Councils. But Sinhala Buddhist extremists forced Bandaranaike to abandon the Pact.

The Left was supportive of the Pact but actions of the Tamil leadership that were insensitive to the delicate situation only strengthened the enemies of the Pact. Bandaranaike, however, passed the Reasonable Use of Tamil legislation in 1958. Subsequent attempts to restore the language rights of the Tamils failed as a result of opportunist communal politics. It was only in 1987 following the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord that Tamil was made an official language of Sri Lanka. But its implementation, especially in matters affecting public dealings of the government, is most

unsatisfactory. This will need a change in mindset of the government and opposition parties as well as greater public understanding.

Island-wide communal violence was first suffered by Muslims in 1915. The Malayali worker community in Colombo was targeted in the early 1930s by communal forces. Although there were isolated but serious incidents of anti-Tamil violence in 1956 around the time of the Sinhala Only Act, Tamils were first targeted systematically in 1958 by stirring anti-Tamil feelings following the scrapping of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact. Communal violence was thereafter much under control with the government acting firmly to pre-empt communal violence. Communal incidents did raise their head with the weakening of the SLFP-led government in 1976 but it was only after the capture of power by the UNP that major anti-Tamil communal violence broke out, firstly in 1977 and following various incidents, including attacks on Hill Country Tamils in 1981, leading up to the nakedly state-sponsored violence of 1983. Although there has been no attack on Tamils on a mass scale since then, except for isolated incidents in response to developments in the armed conflict, the war has taken a heavy toll since 1983 until its end in 2009. Anti-Muslim violence is on the rise with two major events in 2001 and 2002 and Hill Country Tamils continue to be targeted with one major incident in 2000.

Discrimination against Tamils in state employment has been a major grievance that has built up since the 1950s with minimal recruitment to the police and armed forces and a sharp fall in recruitment to administrative services. Discriminatory handling of university admission since the notorious "standardization" procedure of 1970 and its sequel in the form of district quotas has been a matter of resentment which was only partly addressed in 1977. However, the war has totally altered the picture, with a large section of the more literate population fleeing the country since 1983.

Tamil attempts to resolve the national question took the form of a series of failed negotiations since the last years of the State Council, and an unsuccessful satyagaraha campaign by the Federal Party in 1961. The

worsening of the situation in the 1970s following the republican constitution of 1972, the Language of the Courts Bill of 1973, and the tragic death of nine Tamils on the last day of the Fourth International Tamil Research Conference in Jaffna in 1974 led to further worsening of the national question. On the one hand there was a surge in state oppression of Tamil youth and on the other a rise in militancy and the FP, out of desperation, forming the TULF and calling for a separate Tamil state.

Insensitive handling of militancy in the North continued more intensely under the UNP since 1977 with the stationing of the armed forces in Jaffna. Tamil militancy grew as a result and in 1983 became a serious political force with backing by the internationally located diaspora and a sympathetic Indian government.

The escalation of the war and Indian intervention were the result of the negative attitude of the UNP government and its hostility towards India. The emergence of militant Tamil youth movements, although inevitable, had some positive features especially in defending people from military repression. It also had serious long term negative impact on the political culture of the Tamil people. Internal and inter-movement rivalries and internecine killings not only hurt prospects of a united liberation force but also the democratic climate in the North and East.

India persuaded the Sri Lankan government to negotiate with the militants in Thimpu, and the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987 was a result of a dead-end situation in the escalating armed conflict. The Accord brought into being the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment and thereby the North-East Provincial Council. But lack of far-sight on the part of many players led to the emasculation of the Provincial Councils, the non-implementation of key aspects of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the killing of more than 60,000 Sinhalese youth and strained relations with India.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment was weakened from the outset by a combination of forces including the LTTE which helped the President to dissolve a Provincial Council (PC) at will to the more recent Supreme Court action by the JVP and JHU to break up the NE Provincial Council. The war became

the pretext for not devolving key powers to the PCs, but it is the unwillingness of successive governments that is to blame. Today, even after the long overdue election to the Northern Provincial Council there are no signs of the government's granting the Council its due rights or respecting the feelings of the Tamil people.

Even after the war, opportunities for rebuilding communal harmony have been squandered by the government. Prospects of resolving the national question based on the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment have been virtually destroyed by government's falling into a chauvinistic bind in the process of capitalizing on war victory. This failure has encouraged Tamil narrow nationalists at home and abroad to take a vindictive approach towards the government. War crimes and abuse of human rights should be punished. But an international inquiry cannot be the way forward. The Sinhalese people should know that serious crimes have been committed and the culprits should be exposed. But what matters most is reconciliation between the communities, based on a full recognition of the truth. Some of the most effective exposures of war crimes have for sources former Sinhalese military personnel. Thus there is a case for a more positive approach for the Tamil people in linking up with the more sensible elements among the Sinhalese to call for a credible inquiry.

Goodwill between communities and countries has at times better served by work in the cultural and literary fields. The Dhesiya Kalai Ilakkiyap Peravai was founded with the intention of clearing the Tamil speaking communities of socially discriminatory ideologies, cultural backwardness and sectarianism. It has been a remarkable secular force in the areas of literature and art, with its motto "New Life, New Democracy, New Culture".

The Peravai has continuously urged national unity based on mutual respect for communities and is the most effective force among Tamils in pursuing secular ideals among the Tamil speaking communities. Its activities have crossed the waters to establish links in India where it has undertaken joint publications with South Asian Books in the 1990s. It has

brought to Sri Lanka eminent literary personalities like Komal Swaminathan and Pe.Su. Mani among others to build bridges between the secular and progressive writers in both countries.

The longstanding and historical bond between the Tamil people of the two countries is important to us. We like to build on it to effectively address issues of social justice and progressive art and literature at home and share our experiences with our counterparts in India.

The Peravai very much appreciates the invitation from the Communist Party of India (Marxist –Leninist) Red Star to address its seminar on ‘The Tamil Question in Sri Lanka and the Indian Approach’ and is glad to be able to send two of its members capable of doing justice to the seminar theme and present a more realistic picture of the national question in Sri Lanka than what has been painted by interested parties. The hope of the Peravai in participating in this event is that through developing further links with secular and progressive elements in Tamilnadu, it will be able to promote a more balanced approach towards the Sri Lankan national question and thereby effectively combat mischievous acts that only hurt the prospects of a peaceful solution of the national question at home.

*[The above is a summary of the talk intended be delivered by Comrade K Thanikasalam Editor in Chief, Thaayakam (quarterly journal of the Dhesiya Kalai Ilakkiyap Peravai) on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2014 in Chennai at the seminar ‘The Tamil Question in Sri Lanka and the Indian Approach’ organised by the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Red Star. Comrade Thanikasalam could not attend and the summary was read out to delegates.]*

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# The Post-War National Question and the Sri Lankan Left

*(Part 2)*

*Imayavaramban*

## 4. Attitudes to War and Peace Efforts (1983 – 2009)

### *4.1 The Tamil nationalist perspective at home and abroad*

Tamil nationalists of all shades were hopeful of India liberating “Tamil Eelam” for them and therefore allowed themselves to be manipulated by India. The LTTE, unlike its rivals, persisted in armed struggle even after India imposed an Indo-Sri Lanka Accord on the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil militants. It was able to dominate, destroy or marginalize its rivals through ruthless use of force so that the ascent of the LTTE deprived the people of even the limited space for political discussion that existed in the North and East. The people, with choice narrowed between a brutally oppressive state and a ruthless military outfit that kept it at bay, willingly or unwillingly opted for the latter. After the humiliation of the Indian Peace Keeping Force in 1989, it was the perspective of the LTTE that was shown up as the Tamil nationalist perspective in dealing with the national question. All other nationalist perspectives were made irrelevant by way of subordination to that of the LTTE or surrender to a Sinhala chauvinist regime. In LTTE controlled areas, the people were reduced to abiding by the LTTE’s line on pursuing the war, peace negotiations and war again.

The Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987 although designed to serve Indian interests and incapable of addressing the fundamental issues of the national question, had its positive features. The Accord led to the passing of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment enabling the establishment of Provincial Councils, including one in which the Northern and Eastern Provinces were provisionally merged. It should be accepted that the setting up of the Provincial Councils, despite its limited powers that fell far short of autonomy, marked the only positive step in the history of the country towards devolution of power for the minority nationalities. The recognition of Tamil as an additional Official Language was another positive outcome of the Accord, although its implementation has remained far from satisfactory. The attitude of the different Tamil nationalist groups towards the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka also reflected their attitude towards India. The LTTE, although justified in its suspicions about Indian intentions, showed a lack of political wisdom in its attitude towards the North-East Provincial Council. Besides boycotting elections to the Provincial Council, it was short-sighted enough to help the government to undermine whatever little authority that the Provincial Council had. No elections were held for the North-East Provincial Council since the dissolution of the North-East Provincial Council in 1990 by President Premadasa using presidential powers acquired with the help of LTTE proxies elected to Parliament in 1989. Elections were held for the councils, which were de-merged in 2006, only after the defeat of the LTTE: in 2010 for Eastern Provincial Council and as late as September 2013 for the Northern Provincial Council.

Following the military humiliation of the Indian Peace Keeping Forces by the LTTE, achieved with the support of the Premadasa government, the LTTE dominated politics in much of the North and East, even through the years of war and periods of military setback. The LTTE had no democratic tradition and criticism of its leader and even failed strategies met with scorn. To LTTE supporters and sympathizers, Tamil Eelam was the answer to the national question and the LTTE was an invincible fighting force that will deliver it. In LTTE-controlled areas the attitude of Tamils



towards the LTTE ranged from active support of some to passive submission by the many. Thus, the choice for the militant rivals of the LTTE was between becoming subservient appendages of the LTTE and seeking shelter from either the Sri Lankan state or the Indian establishment. Several militant organizations had opted for India even before the Accord while most of the others were pushed to cooperating with the Sri Lankan government and some even the armed forces.

The Tamil nationalist rivals and opponents of the LTTE were reduced to the status of passive observers when not used by the governments of Sri Lanka and India to do their bidding to undermine the LTTE. The Tamil Nationalist Alliance (TNA) comprising the Federal Party, the Tamil Congress and a few erstwhile militant groups, for opportunist reasons, accepted the LTTE as the 'sole representatives' of the Tamil people in order that they could win parliamentary seats in the LTTE dominated North-East. The TNA, much to the resentment of India, was also supportive of the LTTE during the peace process facilitated by Norway from 2002 until its failure in 2003 and formal breakdown in 2007, and until the military decimation of the LTTE in 2009.

The population of the Tamil diaspora has grown rapidly since 1983 and have shown much concern about the national question. While those in India are restrained from active political work, those resident in North America and Europe and to a less extent those in Australia have grown to be supportive of the Tamil nationalist cause, and even the many with reservations about the LTTE have been broadly supportive of the armed struggle against the Sri Lankan state. At the same time, Tamil nationalist activists among the diaspora have grown increasingly out of touch with the reality in Sri Lanka and naïve about the intentions of international players. Active supporters of the LTTE, especially reputed fund raisers, wielded greater influence on LTTE policy than the Tamil population at home, including the fighters for the cause, because of their control over finances and perceived influence with both government and opposition politicians in the West. To many of them, Tamil Eelam, was an obsession

and the LTTE, or to be more precise its leader Pirapakaran, was the agent to realize that dream.

With approaches to the national question highly polarized and conditioned in terms of attitude towards the LTTE, the vast majority of the diaspora was denied access to balanced sources of information and, in particular, political analysis. Very few, even among the critics of the LTTE, realized that, when war resumed in 2006, the LTTE was not calling the shots in the battlefield. Many assumed that the LTTE was negotiating for peace in 2002-2003 from a position of strength and much on its own terms, whereas the reality was that the LTTE and the government were forced to the negotiating table by the West, especially the US. The supporters of the LTTE also propagated a false impression of invincibility of the LTTE, based on past performance, ignoring the external factors that once made military success possible for the LTTE.

Two illusions have haunted Tamil nationalists among the diaspora: firstly the faith in the infallibility of the LTTE leadership and secondly the impression that the West, almost as a whole, was on the side of the Tamils. These illusions which blinded them to the realities of Sri Lanka survived the international isolation of the LTTE following the breakdown in the peace talks, and continue in other forms even after the decimation of the LTTE by the Sri Lankan state with the support of the West. The key role of the US (acting on the prompting of the UNP leadership) in inducing a split in the LTTE during peace negotiations leading to the breaking away of a sizeable section of the LTTE in the Eastern Province has been ignored and interpreted as an act of treachery by an individual. They also ignored the contributory role of regionalism within the ranks of the LTTE.

