SINHALA-NESS AND SINHALA NATIONALISM

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In the British colonial era one can speak of a combative upsurge of cultural nationalism among the Sinhalese from the mid-late nineteenth century in opposition to the subordinations imposed on them by the imperial order. In so far as the British colonialists arrogantly looked down on them (and all "natives") as inferior, this was a response of the downtrodden. This line of response overlapped with a movement of Buddhist revitalisation that had commenced earlier, partly as a counter to the denigration of Buddhism by the Christian missionaries and their followers and the ongoing proselytisation among the Sinhalese.

Eventually these strands flowed into and inspired the socio-political changes associated with the year "1956." Because of the emphasis on the "Sinhala Only" language platform in the rhetoric of the MEP-led-by-the SLFP, the principal associational organisation behind the electoral shift, this development has been described as a "linguistic nationalism" (e.g. by K M de Silva 1981). However, here, I will refer to these strands by the more inclusive phrase "cultural nationalism," a concept that encompasses a language emphasis as well as other dimensions, indicated by such words as "tradition," "civilisation" and "history."

This said, I hold that language is fundamental to this interventionist Marga Project and that we must be attentive to the limitations of pursuing this debate in the English language and the consequent distortions of translation. Sinhala consciousness over time and Sinhala nationalism in modern times (the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) has developed and occurs in and through the Sinhala language. This language has never operated in isolation. It has interacted with Pâli, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu and Malayâlam over the centuries and with Portuguese, Dutch and English in more recent times. While these interactions have been significant, the critical arena remains that of Sinhala syntax and vocabulary. If one wishes to counteract the extreme forms of Sinhala nationalism, then, it has to be effected in and through the Sinhala medium.

A particularly knotty issue in this regard is the word jâtiya. Etymologically, jâtiya refers to "birth," -- but has been used at the popular level over the last 150 years as a synonym for vargaya (category) as well as kulaya (caste). Thus, it has been used as a reference for "kind," "caste," "nation" and "race." It seems that there is, as yet, no agreement regarding the manner in which we can distinguish "race" and "nation" in Sinhala-talk, since the academic conventions in this regard are not widely diffused or implanted.

One mark of the weight that is placed on other dimensions of culture is the reference to "2000 years of history" in such diverse moments as Arjuna Ranatunga's response to Shane Warne's derogatory remarks and the prose of the Sinhala Commission's submissions. This is a code for the value attached to antiquity, a civilisational antiquity. In these instances it is associated with the downgrading of other peoples' antiquities and fosters the clash of ideologies associated with these positions. Thus, in Sri Lanka today one sees particular readings of the past that are informed by the interests of the present.

However, this emphasis on custom is not new and should not be attributed to the impact of a print technology in the Eurocentric manner of a Benedict Anderson (Freitag 2000; Roberts 1996 and 2001). There has been a long-standing emphasis on knowledge in the Sinhala Buddhist traditions, traditions conveyed in the modes textual, iconic-visual, kinesic

and oral (Roberts 1994: 63-64 and 2000). Thus, the ideological productions of the Kandyan ruling classes were marked by a pronounced emphasis on custom and antiquity. Their letters to the British in the period 1796 to 1815 began with a reference to Vijaya "who vanquished the most cruel devils" or "King Wijaya born of the noble exceeding pure Race of the Sun" (Vimalananda 1973: 474; 1984: 67) and constantly lectured the British on the importance of adhering to practices that were "anciently customary" (Vimalananda 1984: 63, 73).

It is worth noting here that the Sinhala or Elu language had reached its present form around the thirteenth century. As a language Sinhala is marked by a remarkable measure of uniformity. In noting the regional variation that existed/exists one can hardly talk of "dialects". The differences are in word bank rather than syntax. This seems to have assisted a considerable commonality of metaphor and symbol, particularly in the religio-cultural field addressing causality and suffering.

In the past written, ola-leaf communications in Sinhala were augmented by the modality of dance on the one hand and by the oral modes of talk, song and poetry on the other. I emphasise here the centrality of poetical exchanges in the world of the Sinhalese until late-twentieth century times. The power of poetry resides in its capacity to evoke and the fact that the simplicity of the samudraghosha and other metres enabled/enables people to memorise snatches and/or whole texts.

Whereas Sinhala prose in pre-British times often included Sanskritic words, most Sinhala poetry adhered to the Elu form and had only limited Sanskritic inputs. Even in the field of prose the syncretistic incorporation of Sanskrit and Tamil words into Sinhala expressions was not without moments of cultural struggle involving resistance to and/or rejection of these influences by some literati (eg Vattäve Thero and Vidâgama Thero in the fifteenth century). That is, the efforts of these two bhikkhus can be interpreted as an early instance of indigenisation.