To the Tamil nationalists of the diaspora, every little 'victory' of the LTTE including attacks on civilians was a matter to celebrate. As for civilian casualties, the attitude was even more cynical, based on the belief that the more the Tamil victims of war the more the West was likely to take notice and intervene. The series of important defeats of the LTTE and the external and internal factors that contributed to them were never

matters for serious discussion or analysis by Tamil nationalists at home or abroad.

It has been the collective emotional mindset of the diaspora — unable to accept the defeat of the LTTE — that left it in a state of shock, so that some still deny the death of the leader of the LTTE at the hands of the armed forces. In contrast, in Sri Lanka, including LTTE controlled areas, Tamils were growingly conscious of the possibility of the defeat of the LTTE as it began to lose ground in the North in the first half of 1998. However, the speed and nature of the defeat and the scale of destruction shocked all.

#### *4.2 The Parliamentary left*

During the 17 years of UNP rule from 1977 to 1994, the parliamentary left acted with dignity to consistently reject chauvinism. Following the unseating of TULF MPs for refusal to swear an oath of allegiance rejecting secession as required by the 6<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution introduced in the wake of the anti-Tamil violence of 1983, Sarath Mutthetuwegama of the CP, the only left MP in parliament, was the sole voice defending the Tamils harassed by the chauvinist state. Also, remarkably, the parliamentary left, unlike the SLFP, unreservedly defended the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord and the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment that enabled the establishment of Provincial Councils, with the Northern and Eastern Provinces merged into one Council. The left leaning Sri Lanka Mahajana Paksaya (Sri Lanka People's Party, SLMP) with roots in the SLFP and led by Vijaya Kumaranatunge (married to Chandrika Kumaranatunge, President of Sri Lanka 1994-2005 and shot dead in 1988 by a JVP hit-man for his support of the Accord) took a bold principled stand on the national question. The entire left (excluding the nominally left outfits like the MEP which matched the JVP in their chauvinism) was targeted by the JVP during its ruthless campaign of violence against the Accord.

The parliamentary left which has at least in policy been opposed to chauvinism, has traditionally viewed the national question in terms of

Sinhala and Tamil speaking people rather than in terms of nationalities with grievances and aspirations that could only be addressed by a solution based on self determination. Its conduct on the national question varied, however, between actively addressing the grievances of the Tamil speaking people and calling for a peaceful settlement of the national question with some degree of devolution of power on a regional basis when in opposition to one of the occasional vociferous protest against discriminatory acts by the government ending up in meek submission when in government.

This pattern has been most marked under the Mahinda Rajapaksa regime, as shown by its sham protests against anti democratic 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment granting more powers to the President and extending the presidential term of office beyond the earlier constitutional limit and the politically motivated impeachment of the Chief Justice in 2013. This lapse of political morality is a result of parliamentary political opportunism, to which the Democratic Left Front, led by Vasudeva Nanayakkara fell victim in 2010. Nanayakkara, who split with the NSSP in 1989, had an honourable record on the national question until after he, like other left MPs, was elected MP in 2010 entirely on the largesse of the SLFP, or more accurately, President Rajapaksa.

#### *4.3 The JVP*

The chauvinism of the JVP came into full bloom in its violent rejection of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987. Its opposition — unlike that of the SLFP which besides opposing devolution of power challenged the infringement of the sovereignty of Sri Lanka in the less discussed clauses of the Accord that subjected Sri Lanka to Indian hegemony — concerned only the devolution of power under the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The JVP, besides bitterly opposing the peace negotiations between the UNP government (but under the presidency of Chandrika Kumaratunge) and the LTTE, acted in collusion with the right wing Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) in derailing the Post-Tsunami Operational

Management Structure (P-TOMS) mechanism devised in 2005 to deal with the devastation caused by the tsunami of 26.12.2004 in LTTE controlled areas and in demerging the Northern and Eastern Provinces in 2006 through the Supreme Court, whose political neutrality was questionable.

The JVP which secured 39 seats out of the 225 seats in parliament in 2004, far in excess of its real electoral strength, by joining in a coalition with the SLFP sought to be assertive in government and as a result was forced to leave the coalition in 2005. It got close to the government again by strongly backing Mahinda Rajapaksa in the presidential election of 2005, but was soon outmanoeuvred by the Mahinda Chinthana government by firstly persuading opposition UNP MPs to join the government in large numbers and then inducing a split in the JVP which was uneasy about that move. The faction that joined the government is even more chauvinist than the JVP.

The JVP performed increasingly poorly in the elections that followed the defeat of the LTTE in 2009, indicating that its chauvinism has lost its electoral charm with the urban support base that it had assiduously built since its comeback in 1994. The JVP used Sinhala chauvinism to build its middle and lower middle class vote bank without a credible left political programme in hand and, like the parliamentary left, was a victim of opportunism except that its decline was even more rapid. Its openly chauvinistic stand and display of loyalty to institutionalized Buddhist values have made it hard for the JVP to change course or even tactically accept devolution of power to the oppressed minorities. Thus, along with the JHU, it was the bitterest opponent of the peace negotiations in 2002-2003, the most ardent supporter of the war revived in 2006, and a relentless opponent of any form of ceasefire.

Also, the JVP, despite declared opposition to Indian hegemony and US imperialism, warmed up to both powers during the war, especially when the LTTE seemed to hold the upper hand militarily, and expressed gratitude to India and US for militarily and politically supporting the government. Resentment of India and the West was revived in the post-

war era, especially in the face of the UNHRC resolutions against Sri Lanka and what seem to be Indian and US pressures on Sri Lanka on the national question.

#### *4.4 Marxist Leninists and Trotskyites*

Of left political parties, the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party (NDMLP) and the Communist Party of Ceylon-Maoist (CPC-M) – successors to the Marxist Leninist faction of the Communist Party – and the NSSP, the USP and the rather sectarian SEP – Trotskyite organizations born of dissent in the LSSP – have been consistent in their respective stands on the national question. All accept that Tamils are a nation or nationality with the right to self determination. However, the NDMLP has gone further to recognize the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils as minority nationalities in their own right on an equal footing with the Tamils of the North-East.

Prospects rose in 1999, amid a climate of war weariness on both sides of the communal divide, for the unity of left forces that rejected opportunism and compromise with chauvinism, and a New Left Front (NLF) was formed, comprising the NSSP, NDMLP (then known as the NDP), the USP, and three other left groups. The NLF made an impact in the elections to the Provincial Council in 1999 in some districts. But the naïveté of the NSSP leadership in falling for overtures from the JVP, designed to cause a split in the NLF, led to the break-up of the NLF in 2001. The damage had been lasting and remains a hindrance to principled broad-based left unity.

Their attitude towards the LTTE was in sharp contrast to that of the CP and LSSP which considered the LTTE to be a terrorist organization and that of the DLF, which joined the government in 2006, which was qualified in its criticism of the LTTE. The NSSP and the CPC-M have been less critical of the LTTE than the rest, whereas the NDMLP which recognized the LTTE as the effective fighting force of the Tamil nationality was consistently critical of the LTTE's militarist approach, lack of democracy and failure to oppose imperialism.

It should be noted that these parties, besides their concurrence in viewing the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment as inadequate to solve the national question and calling for greater devolution, have also been supportive of the short-lived peace process facilitated by Norway, and denounced moves by various quarters to undermine it. Admittedly, there are differences in their respective perspectives of the national question of these left parties. The NDMLP urges the recognition of Muslims and Hill Country Tamils as distinct nationalities while the others tend to address the national question as one concerning the Sinhala and Tamil nations. This difference, however, had not been an obstacle to their taking a principle stand in opposing war and calling for a negotiated solution based on the right to self determination. But what is unfortunate is that the NSSP (which took the name NLF and later changed it to LF) and to a less extent the USP seem to be driven by parliamentary ambition so that they have got drawn into a political alliance led by the UNP in the pretext of restoring democracy.

#### *4.5 The unorganized left*

The unorganized left is not a strong force and mostly comprises dropouts from the old left parties and the JVP. Some groups which split from the JVP following the failure of the 1971 insurrection once had considerable following, but failed to unite or to organize themselves as political parties. Some have drifted towards non-government organizations (NGOs) and stagnated politically. There are also individuals, including political commentators, who for various reasons keep away from party politics.

By and large, the stand of the unorganized left on the war, a negotiated solution to the national question and devolution of power has been close to that of the Marxist Leninists and Trotskyites. But very rarely has it had an impact on the public at large in the context of media dominated mainly by chauvinist politics among the Sinhalese and narrow nationalism among the Tamils.

*(to be continued)*

# The Idea of Secularism in a Buddhist State

*Aswaththamaa*

Sri Lanka is facing the stiffest challenge in its history to overcome religious extremism and open hatred towards minority religions in the country. The latest theatrics of the Buddhist extremist groups like *Bodhu Bala Sena* (BBS) and *Sinhala Ravaya* have created fear among the religious minorities and call into question the prospects for secularism in a Buddhist state. In major theories of modern society as well as of the sociology of religion, it is assumed that modern states are 'secular', implying complete segregation of religion from all other functionally differentiated social mechanisms and organisations, political system and the state in particular. Modernity has played an increasing part in the evolution of the Sri Lankan polity in the last century. The pace of modernization was further accelerated by the adoption of liberal economic policies in 1978. But modernity has failed to alter the core of the state.

The Constitution of 1978 which introduced an open economy also institutionalized religion and made the Sri Lankan state into a Buddhist state, which ran contrary to the notion of modernity requiring a modern state to be secular. The reality is that the 'modernity' has its variants in South Asia and Sri Lanka has its peculiar version.

Religion is today a highly complex social phenomenon which encompasses faith, morality, values, beliefs, rituals, social practices, group allegiance, authority, hierarchy, power, money and organization among



others. It also exerts influence on literature, the arts, architecture, music and philosophy. In other words, it permeates all aspects of the life of a believer. In Asian societies, as elsewhere, religion has been closely intertwined with the political power structure, and its persistence in the modern context poses fresh challenges to secularism. This essay comprises an effort to understand the position of the Sri Lankan state vis-a-vis secularism and the dangers posed by a sectarian state to a multi-religious society.

Secularism in principle refers to the separation of religious orders from the state, neutrality of the state in religious matters, equal treatment of different religions by the state, and the right of individuals to believe (or not believe) in a religion as a matter of private faith, insulated from the public sphere. Secularism emerged as a political ideology as a result of bitter and bloody conflicts in Europe. From a broad and rational perspective, it could be argued that secularism is indispensable to any multi-cultural and multi-religious society.

Diversity is an inherent attribute of all human societies, and will be rich and run deep in multi-cultural and multi-ethnic societies. Conflict of views and interests will thrive in very nearly all spheres of social life in such societies. What matters is that such conflicts are handled amicably, and secularism offers the best approach to their resolution. In a society where numerical supremacy of a religious group could predispose it to disfavour smaller groups, secularism could intervene to deter persecution of religious minorities. Secularism thus restrains the political expression of cultural or religious conflicts between different communities in a multi-religious country.

As Sri Lanka has been a multi-religious country, it was expected that secularism will thrive in the process of modernization. But that did not happen. Tension has been stirred between ethnic groups through recourse to the historical chronicle of *Mahavamsa*, a source document addressing the historical relationship between the Sinhala monarchy and the *Sangha*.

The identity of the “people” was not a central issue in the *Mahavansa*, and assorted, loosely affiliated groups constituting the population at large are not described or addressed in terms of their distinct ethnic identities in the modern sense. But, influential modern commentators, in the process of defining the Sinhalese by race, language, and religion and as a people whose history and destiny legitimize their claim to pre-eminence, have wilfully reread the ancient chronicle to serve a specific ethno-nationalist agenda. In the process, the universalism of the Buddha and the complex, compassionate discernment at the heart of his message are fatally compromised to serve the passionate intensity of ethnic competitiveness. The consequences have been (and continue to be) distressing in the extreme. The tragic course of events in Sri Lanka is, however, not atypical.

The present context is a continuation of the past in a difference sense with same ideological underpinnings. The Buddhist re-awakening is funded and garnered by the Sri Lankan state, which is enjoying a majority support based on its Sinhala-Buddhist ideology. The state, knowing well that history can play a crucial role in persuading people about Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony, promotes the production of “historical” movies and discussions in the media saluting the historical greatness of Sinhala-Buddhists. Anagarika Dharmapala features prominently in most discussions. Ironically, Dharmapala had censured other religions for being violent and claimed pre-eminence for Buddhism among world’s religions for its transcending caste, kin, and race while emphasizing its main, humanizing message of tolerance and compassion. Contemporary revivalists of Buddhism have effectively turned the tables on the Buddha and his message.

Anagarika Dharmapala, on the other hand, invoked the *Mahavansa* to affirm the relationship between Buddhism and the special interest of the Sinhalese, whom he described as racially distinct and whose historical destiny is to rule Sri Lanka. Linking of religion with the people of the country through the agency of an ancient chronicle has been made the key to modern Sinhala national identity, in order to bring modern day Sinhala

Buddhism into conflict with secularism and freedom of practice of other religions.

The Sinhalese are informed that, according to the *Mahavamsa*, they have been specially chosen by the Buddha and that it is their political unity that can guarantee the survival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Conversely, the Sinhala Buddhist political identity is guaranteed by the espousal of political Buddhism. Certainly, in the Buddhist revival that preceded independence in 1948, which facilitated the transfer of power to a Sinhala Buddhist elite, this coalescing of people, religion and land was immensely persuasive and powerful.

However, it should be noted that the *Mahavamsa* does not map directly onto late nineteenth and twentieth-century Sri Lanka, and the political conditions referred to by its main author Mahanama are not those of a modern post-colonial country that craves democracy. This fact is generally ignored by Buddhist revivalists bent on asserting what they take to be a time-hallowed, divinely sanctioned Sinhala Buddhist identity, which they had invoked as part of their resistance to colonialism.

Developments leading to the present crisis in Sri Lanka can be explained in terms of the creation (or rather mystification) of the Sinhala Buddhist identity through history. This has prompted the mindset and the reason for being hegemonic as a state and as a society. On the other hand, psychoanalysis of Sinhala-Buddhist extremism may point to a mix of fear and uncertainty as the reason for their actions. Uncertainty and extremism tend to go together, and there are many examples in history. The best documented is probably the global surge in national-political extremism during the Great Depression of the 1930s, which favoured a shift toward fascism and ultra-nationalism that culminated in genocide in Europe and a world war. Post war developments in Sri Lanka show similarities with patterns in countries where fascism thrived.

The post-war situation in Sri Lanka comprises a political, economic and social crisis, with the much touted development agenda having failed to deliver the goods to the people who are struggling to make ends meet.

War victory and the elimination of the LTTE have run out of steam to assure continued electoral success. Thus the government is on the lookout for alternatives, and the creation of extremist forces is a result of this uncertainty. Post-LTTE Sri Lankan politics is in desperate need of an enemy to cling on to. Religious extremism has invented an enemy, with dangerous implications for social harmony.

The challenge facing democratic forces is the protection of minority religions and sustenance of religious freedom by pressing for secularism in Sri Lanka in a context where the state is Buddhist and exercises widespread hegemony and domination in all the aspects of a multi-cultural society. The state has evolved and modernized sufficiently to cater to globalization and market forces but has failed to become secular. This, however, is not an issue for market forces as long as they can do business with a state which has opened up many fronts and shows a modern face to the world and wants to be the 'Wonder of Asia'.

The statecraft is such that it cleverly micromanages the hegemony through liberal posturing. Religion has been the most successful tool so far for the government to retain support among the people and it will therefore continue to impose Buddhist hegemony on the minorities. What the Sri Lankan state is seeking to achieve is to mould itself as a mono-ethnic mono-religious entity. The violence unleashed by the Buddhist extremist groups with the blessings of the state are designed to intimidate the minorities and make them feel increasingly insecure.

Groups that suffer uncertainty about their collective future can act in different ways. Politically motivated violence perpetrated by individuals, groups or state-sponsored agents and designed to inflict feelings of terror and helplessness on a population in order to influence decision-making and condition behaviour is the method chosen by Sri Lankan Buddhist extremists.

Marxists have upheld secularism as the way forward for the people. Marx identified organized religion as a product of class society. His ideas on religion are part of his general theory of alienation in class-divided

societies. Religion is both a product of alienation and an expression of class interests. It is simultaneously a tool for the manipulation and oppression of the subordinate class in society, an expression of protest against oppression, and a form of resignation and consolation in the face of oppression. It is important to note that not only the oppressed are religious. Members of the ruling class can be equally so. Religion is not merely a manipulative device to control the exploited groups in society. While religion is to some extent the religion upheld by the ruling class because it is, consciously or unconsciously, seen as a force for social control, it may also be followed because the ruling class itself is alienated to a considerable degree.

Combating religion as an institution is in some ways important to the move towards secularism and to class struggle itself. The task is enormous but not impossible. The Sri Lankan state has demonstrated how a state can be modern, liberal and open to free trade while not being secular. Aspects of modernity have been made to work collectively to reassure and reconfirm the supremacy of the state religion.

The need of the hour for the people of all religions and progressive forces is to unite to fight religious hegemony. Meanwhile one should remember the secularism is not about ridding religion from the lives of people, or to deny people the right to a religious faith or to practice it. Secularism requires one not only to respect such rights but also to protect them. This understanding is essential to bring people together to fight for the right to religious freedom. It is through the defence of religious rights that the Sri Lankan state can be made secular in the long term. It should also be noted that, in the present context, for Sri Lanka to advance towards peace and reconciliation it also needs to move towards secular values. Besides, secularism will remain an essential prerequisite for lasting peace in Sri Lanka.

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# Hill Country Tamil Women: Employment Issues

*Michael Panneerselvam*

Among the historical records of the tales of sorrow of the Hill Country Tamils who were brought to Ceylon to serve on plantation crops, those relating to the condition of women are most terrible. Having established their lives in the Hill Country through long journey by sea and through forest and hilly terrain and hostile weather comprising hot sun, heavy rain and cold weather, they transformed the country into an exporter of plantation crops through clearing forests and establishing plantations. Their toil and struggle for survival to achieve it was full of untold sorrow. Hunger, starvation and illness tortured them further. Violence by the labour overseers and their henchmen and the arbitrariness of the white estate superintendents pushed them into a state of slavery. This condition persisted even after Ceylon became independent and, even today, its residues can be seen to severely oppress them in other forms.

While other parts of the country have developed educationally over a long period, education of Hill Country Tamils began only in the 1970s. That of Hill Country Tamil women started even later. While genocidal and depopulation activities have been imposed on these people in various ways, gender inequality and an economy based on physical toil stood in the way of progress for Hill Country women. Gender inequality, initially based on the labour power of males, exists from the time of birth. In particular, half a bushel of paddy was offered for the birth of a male child

and quarter bushel for a female child. Subsequently, exploitation of labour was indiscriminately imposed on women. A scheme was proposed by the Wages Board based on Company Law and was put into practice, by which weeding tea bushes, fertilizing, planting seedlings, withering, fermenting, weighing, packeting, and tea plucking especially became mandatory duties for female labourers.

The employers who paid much attention to extract as much work as possible in the form of labour from the women paid scant attention to their welfare. Although they toil hard climbing hills and valleys with gunny cloth across the waist and basket hanging from the head with fingers calloused by tea plucking, getting drenched in rain and scorched by the sun, suffering leech bite and cut by tea stumps in shivering cold, they seldom receive the agreed wage to drive away the poverty of their families or to advance themselves. This condition applied alike to all women irrespective of age. It has been customary for women to register as labourers at a specified age and for parents to consider it their duty to ensure registration and seek the assistance of trade union leaders for the purpose. It is difficult for a woman born in a particular estate to register herself as labourer after marriage even when she chooses to stay in the same estate or move to another estate after marriage. There have been instances where the management deferred registration in view of the need to grant maternity leave and maternity benefits. Such actions have been carried out by the management in a planned way.

In the decade after 1970, there were some changes in the situation. Prior to 1970, before the Estate Schools were taken over by the government, responsibility for education in the plantations rested with the estate management, which aimed at high profit rates and did not pay much attention to education. It considered educational expenditure as a waste. The indifference was also because it was difficult to find labour among people with an educational background. As a result, there were only Estate Schools with a single teacher. The teacher too took advantage of his position as the "big educator" and got the plantation children to attend to

his personal matters so that teaching and learning activities were at a minimum. As a result, the school was managed by several children while grazing the cattle, looking after children, gathering firewood and carrying water uphill were daily routine for the students.

Before 1973, 51.7% of the children had not attended school; 40.6% received primary education; 6.7% received intermediate level education; and 1.3% received higher intermediate level education. The share of education received by females was lower than that of males. However, after the government took over the Estate Schools, the schools offered education to the children of the plantations at the national level. Although there was a deficit of teachers and resources, there was social change through education in the years that followed.

The advancement in education of the Hill Country Tamil children led to changes in ways of thinking. While registering and working in the plantations declined for a variety of reasons, attempts were made at alternative employment. Some took to teaching while others were employed as shop assistants or found other minor jobs in restaurants and markets in Colombo and other cities. Girls found employment as domestic servants in well to do homes. These led to a slight change the way of life of Hill Country Tamils as well as to a rise in the search for alternative employment.

While the open economic policy introduced in 1978 enabled men to find employment at low levels in the expanding industry, most women continued with their work in the plantations. Although women felt the need for alternative employment in the context of the authoritarian approach of the management, lack of career advancement and inability to overcome family poverty, girls were mostly placed in domestic employment.

Although the parents claimed that they opted for that course of action so that the children would have proper meals, their desperation as well as desire for a modest additional income was the driving factor that encouraged the well to do to raid the Hill Country in search for girl



domestic servants. However, the girls who found employment as domestic servants were assigned work which was not commensurate with their age. Besides, they were also subjected to cruelty and harsh exploitation of labour by the ladies of the house. With their basic needs not fulfilled, the girls were subject to physical and emotional ill treatment, and some suffered sudden death.

Mandatory education, awareness of children's rights, laws of child employment and the emergence of middle class families led to some changes in the way of life of the Hill Country Tamils. Although some women have found employment as teachers, the majority with a low level of education face problems with choice of alternative employment. With employment in the garment industry which came up in the late 1980s as the only option before them for alternative employment, many women took to work in the garment factories. A decline in women's desire to work in the plantations and the attraction of higher education acted in favour of the quest for an alternative to plantation employment.

The rapid growth of the garment industry, while strengthening the prospects for temporary employment of the women, has hindered educational development. Reasons such as their own keenness for employment and the economic condition of the family attracted them to these jobs. Owing to the shift in emphasis of the Sri Lankan economy from the export of plantation produce to that of export of garments and the privatization of tea plantations, wage earnings in the plantation sector fell below that in the garment industry. As a result a considerable number of women opted for the latter. Nevertheless, most women remained in the plantation sector.

Nevertheless, a combination of factors including the continuing development of education, the role played by schools, the interest among Hill Country females for higher education, the establishment of Colleges of Education in the Hill Country, the sudden decline of the garment industry and private interest in garment manufacture led to search for employment in other directions. Women found government employment

opportunities based on educational accomplishment, experience, and training. Many found jobs as teachers and some as medical and legal practitioners and educationists. Yet others became clerical officers. However, since the general level of education, skills training and career guidance in the Hill Country were poor, women found jobs at low levels in private sector organizations in urban areas. This provided the owners of establishments with opportunity find employees at low wage levels.

Against this background, a tendency grew among the younger generation of Hill Country Tamil women to abandon work in the plantations in favour of employment as house maids in the Middle East, which has besides developed into a serious social problem. The very role played by the senior labour overseers in bringing workers from India in the early stages of the plantation industry is now being played by employment brokers for the Middle East. To earn a living for themselves, they introduce women to employment agencies. In the process they make money from two different sources, namely the agencies and those seeking employment.

Women who go to the Middle East, driven by their desire to pull their families out of poverty and the attraction of foreign employment, but without adequate education or foreign experience, and little knowledge of their employment security or terms of employment, undergo untold suffering with some subjected to sexual abuse. Women who return home before end of contract as a result of the harsh conditions lose their earlier jobs to become unemployment and frustrated.

Of women who go abroad for employment, the married and the unmarried face contrasting social problems. When an unmarried woman who worked abroad wants to get married, the society takes an unfair view of her, which makes it difficult for her to find a partner in marriage.

The plight of married women is different. Although they are aware of the sorrowful experiences of women who go abroad for the uplift of the family amid various personal sacrifices, they opt for overseas employment as an employment alternative. The mass media which seem to deal with

issues concerning foreign employment as mere news items rarely deliver it to the people as a well analysed social discussion. Besides, those who return from employment abroad refrain from revealing their personal experiences. As a result, false campaign by employment agencies succeeds in attracting women to employment abroad.

A woman who leaves behind her husband and children to take up employment abroad as a housemaid does so merely for the economic upliftment of the family. Under conditions of the husband living without the wife and the children without the mother, many husbands are known to have squandered the money sent by their wives on liquor and recreational activities, while starving their children. A few husbands have acquired new wives and abandoned their children without the security of a family; and many girls are known to act as foster mothers for their siblings deserted by the father.

This situation which thus imperils the educational prospects for the children who are also vulnerable to cruelty and sexual abuse also pushes them towards socially harmful conditions. These children, devoid of the love, protection and care from a mother, besides being pushed along wrongful ways, are also forced to carry heavy burdens at a tender age.