During what I call the "middle period" (1236-1815) the ideologues of the Sinhala state remained attached to the vamsa ideology of the Mahâvamsa and its offshoots. These stories were never static and admitted variations. But all these variations appear to have been variations on a theme. In sum, there is considerable continuity and they present (1) Siri Laka/Lanka/Tun Raja etc. as a blessed place, blessed by the Buddha; (2) and the Sinhala people as a chosen people. Thus, one has a continuous emphasis on the Dhammadîpa and Sihaladîpa concepts. Thus the traditions of the middle period reiterate (3) the link between religion and state. This permits scholars to speak of Sinhala Buddhism.

For these reasons and in so far as Christianity had no followers in Lanka till the sixteenth century, Obeyesekere argues that, "up to the sixteenth century, being a Sinhalese implied being a Buddhist" (1979: 279). Thus he argues for the synonymity of the two identities till the Portuguese arrived. This is perhaps a contentious view, but has some plausibility for the period after Buddhism disappeared from India, say, from the thirteenth century onward. Be that as it may, it would seem that when the Sinhala literati in the middle period said "Lakväsi" (technically "residents of Sri Lanka"), they meant Sinhala.

Moreover, in the hatan kavi of the Sitâvaka and Kandyan periods there is an explicit expression of Sinhala collective identity in opposition to the various imperial forces as well

as the sädi demala and a range of other foreigners, such as the Kannadi, Doluvara, Kâberi and Tuppahi. This identity at times embraced both the pata and uda rata (Up and Low Country) peoples. But it was never egalitarian and worked within, and as part of, a royalism of the Indo-Sinhala cakravarti type, one that expressed these sentiments in the prasasti mode which sings eulogies about hero-kings and chieftains. As kavi katâ, these poems were, for the most part, not erudite elitist productions, but popular fare available for repetition by ordinary folk as well as use as instruments in the mobilisation of râjakâriya people for war.

Such lines of differentiation-cum-hostility must be located within a context of considerable cultural borrowing of icons, artefacts and symbols from India in association with an equally considerable inflow of Indian immigrants. Such processes made for substantial cultural syncretism. Thus, along one dimension in the middle period one sees an encompassing and incorporative ideological capacity. As in previous centuries, Hindu gods were incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon as deities working under the Buddha's varama (Obeyesekere 1966). Likewise, individual warriors, purohits and aristocrats were accepted into the Govigama Sinhala fold over a couple of generations. Or larger bodies of people were indigenised as Sinhala over time: for instance, immigrant lineages became vannirajavaru and intermarried with the Kandyan radala aristocracy; while segments among the Kandyan Navandanno, the Salâgama, Durâva and Karâva are known to have been migrant bodies of of people.

Alternatively, outside non-Sinhala elements have been accepted by the Sinhala state/society as distinct entities in its existing scheme of things: thus the Yon served as one part of the madigê badda (transport department) in the Kandyan Kingdom. In brief, the principal of socio-political interaction has not been solely that of rejecting the outsider, the Other. But where the incoming person or bodies of people were not assimilated over time and where space was allocated for the non-Sinhala and non-Buddhist, this was always on sufferance within a hierarchical scheme of things. Thus, Catholic and Islamic practices in the Kandyan Kingdom were tolerated but kept within limits. They were, as Wickremeratne notes, "children of a lesser god" (1995: xxxv).

Such flexibility, such styles of inclusivity, sat alongside notions/practices of exclusivity and violent response when outside forces challenged control institutions such as the Sangha/Dhamma or kingship. When Sinhala Catholics and their Goan missionaries gained what was deemed to be too much power in the Kandyan heartland during the 1740s, their books were burnt and they were expelled as "Parangi" (Cûlavamsa II, p. 253). Again, another Sinhala text of the mid-eighteenth century represented Jesus as a carpenter perêtayâ and an emissary of Mâra. Yet another text of this period represents the Saivites as all that is libidinous and repulsive (Young and Senanayake 1998).

These illustrations suggest that the concept of para saturan or para rupu (foreign enemies), a central feature in the vamsa traditions (e. g. Pujavaliya, chaps. 43 & 44), was reproduced in significant ways during the Kandyan period. Not only does the phrase recur in the hatan kavi, on at least two occasions in the war poems the hero-king is represented as the sturdy shore or land (goda), while the threatening imperial forces are the ocean. What one has, therefore, is a model of the insider vs outsider.