Some mothers have even abandoned infants in their pursuit of foreign employment. Although serving as housemaids in the Middle East brings in financial benefits, its overall effect has been mostly negative. Although there are various acts of legislation regarding foreign employment, they are cunningly violated by the agencies. The officials concerned are thus answerable for the occurrence of such violations despite requirements such as the Village Officer's report and School Principal's Report in the case of school going children.

The socio-historical perspective of alternative employment for Hill Country Tamil women is confined to the past three or four decades. The quest for alternative employment has manifested itself in different ways at different times, but without providing a way for a steady employment alternative. Thus the provision of educational development, employment-

oriented technical education and career guidance in a non-discriminatory fashion is a pressing issue.

Besides, the government and the trade unions representing the less educated women should initiate self-employment opportunities for them. The government can enhance their employment prospects by providing them with the opportunity and resources to undertake cottage industries, farming, bee keeping, mushroom cultivation and agriculture.

There is also the need to narrow in practice the gap between education and employment. Initially employment was possible with GCE (OL) qualifications. Now the requirement has risen to GCE (AL), and even university degrees are expected. It is inappropriate to demand such qualifications from a social group with only a three decade long history of education. It is essential that they are granted concessions regarding employment. Nevertheless it is important that the women of the Hill Country take the initiative with a positive social outlook. Besides, they need a clear view and will for social change.

While it is necessary to find solutions for alternative employment, the government has to assure to women who rely on the plantation industry improvements in plantation labour conditions, proper wages and employment security. A solution should be found for their land problem. Ownership of the plantations should be transferred from private companies to the state. Today the government pays much attention to the tourism sector. It is the responsibility of the government to pay simultaneous attention to the employment of women in the plantation sector. Trade unions and social activists should jointly undertake mass campaigns in this connection. Besides, a lasting stable solution has to be found for the question of alternative employment for the Hill Country Tamil women, in place of the endless search for jobs.

*(Based on article in Tamil in Puthu Vasantham 2014)*

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## **Water for the Jaffna Peninsula**

*Eng. Dr. S. Sivasegaram*

Sri Lanka has been granted a loan of approximately US\$ 90 million by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) towards the cost of a major water supply and sanitation project in Jaffna and Kilinochchi at an estimated total cost of US\$ 164.4 million (see [www.development.lk/posters/130905120902Rs.docx](http://www.development.lk/posters/130905120902Rs.docx)). The project concerns the Iranamadu Tank, one of the deepest reservoirs in Sri Lanka and the largest irrigation tank in the Northern Province. The tank, reputedly built in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, was enlarged in several stages under British rule between 1902 and 1920, solely for agricultural purposes; and its bund was raised thrice between 1951 and 1975 to reach its present capacity of 131.8 million cubic meters.

The Kilinochchi District where the tank is located is nearly 1280 sq. km (128,000 ha) in extent, of which nearly 50% is cultivated, mostly for irrigated paddy production. The command area of the tank is estimated at 560 sq. km. It is claimed that raising the bund by a further 0.6 m (2 ft) under the project will increase in the capacity of the tank and meet the drinking water needs of the nearly of 650,000 population of the Jaffna District to the north as well as benefit 21,000 farming households in the Kilinochchi District.

The proposed project is expensive, and risks overestimation of resources and benefits while underestimating real costs and even ignoring future operational and maintenance costs. While one may appreciate the good intention of the government to address the problem of water supply to Jaffna, there are doubts whether the proposed project will be as beneficial to the people of the two districts as claimed. The main purpose

of the project seems to be to provide drinking water to the Jaffna Peninsula by increasing the storage capacity of Iranamadu, and it is added that there will be “spillover effects in terms of improved groundwater availability” [<http://ioes18.wildapricot.org/Default.aspx?pageId=1690881>]. This claim, among others, promising prosperity to the farmers in Kilinochchi, needs scrutiny in the context of charges by farmers’ associations of Kilinochchi that the agreement with the ADB was made without consulting cultivators in Kilinochchi, and that the ADB was misled regarding their consent and the feasibility of the project. [<http://tamil.dailymirror.lk/2010-07-14-09-13-23/2010-08-12-10-11-54/2010-08-12-10-10-09/100952-2014-02-21-12-24-54.html>]. The charges are too serious to dismiss lightly and deserve to be seriously followed up.

The proposed project stirred controversy in the Northern Province including among members of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) who are in power in the Provincial Council. Political aspects of the acrimony apart, genuine problems concerning the differing needs for water in the two districts need to be viewed sympathetically and dealt with in ways that will not only address the concerns of the people of the two districts but also benefit the country as a whole.

Objections to the project from cultivators in the Kilinochchi District, which belongs to the dry zone of the country, are based on their reliance on Iranamadu tank for cultivation as well as ground water. The maximum water storage in the reservoir is limited by the inflow during the rainy season, and increasing the capacity of the tank will not be of help, unless the tank spills over substantially and regularly. Spokespersons for the cultivators have claimed that the Iranamadu tank spills over only during one or two rainy seasons in every seven years while planners claim that it spills over three or four times. The former argue that the water requirement for paddy is 21,000 cubic metres per hectare (or 7 acre-ft per acre) does not change, so that the water storage tank is just about adequate to sustain paddy cultivation at the present level. They have also pointed out that raising the spill level by a further 0.6 m (2 ft) cannot substantially

increase the acreage of cultivation during the Yala season which now stands at around 25% or less of the available land owing to inadequacy of water.

As the tank also suffers periodic drought conditions, during such times the capacity of the tank will be inadequate to supply drinking water to the peninsula as well as support local agriculture. Thus there is a basis for the fear that commitment to supply water to the peninsula entails risks to Yala cultivation in the region. Thus, the genuine issue before the cultivators is not one of unwillingness to provide water to the peninsula but one of facing threats to their own survival.

Rather than address their concerns and examine ways in which water requirement for agriculture can be assured before pledging drinking water to the district to the north, local political interest groups have only acted to make the tank water a bone of contention between the people of the two districts.

The need for adequate potable water in Jaffna was recognized long ago and proposals to conserve groundwater in the peninsula were made as early as in 1879 under Government Agent CW Twynham. Early in the 1930s K Balasingham, Member of the Legislative Council visualized the utilization of the lagoons by their conversion into fresh water lakes, and this was followed in 1954 by a well thought out and comprehensive proposal by Irrigation Engineer S Arumugam, details of which I will not go into here, but simply point out that it is a relatively inexpensive project comprising the strategic erection of barriers to conserve the surplus rain water and thereby transform saltwater lagoons into freshwater lakes. (See Annexure 1 for a summary of the essential features of the so-called "River for Jaffna" proposal, also referred to as the "Engineer Arumugam Plan".

What matters most about the proposal of Arumugam is that, in contrast to the proposed pumped water scheme which is susceptible to drought conditions, it offers an inexpensive, environmentally friendly and sustainable way to ensure perennial water supply for the peninsula as well as conserve and enrich ground water in the peninsula. Most importantly,

its implementation will not hurt the interests of any section of the population in the two districts.

Water conservation needs to be made a priority for not only the Jaffna peninsula but also for the Districts of Kilinochchi and Vavuniya. Not long ago, the Vavuniya district experienced a severe shortage of drinking water. The main cause was the decline in ground water as a result of callous neglect as well as the intentional filling with earth of inland lakes and ponds in the entire North. Influential personalities on opposing sides of the political divide have been instrumental in the filling up of ponds in urban areas and unlawfully encroaching upon the land fill to build dwellings and other structures. Thus, the restoration of ponds and lakes should be a high priority even at the cost of evicting unlawful occupants of lands on or adjacent to areas that were once ponds or lakes.

Collection of rain water was not uncommon in Jaffna some decades ago. Rain water collected from the roofs of buildings is generally cleaner than water collected from underground; and its use with or without filtration as necessary should be encouraged in urban households. Rural water conservation by the collection of rain water in garden pits was initiated as a campaign in the 1970s in parts of the peninsula but political developments since the late 1970s brought it to a halt. That project too deserves revival. An additional benefit of such ventures is that it makes people conscious of the value of a precious commodity called water which is taken for granted by victims of consumerism.

I do not altogether reject the prospect of using surplus water from the Iranamadu Tank to meet fresh water requirements of the Jaffna District. Presenting the problem as a choice between water for drinking and water for cultivation is incorrect and injurious to the interests of the people of the North. Engineers have drawn attention to the loss of water from the Iranamadu tank through seepage in the irrigation canals. The proposed project seeks to address the matter by lining the canals. That will be beneficial as it means bringing more land under irrigation as well as



creating a surplus of fresh water. The case for raising the bund will be strong in that context.

The cost effectiveness of pumped water supply to the Jaffna Peninsula is, however, doubtful and there are also concerns of safety of the water under the proposed scheme, under which the water is to be treated after pumped delivery by pipe to the Peninsula, during which process Cyanobacteria (commonly known as blue-green algae) in the water can under anaerobic conditions in the pipe yield toxins that cannot be easily removed.

Quality of drinking water is now a serious issue in many parts of the country. Excessive use of synthetic fertilizer, pesticides and weedicides pose serious health hazards through contamination of ground water. Cultivators should be educated about the harmful effects of overuse of agrochemicals; and the provincial government can play a useful role in such matters. We see a return, although slow, to organic methods of farming in industrialized countries where there is increasing awareness of the harms of agrochemicals. Sri Lanka needs to learn from the experiences of others.

The tragedy of Sri Lanka is that the country is forced to adopt policies and practices imposed on it by powerful vested interests with the backing of global monetary organizations and lending agencies. In this instance concerning the water needs of the Jaffna Peninsula, the country is in a very good position to reject the ADB Project since the alternative to the ADB funded project is far less expensive than even the Sri Lankan component of the Project, leaving aside the annual interest and repayment costs on the loan. Adopting the River for Jaffna plan instead will be beneficial by way of a huge saving in investment in water pumps, piping and power installation as well as by opting for water treatment methods available in the country in preference to what is offered by ADB designated suppliers.

On Iranamadu, I sum up my main arguments as follows:

1. Drinking water should not be collected from the reservoir at the expense of water for irrigation.
2. The reservoir spill level should be raised after ensuring that seepage losses are minimized and ascertaining the need for surplus storage.
3. The economic benefits of the project need to be re-evaluated, taking into account implications for the cultivators and rice yield.
4. Water supply and sanitation development for Jaffna has to be based on a sustainable and ecologically sound scheme, and the "River for Jaffna" proposal of Arumugam seems the best available option.
5. Besides adopting the River for Jaffna proposal, particular attention needs to be paid to rain water harvesting and to the restoration of ponds and lakes in the entire North.

I am particularly grateful to Eng. DLO Mendis for encouraging me to write and for his constructive comments and to Eng. Thiru Arumugam for providing me with much of the information on the "River for Jaffna" proposal. Eng. Thiru Arumugam also informed me that the UN Environmental Program Report of August 2013 on thirty water projects recommended for implementation in Sri Lanka in the next twenty years selected three as top priority with the "*River for Jaffna*" given highest priority. It was also gladdening to learn from Eng. Mendis that the Institution of Engineers, Sri Lanka has recently decided to support the original "River for Jaffna" Plan. It is also satisfying that the Northern Provincial Council in May this year resolved against the implementation of the ADB Project. Unfortunately, external pressure on the government is still strong to go ahead with the project and there is the danger of the government yielding to such pressure.

It is for the people of the Northern Province to speak in one voice against the project as well as canvass national support for the "River for Jaffna" Plan, something which will not be difficult to secure in view of the economic burden that the ADB Project will place on the people of the whole country.

## Annexure-1

### **Key features of the river for Jaffna Project**

Key points of the scheme and details of the work done in the 1960s are as follows:

- Close off the openings in the road and rail bridges in the Elephant Pass causeway at the western end of the Elephant Pass lagoon to prevent fresh water going to the sea from this end. This work was completed.
- Build a bund and spillway at the eastern end of the Elephant Pass lagoon at Chundikulam to prevent fresh water going to the sea. This work was completed and the Elephant Pass lagoon became a fresh water lagoon for a few years but unfortunately the bund was breached by subsequent heavy floods, thus allowing sea water access since then.
- Excavate a 12 metre wide, 4 km long channel, called the Mulliyank Channel, from the northern side of the Elephant Pass lagoon to convey fresh water from the Elephant Pass lagoon to the southern end of the Vadamarachchi lagoon, including regulatory gates to control the flow. About 80% was completed when funds ran out and work stopped.
- Refurbish the existing Thondamanaru Barrage (where the northern end of Vadamarachchi lagoon exits the sea) to make it watertight, and improve the discharge gates to allow for discharge of flood water. This will make the Vadamarachchi lagoon a fresh water lagoon. This work was carried out but a few years later the wooden stop logs perished and allowed sea water to enter the lagoon.
- Provide a spillway and gates at the southern end of Upparu lagoon where it exits to the sea, near Ariyalai. This will make Upparu lagoon a fresh water lagoon. (The spillway and gates were constructed, but a few years later the wooden stop logs perished and allowed sea water to enter Upparu lagoon.)

*(Source: "A River for Jaffna" by Eng. Thiru Arumugam in Sunday Leader, August 11, 2013)*

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## **The Tiger Bogey**

The government claimed that it had eliminated LTTE terrorism in 2009; and today the same government is claiming that there is a serious “Tiger threat” to the security of the country. It is interesting that the Tiger threat returned in the wake of a poorer than expected performance by the government in the Western and Southern Provincial Council elections, although it secured both councils. The government had timed the elections to follow the UNHRC sessions where a resolution hostile to it was likely to be adopted, in the hope that anger about the US-sponsored resolution will mobilize public support. But somewhere its sums went wrong.

It is no secret that a rump of the support base of the LTTE is still alive among the Tamil diaspora and it has to be expected that the annihilation of the LTTE as a fighting force does not automatically mean its political extinction. But the LTTE is unlikely to revive politically in the foreseeable future and its regrouping as a fighting force is even less likely.

The government has besides the recent encounter killing of three LTTE suspects arrested several individuals on suspicion of being members of the LTTE. It has also proscribed sixteen overseas Tamil organizations and denied entry to the country to more than 400 individuals associated with these organizations. The government desperately needs the Tiger bogey in a situation where the shine of the war victory is slowly but surely fading amid rising public disaffection with increasing economic burdens, soaring corruption and crumbling social order.

Pro-LTTE Tamil nationalists among the diaspora are also pleased with the revival of the Tiger bogey as it helps them to keep politically afloat as well as ensure steady cash inflow. That together with the empty boast by local Tamil nationalists that the “International Community” will liberate the Tamils of Sri Lanka is only helping the chauvinist government to defer a solution to the national question by whipping up communal feelings.

## Politics of Gambling

The government has all along been untruthful about its policy on gambling. The government, in a desperate bid to boost foreign currency earnings, wanted to develop casinos in and around Colombo as a tourist attraction and had made a deal with Australian gambling tycoon James Packer's Crown Resorts Ltd to accommodate a massive casino in a US\$ 400 million mixed-use resort in Colombo. The cabinet approved the project in September 2013, but strong public opposition forced a seeming retreat.

The government which pledged on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2014, when the parliament approved the project, that would be no casino in the resort, soon found a way round to permit gambling there by declaring that casinos will be restricted to D.R. Wijewardane Mawatha, the area where Crown Resorts has planned its hotel and that anybody can operate a casino there only in partnership with a local licence holder. According to government sources five licences have already been issued, but this has been challenged by the main opposition party which asked the government to table the licences in Parliament. There are besides two other projects being developed that are likely to include casinos: a US\$ 300 million resort by Vallibel One PLC located near Packer's planned complex; and a US\$ 850 million project of John Keells Holdings PLC.

Gambling was made illegal by the SLFP government shortly after it came to power in 1956. It was legalized under the UNP government as part of its open economic policy, and many nightclubs and luxury hotels have gambling facilities. The parody is that the SLFP which banned gambling nearly six decades ago is itching to promote in a big way while the party that legalized it is pretending to oppose gambling.

While opponents of casino gambling draw attention to its direct social impact as well as the accompanying boom in prostitution and damage to Buddhist religious and cultural values in a predominantly Buddhist country, vociferous champions of Sinhala Buddhist values such as the Jathika Hela Urumaya have done nothing to stop the government from passing the casino bills in parliament.

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# Electoral Politics and the South Asian Left in the Context of the Indian Parliamentary Elections

## **Preamble**

Comments on the outcome of the Indian parliamentary elections have ranged from shameless glee of the reactionary right to utter dismay of the supporters of the Congress and the parliamentary left. The overall outcome was predictable but very few expected the right wing Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) to win an impressive majority.

Amid differences between the political developments in post-colonial Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) and India, there are significant similarities in the patterns of parliamentary politics, especially in the rise and decline of the parliamentary left and the emergence of the religious right as a political force. Although Sri Lanka was exposed to elected government and universal suffrage before any other South Asian country, unlike in India, neither its parliamentary democracy nor its freedom from colonial rule was an outcome of anti-colonial struggle. It has been in India, however, that parliamentary democracy, with all its characteristic defects, best averted threat of subversion by military intervention as in Pakistan or abuse by an overwhelming parliamentary majority as in Sri Lanka — first in 1972 through the extension of the term of the elected body and then severely in 1978 by the introduction of an executive presidency. After India, it has been in Sri Lanka that the left asserted itself as a major force in national politics at least until 1977. Against this background, it will be useful to note a few interesting parallels between the outcome of the

Indian General Election in 2014 with that for Sri Lanka in 1977 before proceeding to comment on the role of electoral politics in the advancement of the left movement in South Asia.

### **The overwhelming turn of tide**

The almost clean sweep by the BJP in the Hindi heartland and the northern and western states, excluding Punjab and—less prominently—Maharashtra, was solely at the expense of the Congress and compares closely with the capture of over 90% of the seats outside the North and East by the United National Party (UNP) in 1977 in Sri Lanka at the expense of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and its estranged left allies. Exact parallels are hard to draw, but in both instances the defeat of the incumbent governments was long anticipated.

The scale of the victory, which was less expected in both cases, was enabled by the “first past the post” system of election in geographically defined individual electorates. While the losers consoled themselves by claiming that they had secured a substantial share of the vote, the decline in support was sufficient to tilt the balance, however disproportionately. In Sri Lanka, the UNP used its overwhelming parliamentary majority to introduce some form of proportional representation in order to avert the risk of the opposition turning the tables on it at some stage to reverse the changes that it had imposed on the country.

Given the political complexity of India, proportional representation, although highly desirable from the point of view of minority group interests, will be hard to achieve without consensus among dominant political parties. On the other hand, the pro-imperialist structural changes that the BJP regime is likely to introduce using its steamroller majority will prove hard to reverse through the electoral process. The Sri Lankan experience is particularly relevant here. The SLFP which opposed the open economic policy of the UNP well into the 1990s, failed to stand up to imperialism in the altered political landscape when it returned to power after 17 years in opposition. In India, the Congress, having steered India

into imperialist globalization and a pro-US foreign policy, lacks the moral character to play a role in reversing creeping neo-colonial domination.

Reasons for the unpopularity of the defeated governments in the two countries differ, but dissatisfaction about economic performance was a common factor. It was in that context that the UNP campaign in 1977 and the BJP campaign in 2014 gave prominence to a “development” agenda. JR Jayawardane used a development-based campaign that pledged to transform Sri Lanka into another Singapore — his vision of an economic model for Sri Lanka to pursue through an open economic policy. The UNP projected Jayawardane as the person who would deliver and Jayawardane used devious means to pre-empt dissent within the ranks of his party. The projection of Narendra Modi and his “Gujarat model” as the pioneering forces of transforming India well surpassed the UNP’s bid in terms of campaign strategy as well as expenditure. The BJP campaign was to a large extent modelled after US presidential campaigns with the media effectively transforming the election into a personality contest between Modi and Rahul Gandhi. The role of corporate capital in India in deciding the outcome of the elections was also unprecedented.

Reputed anti-imperialist campaigners have noted with dismay the implications of the BJP victory. Peter Custers writing in *Countercurrents* [<http://www.countercurrents.org/custers260514.htm>] has drawn particular attention to funding by corporate capital which was overwhelmingly in favour of the BJP and the massive advertisement campaign in the print media and the Internet as well as access to television. He has also warned that the Narendra Modi regime is likely to focus one-sidedly on infrastructural projects and investment oriented growth so as to ensure double-digit growth, as is desired by India’s restless IT-professionals and educated urban youngsters at the expense of social justice, conservation of natural resources and protection of the environment.

Although commentators differ on how far the Modi regime will go with the BJP’s overtly sectarian agenda, the communal forces behind the victory of the BJP, especially the RSS with which Modi has close ties, are



not likely to tolerate any semblance of secularism. Early evidence is that forces of caste, gender and religious oppression have not lost time in taking the offensive, confirming fears expressed by Prabath Patnaik (Frontline, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2014) who analyses the role of communalism in the BJP's election campaign and its contribution to the victory of the BJP. Patnaik notes that its communalism was implicit and found expression in class terms, pitting the poor against the middle strata of the population. Patnaik draws particular attention to the illusory "development model" of the BJP as well as to the media hype about the "Gujarat model". But the Indian left and progressive forces attempted unsuccessfully to explode the myth of the "Gujarat model" much after it captured the minds of the middle classes with the help of the dominant media at least two years before the elections along with the building up of the image of Modi as the "Development Messiah".

What the Indian left and democratic opposition to the BJP need to take careful note of is the effect of a combination of BJP's aggressive politics with a sense of dejectedness of its opponents. In Sri Lanka, the impact of the defeat on the main opposition parties was so devastating that the SLFP took nearly a decade to re-emerge as a major force, but with minimal distinction from its rival, especially in economic policy. A similar danger faces the Congress, and the signs are that it will probably adopt the "development" model and policies appealing to the emergent middle class as its electoral strategy in elections to come.

The impact of the electoral defeat of the parliamentary left in Sri Lanka was far reaching. The defeat led to a serious split in the Lanka Samasamaja Party (LSSP) and to the effective loss of independence of the LSSP and the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CPSL) owing to their subsequent reliance on the SLFP to get their parliamentary seats as 'bonus'. What was worse was that the passive response of the parliamentary left hurt the credibility of the left movement as a whole. The re-emergence of the pseudo-left JVP, initially under the patronage of the UNP, compounded the crisis of the left in more than one way.

In India, the Communist Party of India (CPI) has yet to recover from its loss of credibility caused by its alliance with the Congress under Indira Gandhi during the Emergency Rule of the mid-1970s. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM), intoxicated by its string of electoral successes in West Bengal, got fully submerged in electoral politics — even to the point of Jyothi Basu, CPM leader in West Bengal desiring the post of Prime Minister of India in 1996 — and adopted policies that alienated it from the masses and eventually led to successive humiliation in recent elections in the state. The CPM has also paid dearly for its opportunistic electoral alliances in states other than its strongholds. The CPI and CPM have neither learned from past mistakes nor shown the inclination to learn from the experiences of the left elsewhere. There was much to learn from the failure of the parliamentary left in Sri Lanka which was electorally better placed than that in India in the years after the departure of the British from South Asia. The explanation offered by the CPM for its electoral fiasco that the party “failed to connect with middle classes & youth” (Interview with Prakash Karat, General Secretary CPM, Frontline, 2014) is indicative of a desire to woo the urban and semi-urban middle classes at the expense of defending the interests of the labouring classes.

Some of the seeming similarities between the humiliating experiences of the parliamentary left in the two countries are, however, deceptive. Notably, the Sri Lankan left forfeited minority representation as early as 1960, whereas the Indian left has been poorly represented among the Hindi-speaking majority and in most of the northern and western states which were fully dominated by the Congress until the BJP entered the scene. While secularism fares strongly in the left politics of India, the Sri Lankan parliamentary left has badly slipped up since the 1970s.

### **Nepal’s parliamentary political experience**

Nepal is the only South Asian country to have had a left prime minister. While the electoral performance of Nepal’s left has been generally impressive, Nepal is also the country where the left should have long lost illusions about achieving socialism through parliament.

Nepal's left was instrumental in restoring parliamentary democracy on several occasions. In the chequered past of parliamentary democracy under the monarchy, the combined left vote reached just under 35% in 1994 when the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist) (CPN-UML) formed a minority government that was dismissed in 1995. Despite its bitter experience, the CPN-UML, with a voter base of around 20% which it has consistently retained, is still a revisionist party committed to the parliamentary path and given to dubious deals with the monarchy and the reactionary Nepal Congress, and its hostility to revolutionary left parties takes precedence over its rivalry with the reactionary Nepal Congress Party (NC).

The revolutionary left, although divided, has been able to unite on issues, and it was owing to the gains of the ten-year insurgency commencing in 1995, led by the Communist Party of Nepal, Maoist (now the Unified Communist Party of Nepal, Maoist), that the revolutionary left earned unprecedented mass support. But revisionist tendencies got the better of political sense of the UCPN-M when it won the largest number of seats to the Constituent Assembly in 2006. Its decision to form a minority government based on a misjudgement of its own strength and of the intentions and capabilities of the NC, CPN-UML and regional political parties, and an underestimation of India's potential to manipulate events in Nepal had tragic consequences

The positive outcomes of the peace process were the abolition of the monarchy and the introduction of an electoral system with a fair degree of proportional representation. But the UCPN-M was a net loser since the peace process which led to the disbanding of its People's Liberation Army and the reversal of the gains of the oppressed masses through armed struggle did not lead to the drafting of a new constitution. As a result, the UCPN-M, and its leader Dahal and deputy leader Bhattarai — both of whom craved after the post of Prime Minister which they did not hold for long or use for any benefit of the revolutionary cause — lost credibility. Besides, the UCPN-M suffered a major split leading to the militant faction

of the Party founding themselves as the Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist (CPN-M). When the CA was eventually dissolved and elections were held in 2013 November, the UCPN-M suffered a humiliating loss – with its share of the vote slumping from an impressive 38.1% in 2008 to 17.8% in 2013, partly owing to the split and the call for a boycott of the elections by the CPN-M and its allies, and more importantly owing to its loss of credibility.

Hostility between the UCPN-M and CPN-M has since ebbed and the former has made overtures to the latter and the response is seemingly positive. Some of the damage that the revolution struggle suffered as a result of the miscalculation of the UCPN-M and compounded by the split is irreversible. Reuniting the two factions could be the way forward, only if the aims and strategies of the revolution are clearly redefined based on the bitter lessons of electoral politics. The need for broad-based unity of genuine left and revolutionary forces cannot be over emphasized.

Thus, if Sri Lanka has lessons for the revisionist CPI and CPM of India, Nepal has lessons for the badly divided revolutionary left of India. The lessons need to be read in the context of a reactionary, sectarian and pro-imperialist regime with a neo-liberal agenda, a deceptively acquired popular mandate, and hostility towards the working class, social and religious minorities, and the left, progressive and democratic forces.

### **Surviving oppressive regimes**

Parliamentary democracy has been consistently interrupted by the armed forces in Pakistan since the assassination in 1951 of Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan, who from the very outset persecuted the left. Following the alleged Rawalpindi conspiracy against the Ali Khan government, left publications and gatherings were banned and progressive writers were jailed. The Communist Party was banned in 1954. From then on, the left faced the wrath of one dictator after another. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who founded the Pakistan People's Party with a socialist agenda and had the support of the left especially during the mass revolt of 1968-69 which

brought an end to the military dictatorship of General Ayub Khan and helped Bhutto's ascent to power in 1971, turned against the left in 1972. The crackdown on the left which manifested as mass arrests, torture and assassination continued with greater zeal under General Zia ul Haq. The climate of terror forced many left activists to leave Pakistan.

Although the situation has eased somewhat since the assassination of Zia in 1988, reorganizing the left has not been easy in a country long ruled under the shadow of the army. The left has nevertheless organized itself through establishing political parties and unionizing labour and been active in the struggles of workers and peasants for better wages and working and living conditions. With Pakistan's fragile parliamentary democracy dominated by the landlord-capitalist elite under growing threat from the mighty armed forces and Islamic fundamentalism with terror as political language, and US imperialism increasing its military presence on the pretext of its unfulfilled mission in Afghanistan, the achievements of the fragmented left are commendable. But the task ahead of advancing to a New Democratic Revolution is far more challenging.

The experience of the left in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) was much like that in West Pakistan until 1971. The liberation of Bangladesh with the help of India, contrary to expectations, had adverse implications for both democracy and the left movement. The revolutionary left was targeted by the Sheikh Mujibur Rahman regime and from the start, although the arrests and killings do not fare prominently even in comments critical of Mujibur's misrule. The assassination of a vastly unpopular and dictatorial Mujibur by the military in 1974 did not help democracy.

Although the spells of direct military rule that followed were not prolonged and governments have been elected, and the dominance of the army has diminished, politics today is dominated by two corrupt bourgeois parties, and Islamic fundamentalists are posing a challenge to the emergence of a democratic-left alliance. India has been an important player in Bangladeshi politics and its role is partisan. The political divide could manifest itself as one between an Indian dominated group and an

Islamist alliance. Economic problems of Bangladesh have not been resolved by the country adopting an open economic model.

The revisionist faction of the Communist Party tarnished its image as a left party by alliance with the pro-Indian Awami League regime in the past, in much the same way that its counterparts did in India and Sri Lanka. The fragmented revolutionary left weakened by the nationalist surge in 1971 has yet to mobilize its resources to realize its potential as a working class force.

A strong lesson for the left in Afghanistan was that the overthrow of a dictatorship by a military coup cannot assure a stable left government. The left government's reliance on support from the Soviet Union proved tragic not only for the government but also for Afghanistan and the left movement as a whole. What the misguided policy of the Soviet Union and its clients in Afghanistan achieved was the intrusion of US imperialism firstly by backing the Taliban and other Islamic fundamentalists and then on the pretext of combating Islamic fundamentalism.

Following the ban on communist parties after the fall off Soviet-backed government, the left as a whole has been driven underground. Armed forces of the US will remain until they and the US-controlled regime in Kabul are forced out by a national liberation struggle.

### **Struggling democracies**

Bhutan, like Sikkim until its annexation by India in 1974, has been a vassal of India. Although Bhutan has parliamentary democracy with universal suffrage since 2008, India is still able to manipulate elections to ensure that Indian hegemony prevails in land locked Bhutan. The only known left party is the Bhutan Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist) which has its main support base among Nepali-speaking Bhutanese.

The Maldives, long administered as a British protectorate under a sultan (who was elected since 1932) and briefly a republic in 1953-54, became fully independent in 1965 and a republic in 1968. British influence has since waned with India (especially since the stage-managed abortive

coup by Tamil militants in 1988) and the US now playing an important role in the affairs of the Maldives. Given the small size of the country and its continued reliance on tourism as the mainstay of the economy, parliamentary democracy in the Maldives has been vulnerable to foreign influence and elitist conspiracies. Mohamed Nasheed's election as President under a new constitution and multi-party system brought an end to the dictatorial regime of Maumoon Abdul Gayoom in 2008, but a coup forced him to resign in 2012. His bid to return to office was thwarted by forces loyal to Gayoom. Maldives is at the centre of rivalry for regional domination with India and US as the main players, with China seeking to ensure neutrality of the Maldives by strengthening trade and tourism.

### **Dealing with the reversals**

Undoubtedly the success of the religious right in India was facilitated by the unprecedented campaign spending sponsored by the corporate sector and a well orchestrated campaign by the media. But the humiliation of the parliamentary left was self-inflicted. One could rightly claim that the ultimate downfall of the CPM was as inevitable as that of revisionist communist parties elsewhere. But the speed of decline of the CPM in West Bengal has much to do with the CPM-led government's misguided economic policies which put it on a collision course with the rural masses. As pointed out in editorially the Economic & Political Weekly (EPW) of June 07, 2014, the CPM failed to learn from the warning signals in 2009 and the shock defeat in the state assembly elections in 2011. The EPW drew attention to the dismal performance of the CPM in the industrial hub of Asansol with a significant organised working class, where it trailed the BJP and the Trinamool Congress (TC) and to its loss of support even among the marginalized population including those evicted by recent urban development projects. Unable to come to terms with its alienation from its core constituencies, the CPM is clutching at straws to explain its defeat, like, for example, blaming widespread ballot-rigging by the TC. The EPW, while pointing to the general shift away from anti-colonial secular to Hindu sectarian values as an objective factor that hurt the left,

accuses the CPM of engaging in an intellectual crusade against neo-liberal ideology and policy at the centre while accommodating a neo-liberal agenda and loyally serving the interests of big business at the state level.

It is true that the entire Indian left has suffered a great setback owing to the folly of the CPI and CPM which deserved to be rejected. But it is not a defeat for the genuine left to rejoice over. The BJP has been quick to get on with its neo-liberal agenda. While it is for the entire left and democratic opposition to arrest the trend, the revolutionary left has to take the initiative and maintain the lead in all mass campaigns against the neo-liberal agenda, based on class struggle to prevent opportunists and NGOs from hijacking campaigns and deflecting their class orientation.

Among India's neighbours, Nepal could suffer the impact of aggressive Indian hegemony most. In Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, an aggressive Indian foreign policy will benefit the religious extremist groups unless the left takes the initiative in resisting sectarianism while defending national interests. Also, the national question in the whole of South Asia is likely to worsen, with imperialism showing an interest in using identity issues to divide the oppressed masses. Thus the left has to pay serious attention to dealing with identity based issues, without subscribing to elitist sectarian interests and religious and national extremism.

The revolutionary left has to sincerely accept the reality that social and economic development in the Third World is highly uneven with variation from country to country as well as from region to region within a country. Thus, while striving for a common revolutionary goal for the whole society, it is necessary for each revolutionary party to accept the need for different strategies and tactics to address conditions specific to a region and deal with political differences in a spirit of mutual respect.

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# Re-colonizing Africa

## **Neo-colonialism strikes root**

The imperialist African colonization project was never over, and European colonists were most reluctant to give up their African possessions. The absence of an industrial economy and an organized industrial working class in most of sub-Saharan Africa made it hard to sustain anti-colonial struggles as anti-imperialist struggles against neo-colonial control.

Yet Africa produced Amilcar Cabral, one of the greatest Marxist thinkers of the past century who applied Marxist theory to liberation struggles in contexts of colonial rule imposed on pre-class society. Africa also produced visionary anti-imperialist leaders like Kwame Nkrumah whose insights of neo-colonialism were path-breaking. Most significantly the leaders of the anti-colonial struggle of Africa in the 1960s and 1970s were predominantly left-inclined if not Marxists. There were, however, nationalists like Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya who sold out in advance to the colonial masters and there have been other betrayals too. But, as the neo-colonial agenda set in place, the national bourgeoisie of the ex-colonies yielded to imperialism, and Africa was no exception.

Neo-colonial conquest of Africa has, however, been different in form from that in Asia and Latin America. The lack of industrialization and abundance of minerals made sub-Saharan Africa a target for continued plunder of unprocessed or semi-processed minerals. The unequal global pricing system which discriminated against producers of primary goods made Africa vulnerable to imperialist domination. Many countries which defied imperialism in early and mid-1970s, in the face of economic crisis, yielded to imperialist pressure. Those which dared to defy were subverted through imperialist meddling in their internal affairs, with the apartheid regime South Africa playing a key role in southern Africa.

Control of post-colonial Africa's resources did not pose a problem for imperialism, which continued its plunder with the compliance of the state

in many countries. Compliance when not 'voluntary' was won through agency of civil war. Defiant regimes were punished through support for reactionary terror as in Mozambique and Angola and imposing of economic sanctions as in Zimbabwe.

Although the list of countries that suffered unlawful regime change in Africa is long, direct imperialist action was minimal from the mid 1960s until recently. Regime changes resulted often as a result of political rivalries with no anti-imperialist content, amid growing ethnic and religious tensions in the past two decades against a background of socio-economic problems aggravated by Structural Adjustment Programmes imposed by imperialist financial institutions. With South Africa playing the role that Israel played in the Middle East and parts of North Africa – especially the Sudan – overt imperialist military action was unnecessary except in situations, like in Ethiopia in the 1970s, where the US and the Soviet Union competed for dominance. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, US imperialism felt secure about the prospects for unhindered plundering of sub-Saharan Africa.

China has expanded its trade with Africa from the 1990's to replace the West as the dominant key trade partner; and in 2013, trade between China and Africa reached \$200 billion including Chinese direct investment whereas US trade and services totalled \$96 billion. Thus China is rapidly challenging US economic hegemony in Africa through being a viable alternative to US investment in many sectors from mining and oil to telecommunications and banking.

China's diplomatic and economic ties with Africa developed in ways different from those of the imperialist West. Many positive features of the Chinese approach derive from the decades when socialist China offered assistance to African countries with an anti-imperialist perspective. Chinese intentions are now different, but its avoidance of military expansion and non-interference in internal affairs, even to the detriment of progressive forces in countries, has paid diplomatic and commercial dividends. Also China has taken investment risks in several African

countries that had been written off by the West. Also China has taken investment risks in several African countries that had been shunned by the West. Current US policy in Africa is an outcome of the failure of the US to curb Chinese influence.

### **Imperialist economic domination**

Imperialism had no plans to industrialize Africa. White racism which was well established in Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century obstructed industrial development in Africa throughout the colonial era, when Africa was mainly a source of cheap raw materials and primary goods to the colonial rulers. Infrastructural development was determined by colonial interests so that post-colonial African countries had to turn to socialist countries for development projects such as the Aswan hydropower project in Egypt in 1957 and the TanZam railway providing sea access to landlocked Zambia in the 1970s.

When the industrial strategy of imperialism became one of exploiting cheap industrial labour in former colonies and outsourcing some aspects of manufacture, Africa was mostly left behind. Most of the sub-Saharan African countries have been starved of foreign direct investment for industrial development. The continent as a whole is trapped in a situation where countries, caught in an international debt trap and unable to mobilize sufficient capital for industrialisation, still rely on the production of primary goods for economic survival.

Africa has yet to develop a strategy to free itself of imperialist control. The collapse of socialist regimes in the Soviet Union and East Europe and the shift of China towards capitalism made it hard for African countries to develop national economies. Consent of the African National Congress to imperialist demands for an open economic policy and security of capitalist interests in South Africa as preconditions for transition from an apartheid regime to a multi-ethnic parliamentary democracy, ensured that the ANC became junior partner in the continued plunder of South Africa. The slaughter of 34 African workers at the site of the platinum mine in

Marikana on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2012 by the ANC government is clear indication of the direction in which the ANC and its allies are heading. Thus land reform and native control of natural resources were denied to the people of South Africa and ANC's surrender has made it harder for southern Africa to develop its economy in defiance of imperialism.

Under the colonial system, imperialism did not always require direct control of agricultural land. Agricultural wealth was expropriated by a variety of processes, and taxation was often an important mechanism. Under neo-colonialism, multinational corporations (MNCs) desire direct control of agricultural and pastoral land. Different versions of control over land in countries of the Third World have been put into effect by agricultural and food-sector MNCs.

The process of land grab once practiced widely by the MNCs in Latin America has now come to haunt Asia and Africa. Acquiring agricultural land for producing crops to serve the food requirements of another country or for commercial gain is practiced not only by the MNCs but also by their local proxies. Land is also acquired with the support of the government in the neo-colony in the name of foreign investment to divert production away from essential foods to consumer produce or crops for bio-fuels, and thereby threatening food security for the local population.

UK is the biggest investor in bio-fuel production in sub-Saharan Africa, followed by the US, India, Norway and Germany. Over-irrigation has depleted river and ground water supplies in Australia, China, India, Pakistan, the Middle East and the United States, and corporations are eyeing Africa where this has so far not happened on such a scale. (See <http://links.org.au/node/3099>.) Although the Chinese state-owned agricultural corporation Beidahuang has undertaken a huge agricultural venture in Western Australia and there has been a bid for a similar project in Argentina, claims of China's land grab in Africa are unsubstantiated, and some of them appear to be mischievous speculation. (See <http://www.chinaafricarealstory.com/2012/01/zambezi-valley-chinas-first.html>.) It is hard to say why China has not undertaken large agricultural ventures

in Africa other than agricultural cooperation projects in the fashion of undertakings by socialist China.

### **The military approach**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, US imperialism intervened in the Horn of Africa on the pretext of fighting Islamic fundamentalism, and Sudan and Somalia have for long been its targets. After direct intervention failed in Somalia, the US resorted to a proxy war firstly using Ethiopia and now using the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). The African Union has also been used in Darfur in Sudan and has served as a cover for French military operations in the Ivory Coast in 2011 and more recently in Mali and the Central African Republic. The conduct of France in Africa has been like that of old colonial France, arrogating to itself the right to intervene to maintain “colonial order”.

Imperialist military presence in Africa surged early this century in response to China’s growing trade with Africa, which was seen as a threat to the hegemony of the West. Obama expanded and enhanced AFRICOM, formed in 2008 under George Bush. The AFRICOM base in Djibouti – its only known permanent base in Africa with thousands of troops stationed at Camp Lemonnier – is being upgraded at a cost of US\$ 750 million. (See <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-militarization-of-the-african-continent-aficom-expands-operations-in-cooperation-with-europe/5378627>.) In neighbouring Somalia, the US with support from the EU is maintaining 22,000 AMISOM troops as well as flotillas of warships in the Gulf of Aden under the guise of fighting “piracy”. A series of navy operations termed “Obangame Express” with European, African and South American involvement has been in operation in the Gulf of Guinea for four years now, allegedly to strengthen the security capacity of West African states against “piracy” off the west coast of Africa which threatens oil exports.

Nigeria, with growing Chinese economic interests in the country, especially in the petroleum sector, is the largest African oil exporter to the US and has growing military and intelligence ties with the US. Spiralling

violence in the north west of Nigeria by Boko Haram, an underground Islamic fundamentalist military outfit, has now become the pretext for possible imperialist military intervention.

The danger of US-led military intervention is growing in countries where the US instigated violence to serve its expansionist interests. Libya is lawless with no effective government and the countless militias that filled the post-Gaddafi power vacuum are intimidating the population. The country is on the brink of civil war and faces disintegration. The chaos has also transformed Libya into a primary source of illicit weapons that find their way into countries stretching from Nigeria to Somalia and via Qatar into Syria. The US, meanwhile, uses the crisis to boost its military presence. (See <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/24/libya-disaster-shames-western-interventionists>.)

In South Sudan, carved out of Sudan with active support from US imperialism and Israel, rivalries within the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army led to armed conflict in December 2013 and the US seeks to dictate the terms of the negotiations for peace, much to the resentment of President Salva Kiir who has criticized both the US and the UN mission in South Sudan for unwarranted interference in internal affairs. The US interest in a settlement is driven by its concern that the failure of South Sudan will be seen as a monumental failure of its Africa policy. The US is also driven by the desire of American oil companies to fully exploit the oil resources freed from a hostile Sudan.

The context of US military expansion in sub-Saharan Africa is unlike that in Latin America where the US faces anti-imperialist regimes or that in Asia where a militant left is still active and capitalist China hinders US hegemony. Despite intense US military expansion in sub-Saharan Africa in the past decade, the US has so far sought to give the impression that its numerically and territorially growing presence is a stabilizing influence on which African governments could rely for their own survival while they remain true to neo-liberal economic policies. The setting up of drone aircraft bases and the expansion of AFRICOM on African soil are signs of further deployments and more aggressive military operations.

It should be noted that regime changes enabled by imperialism in Libya and Ivory Coast did not target serious challenges to neo-colonialism but regimes that were inadequate in their subservience and that it was French imperialism rather than US imperialism which took the initiative to intervene in Ivory Coast, Mali and Central African Republic, which once belonged to colonial French West Africa.

As for overall imperialist strategy, rivalries between regimes, tribes and religion are now increasingly used to manipulate individual governments so that they dare not defy the neo-colonial order. Imperialists have failed to achieve a regime change in the one country, Zimbabwe, where they desired it most because of the "bad example" set by the ZANU-PF regime in transferring land taken over by the colonists to the landless, unlike the ANC in South Africa, which promised the same but delivered little.

### **Concluding remarks**

There is a noticeable lack of sustained effort by anti-war campaigners in the US and other imperialist countries to counter the US military build-up in Africa and the activities of the CIA and other agents of American subversion in Africa. Thanks to the systematic portrayal of the US-led military action in Libya in 2011 as a humanitarian act to protect innocent civilians from Qaddafi, responses to current imperialist atrocities in Africa are weaker than that to US bombing of civilians in Libya in 1986. While containing China may be the immediate purpose of the military build-up, long term implications for Africa are more worrying.

The politically weak national bourgeois regimes in Africa lack anti-imperialist potential. The "Arab Spring" has shown that spontaneous movements do not lead to fundamental change. The treachery of the ANC, its trade union allies in COSATU and NUM, and the revisionist Communist Party have triggered militancy among a section of the working class with a strong class consciousness. The working class of Egypt, Tunisia and South Africa should learn from their bitter experiences and lead the way to rebuilding a communist movement in Africa, for there cannot be a revolution without a revolutionary party.

## *NDMLP Statement to the Media*

*17<sup>th</sup> June 2014*

### **Condemning Anti-Muslim Violence**

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement on behalf of the Politburo of the Party in connection with the vicious acts of violence against Muslims in Aluthgama by Buddhist fundamentalist thugs.

The recent vicious attacks against Muslims in Aluthgama have been a manifestation of the hostile propaganda and actions in recent times by chauvinists and Buddhist religious fundamentalists against Muslims and their mosques. Two Muslims have been killed and around sixty persons including children and infants have been injured. Houses and business premises have been set ablaze. The people who were forced to flee their homes have taken refuge in mosques and other public places; and Buddhist religious fundamentalist fanatics are seeking to extend such violence to other areas. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party very strongly denounces this brutal attack on Muslims.

Proscription of the Buddhist fundamentalist Bodhu Bala Sena and other such fanatically chauvinist organisations is the only way to prevent such planned attacks. Committing of planned chauvinist violence, murder and arson against Tamils, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils is not new. Next year marks the centenary of the first anti-Muslim violence in the country that occurred in 1915. It is against this background that these vicious attacks have taken place against Muslims. It is well known that the Bodhu Bala Sena which functions with the backing of persons in high places in the ranks of the government is behind the violence.

Such violence affects only the ordinary Muslims, Tamils and Sinhalese. But it cannot be denied that foreign interests are also involved besides those who make political capital of the violence. Hence erecting communal barriers in the



name of ethnic and religious identities to be isolated as Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils will be of no benefit. Those who continue to be affected are ordinary working masses. Hence, the Party points out that it is only through thinking and acting in unity as a working people that it will be possible to identify and isolate ethno religious fundamentalists and advance towards social justice.

SK Senthivel  
General Secretary

*[On 19<sup>th</sup> June, the Party took part in a mass demonstration organized by Tamil political parties in Jaffna protesting the anti-Muslim violence. On 20<sup>th</sup> June, the Party joined the Mass Organization for Social Justice in organizing a demonstration in Vavuniya with a large participation of Tamils and Muslims to protest the violence.]*

### ***NDMLP Statement to the Media***

*6<sup>th</sup> June 2014*

### **Message of Condolence**

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement on behalf of the Party on the passing away of SD Bandaranayake former MP for Gampaha.

Former Member of Parliament SD Bandaranayake who was a voice of democratic and progressive forces in Sri Lanka and an upholder of positions supportive of the left passed away on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2014 at the age of 98 years. The news of his departure saddens the democratic, progressive and left forces and toiling masses of Sri Lanka.

SD Bandaranayake who was elected to parliament in 1956 remained a consistent democratic progressive, a supporter of the left, and a courageous activist inside and outside parliament. When members of the UNP led by JR Jayawardane went on a march to Kandy in 1957 to oppose the Bandaranayake-Chelvanayakam Pact, claiming that the agreement designed to grant Tamils their rights was a secessionist move, SD Bandaranayake took the initiative to mobilize people to obstruct the march at Imbulgoda on the

Colombo-Kandy road in the Gampaha electorate and force the UNP to retreat to Colombo. SD Bandaranayake himself lay across the road as an act of protest.

During the struggles in the North in the 1960s against caste oppression and untouchability, SD Bandaranayake spoke in support of the struggles in parliament as well as visited the North to personally express solidarity with the struggling masses. At the time, during a parliamentary debate he dared to quote Lenin that “the parliament was a den of thieves” and declare that the Parliament of Ceylon too was a den of thieves. As a result he was forcefully removed from the House of Representatives and suspended from parliament for two weeks. He always supported the people and their just struggles. As a result he was arrested in 1971 and detained for more than two years. He spoke firmly in support of granting the Tamil people their just rights and campaigned for the rights of workers, peasants and plantation workers. As a result of his above political stand, he was a long standing friend of the Party who continued to maintain his bond with the Party.

In a context in which racism and religious fanaticism are wreaking havoc in the south of the Country, his departure is a loss that very much saddens the Party and the people of the country. The Party expresses its deepest condolences and heartfelt sorrow to his wife, children and other members of the family and to the people of Gampaha.

SK Senthivel  
General Secretary

### ***NDMLP Statement to the Media***

*25<sup>th</sup> April 2014*

### **Right for Houses**

Comrade V Mahendran, National Organizer of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement on the question of the right of the Hill Country Tamils to own houses.

The Hill Country Tamils who have historically been oppressed as a class and as a nationality remain a helpless group of people without right to own

land or houses. In the current context of Sri Lanka, the call for the right of the Hill Country Tamils to own land and houses comes up as a call for their right for survival. The Hill Country Tamils stand out as a distinct nationality with social, economic and cultural identities characteristic to them. But alongside class discrimination, they have been denied the right to own land and houses.

In the 1960s statements began to rise declaring their distinct ethnic identity. But the question of their right to housing was given voice in socio political fora only in the 1980s. Subsequently, efforts by the late minister Chandrasekaran led to efforts to build individual houses. That has been followed by the implementation of individual housing schemes. Yet, they remain mere houses lacking infrastructural facilities and not changing the living environment of the "line rooms".

Also, despite earlier pledges that land titles will be granted for these houses, no positive step has been taken towards that end. But for the left political parties, no leadership of the Hill Country trade unions and political parties has put forward firm demands for it. Against this background, the demand for individual houses for the Hill Country Tamils was put forward, although not as a unanimous call, during the election campaign for the Provincial Councils. This was voiced as a pledge by President Rajapaksa on various platforms during the elections. But before the ripples of the election campaign died down, the President announced the scheme for apartment blocks with 50,000 housing units. Thereby, the ruling class of the country has blatantly denied a nationality resident in the country its right to own land and housing. Besides, the government has been belittling the demands for the right of these people to livelihood by talking from time to time about one or another scheme for land in the Hill Country that is barren or unplanted.

Amid this, the Hill Country trade unions which are clinging on to the government to keep themselves politically afloat and remain silent to serve their political self-interest. The Hill Country trade union and political leaderships, both inside and outside parliament, have no unanimous demand or common work programme in this respect. It is in view of this situation that the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party is calling for a general discussion among Hill Country organizations on the subject of basic right to house ownership of a nationality resident in this country.

Comrade Mahendran also added on behalf of the Party that the demand for right of the Hill Country Tamils to own houses should not be confined to the question of individual houses but instead be put forward as a demand for the right to houses with the right to a specific extent of land within the framework of a wholesome village.

V Mahendran  
National Organizer

### ***NDMLP News Release to the Media***

*1<sup>st</sup> May 2014*

### **May Day Address by Comrade Senthivel**

*[The text of the address by Comrade SK Senthivel at the May Day rallies in Jaffna and in Vavuniya is given below in Translation from Tamil.]*

The executive presidential government headed by Mahinda Rajapaksa has invested chauvinist oppression as its capital to exercise state power. The administration is conducted in the manner of a fascist dictatorship. This regime oppresses not only the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamils but also the Sinhalese workers, peasants and other toiling masses. The oppression is reflected in the increase in the prices of goods and services, the denial of wage increase and violation of democratic and human rights.

Under these conditions Sri Lanka is being submerged in an unprecedented economic, political and social crisis. Hence need has arisen for the entire people of the country to unite as oppressed nationalities and oppressed classes and mobilize against the regime of the Rajapaksa brothers to win their fundamental rights. It is important for the oppressed Tamil people realize this.

Mahinda Rajapaksa, who is the Executive President now, when he was Minister of Labour in the cabinet of Chandrika Kumaratunge, wanted to pass into law a Workers' Charter. But that attempt was abandoned claiming that it could not be passed into law in the face of strong opposition from big capitalists — local and foreign — and multinational corporations. The same Mahinda Rajapaksa, having secured executive presidential powers and a two-

thirds majority in parliament, could have easily passed into law the Workers' Charter and thereby granted the working class some of its rights, employment security and other concessions.

We want to know why he has been unable to achieve it thus far and why the members of the bogus left participating in government is unable to urge it. Under these conditions, how can anyone refer to this government as a pro-worker government? The Mahinda Chinthana government with its up to one hundred ministers who live a life of wealth and luxury by daily hurting the livelihood of the workers and all other toiling masses has established itself as a blatantly anti-worker, anti-people government. That is why it is desirous of ruling over the toiling masses of the country by dividing them based on race, religion and region.

It is in order to prevent the entire toiling masses from uniting based on class that chauvinist oppression is being perpetrated in various ways. For that purpose the rulers pose off as anti-imperialists and patriots. But in the meantime, obtaining loans by submitting to all conditions, counsel and commands of imperialist funding agencies such as the IMF, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank and tormenting the people of the country comprise their ridiculous anti-imperialism.

The regime of the Rajapaksa brothers has embraced all and sundry ranging from members of the UNP to members of the LTTE and from the racist Jathika Hela Urumaya to the so-called old left to run the government claiming a two-thirds majority in parliament. They are all together in raising their hands in parliament against the workers, peasants and all other toiling masses. But they are unprepared to express support for or urge the solution of the national question which persists as the main contradiction of the country. Also, they are unable to stop the Buddhist fundamentalist Bodhu Bala Sena from going on the rampage because people with influence in the government are behind that organization.

The Tamil leaders who are unwilling to advance against the chauvinistic oppression of the regime of the Rajapaksa brothers by uniting with all possible forces on a common programme, clash among themselves and persist with their reactionary ways in keeping with their ambitions for posts and politics of

dominance. The very leaders who once invited India to intervene and thereby subjected the people to devastation are today anxiously awaiting the arrival of the US and wish that the UN and the UNHRC will enable it.

An impression is being created that the activities of the UN and the Geneva resolutions are in favour of the oppressed Tamil and other nationalities and are supportive to them. But what are behind them are the manipulative hands and conspiratorial motives of US imperialism, which is the common enemy of the people of the world. It is to serve that purpose that the US and the West are shedding crocodile tears for the Sri Lankan Tamils.

In the rivalry between China which is moving towards becoming a superpower and the US, Mahinda Rajapaksa is siding with China, and thereby seeks to project himself as an anti-imperialist. The truth is that China is not a socialist country today and has no anti-imperialist content to it. As a result, the Tamil leadership, unable to resist the Rajapaksa regime through a firm and correctly devised political programme, are appealing to the US, the UN and the UNHRC. Undoubtedly this will take the Tamil people once again along the path of ruin. Past historical experience bears this out.

Hence, on this May Day, the day of internationalist struggle, the entire toiling masses of the country should think and act on the prospect of taking a new political path as oppressed nationalities and as oppressed classes.

### ***NDMLP Report***

*April 2014*

### **Second ICOR International Conference**

The Second International Conference of the International Coordination of Revolutionary Parties and Organizations (ICOR) held from 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> April 2014. The Conference was attended by delegates representing 28 revolutionary parties and organizations from Africa, Asia, Europe and North and South America. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party and the Frontline Socialist Party of Sri Lanka were invited as observers. The NDMLP was represented by its General Secretary Comrade SK Senthivel. He was accompanied by Dr S Sivasegaram.

The Party played an active role in the deliberations of the Conference and also had fruitful discussions with delegates from all participating organizations and exchanged views on a wide range of national and international issues. The Conference, besides reinforcing the international relationships of the Party, provided it with fresh opportunity to nurture long term fraternal relationship with Marxist Leninists the world over.

(The text of the communication of greetings to the Conference from Comrade Senthivel follows.)

**Central Committee**  
**New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party**  
121 Hampden Lane, Colombo 6, Sri Lanka

Organizing Committee  
Second International Conference of ICOR  
Dear Comrades

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party is glad to be in the company of revolutionary delegates from many parts of the world attending the Second International Conference of the International Co-ordination of Revolutionary Parties and Organisations (ICOR) at a time when on the one hand capitalism has failed as a system that can sustain economic development and the imperialist system led by the United States of America is in deep crisis. The past two decades have witnessed mass protests across the globe in advanced capitalist countries as well as in the less developed countries against the imperialist system and the governments upholding it. Protests have led to change of regime, but with few exceptions imperialist domination is intact including in countries which witnessed some of the biggest mass uprisings.

Thus we have before us a situation in which conditions are favourable for revolutionary change but the masses are not adequately organized or mobilized to bring about the change so that imperialism has been able to deflect the impact of mass protests away from it. Despite the claims of the

reactionaries that Marxism is irrelevant and socialism is dead, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Marxism has reasserted its relevance, especially through the failure of capitalism to address its economic crisis. The left movement is reviving in countries where it suffered severe setbacks in late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Yet there is a long way to go before the left can lead social change that can bring capitalism to its inevitable end and replace it with a more equitable system. The left has to overcome its handicaps nationally and internationally. It has to recognize its past failures and weaknesses through a thorough process of criticism and self criticism for it to secure its rightful place as the vanguard of revolutionary change locally and globally.

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party with over seventy years of history of the communist movement in Sri Lanka and fifty years of revolutionary experience since parting company with revisionism and thirty years of history as a political organization in its own right, upholds Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought as its guiding ideology and is firm in its belief that the masses comprise the real revolutionary force. It has consistently emphasised the mass revolutionary line and people's revolutionary struggle as the way forward. It also believes in the strategy of a broad-based united front to resist imperialism and local reaction with the initiative in the hands of the proletarian party.

It notes that imperialism has protected itself by dividing people based on differences in identity and the defeat of imperialism requires uniting the toiling masses based on class through correctly addressing identity based issues. In the specific context of Sri Lanka the party has identified the national contradiction as the main contradiction while class contradiction remains the fundamental contradiction. The party, firmly based on its proletarian stand, has consistently rejected narrow nationalism of all kinds and unreservedly opposed all forms of oppression, while asserting the fundamentality of class and class struggle. Besides asserting the right to self determination as the basis to address the national question, the Party has urged adopting the underlying principle in the right to self determination to address the aspirations of national minorities who do not qualify as "nations" or "nationalities" with a potential claim to statehood.



The Party is also acutely aware of the immediate threat to democracy in the country and of the prospect of creeping fascism through a combination of forces of chauvinism, religious fundamentalism and militarism. It is also conscious that imperialism is using the national question to impose its will on the country. It has thus consistently pressed the urgency to unite all oppressed people and nationalities in this combination of adverse circumstances.

In the international scene, the Party has viewed with concern the quality of relationship between left political parties and the reluctance for dialogue. The Party has sought to maintain good relationship with other political parties of the revolutionary left based on equality and mutual respect. The Party recognizes that the revolutionary situation varies not only from country to country but even from region to region within a country and recognizes the need and the right of a revolutionary party to decide on the appropriate revolutionary strategy and tactics. While it accepts the right of a fraternal party to criticize constructively when it recognizes a serious flaw, it urges that such disagreements are resolved amicably through dialogue. Public censure of a fraternal or friendly party is most undesirable especially when prospects for dialogue have not been duly explored.

The party sees the ICOR more significantly as a forum than collective action that enables amicable dialogue among participating organizations so that parties enrich themselves by sharing experiences and building bridges. The Party also hopes that the spirit of cooperation and solidarity will be extended to other parties and organizations not coming under the umbrella of ICOR as well as to other international organizations where possible.

I thank the delegates from other revolutionary parties and organizations for their spirit of friendship and helping us to learn from their experiences and offering the prospect of long term fraternal relationship.

Finally I wish to thank the ICOR for providing the support and encouragement to participate in the event of global significance and I also wish to thank the Communist Party of India Marxist Leninist for taking the initiative in encouraging the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party to join the ICOR as an observer.

## *NDMLP News*

*15<sup>th</sup> June 2014*

### **Leaflet Campaign in the North**

The Northern Regional Branch of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party initiated a leaflet campaign among the peasants of the region. In a leaflet released on 15<sup>th</sup> June, attention was drawn to the surge in prices of essential goods which is a persisting menace that is a direct consequence of the open economic policy of 1978. It also drew attention to the systematic undermining of the agricultural economy by unrestricted import of agricultural produce and difficulties faced by the farmers in securing a fair price for their produce. The leaflet also drew attention to the government's facilitating the import of genetically modified seeds which will harm biodiversity and eliminate crops native to the country.

Attention was also drawn to the failure of the government to compensate cultivators for loss of crop by natural disasters, continued army occupation of agricultural lands and usurious practices of the Banks.

## *NDMLP News*

*30<sup>th</sup> March 2014*

### **Remembering Comrade Soodamani**

The first death anniversary of the late veteran Comrade IK Soodamani was marked on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2014 in Vavuniya. Comrade N Paheerathan chaired the memorial meeting and memorial lectures were delivered by Comrade SK Senthivel and Mr KK Arunthavaraja. Comrades V Mahendran, S Thevarajah and T Sri Prakash and Messrs K Sithamparanathan, A Nadarajah, K Parthipan, P Sathyanathan, A Devakrishnan and N Jeyaratnam were among those who addressed the meeting. The meeting concluded with a poetry forum in honour of the late Comrade Soodamani with Comrades Ragala Panneerselvam, Semmalar Mohan, S Mohanraj, N Praveena and T Kalaichelvi as participants. Comrade Don Bosco delivered the vote of thanks.

(continued from inside front cover)

As we  
lock  
our doors  
to  
leave,  
of failed better days...  
Always  
the beautiful evergreen of the venal  
naivety  
never to whisper the truth  
of the  
defeated  
corruption  
of the class clown.

As the natives  
posture  
of ambition  
of the failed attempt of  
having  
solace  
of positive thinking...

Where strippers as pole dancers  
are celebrated  
as  
ambitious  
entrepreneurs  
And never the self-objectifying  
over-sexed  
door mat  
of human  
perversion  
of the  
failure of  
betters days

*[We thank Malik Sekou Osei for permitting publication. Osei, an activist of varied forms of Pan-Africanism and a critic of its limitations supports anti-imperialist liberation struggles in Africa, Afro-American Black Awareness campaigns and struggles against racist oppression. Some of his writings can be seen on <http://liberator21.blogspot.com>.]*

## The Sacred Ancient Land

*Mahesh Munasinghe*

*Ancient Buddhism is ancient and  
its preachings are in vain!*

*There is no need  
for all living beings  
to suffer as said therein.*

*Though attired differently as  
clergy, physician, teacher, peasant and worker  
they are all alike in taking revenge—  
in consuming the blood of the neighbour.*

*This clan  
will remain blindly loyal to  
business places in the form of viharas that  
protect and bless those who deliver revenge—  
until the next Buddha arrives.*

*(Retranslation of Tamil version by Marx Prabakar)*

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