This practice, this development, links up with the another feature in deep structure of Sinhala speech-in-practice: the expanding/contracting, situational use of the word "pita."

Govi 1 vs Govi 2 in Village XY

Govi vs Rest within XY

Village XY vs pitagañkarayo or gamen bähara aya

rata vs tota in Piyadasa Sirisena's Jayatissa saha Roslin, where rata could be read as the respectable interior (and/or respectable Govi) in opposition to the contaminated coastal districts (and/or the Karâva).

verala/goda vs muhuda (the Ingrîsi) in Ingrîsi Hatana (with Sri Vikrama Râjasinha as goda).

The Chinese-Box pattern of pita gathers further support from some of the meanings accruing to the words rata and para. As opposed to the word ratun (people of the land), another derivative from rata, the word rattu, refers to "foreigners" or "strangers." Para, too, is a word that carries multiple meanings. Indeed, the Sinhala Dictionary Office's listing contains as many as 18 meanings (some of these are synonyms and overlapping terms, e. g. viruddhavâdhiya and saturu), including the archaic meaning uttama or shrêstta. One of these is pita, so that pita and para become synonymous. However, the conventional sense of the word throughout the middle period and into the twentieth century has been that of "other," "alien" or "enemy." Though disparaging, especially in modern times, para was not necessarily so in the classical literature and could refer to "others" in a neutral sense. Nevertheless, the context of usage in the Cûlavamsa of the early middle period, where it refers to Mâgha and his destructive activities, and in the hatan kavi of the seventeenth century and onwards, where it refers to the Portuguese (who are often called parangi), points to a pejorative import in such politicised expressions.

In review, then, the critical point for our interests is that, in principle, rattu and pita rata aya could map onto parayo (plural of para) in the same sense. So what we have is a significant semantic pattern of expanding/contracting circles of meaning. It is unlikely that Sinhala-speakers are aware of this structure or that they consciously manipulate it in service of their specific interests. It is, I suggest, usually beyond the threshold of consciousness and lurks in subterranean style.

As a pattern it is something that I as observer have devised in the manner of a Levi-Straussian structuralist. However, given my emphasis on the everyday world of interacting people, I do not allow that this is an unconscious structure that remains completely outside the ken of native-speakers. That is, I hold that some native-speakers may have the capacity to understand the pattern or call it into play at suitable moments. Thus, Väligala Mudali, the author of the Ingrîsi Hatana, presumably acted with intent when he cast the hero-king, Srî Vikrama Râjasinha, as the goda (shore) and the English as the muhuda (sea).

Such metaphorical images had the capacity to resonate evocatively among the Sinhalese for three reasons. For one, like all humans, the latter would have been fully alive to the phenomenological experience of their body as something that could be penetrated, in so far as each person is a corporeal container with an outside and an inside. For another, it is likely that a significant number of Sinhalese were familiar with that striking image in the Dutugämunu story where the latter as a boy, the hero-king-to-be, speaks of "dakunin golu

muhudai, uturin hädi demalui" (the dumb sea to the south, the unruly-cum-filthy Tamils to the north). Thirdly, as I have attempted to clarify above, this imagery corresponds with expressions they would be utilising in the familiar world of local politics (including caste politics). Thus, pita, rattu, para and muhuda together form one part of the living practices that express allegiance, factionalism and opposition in the Sinhala world. Their compass is partial, situational and varied.

In some of their uses, then, pita, rata and para constitute what have been called "group shifters" or "disemic" terms in the anthropological literature (Galaty 1982; Herzfeld 1987: 95 -150). These concepts mark words that shift their meaning across a range of co-domains according to the identity of the speaker/writer and the context of expression/action. Such multiple meanings should not be interpreted in ways that de-value the significance of such meaning patterns. References to "situational ethnicity" and the "fluidity" of meaning by some scholars do just that. The implication is that the actors in question are using these categories according to their instrumental strategies and can discard or adopt a label in the same manner as a garment. Such readings are especially common among scholars attached to transactionalist perspectives. In opposition to this interpretation, I hold that a situational shift from the Level X of meaning 'up' to the more encompassing Level Y of meaning does not mean that X has been discarded like an item of clothing. Rather X is not pertinent in that situation and is 'on hold;' and is therefore available for use when relevant for the speaker/writer. A Lancashireman arguing fervently with a Yorkshireman about the respective merits of their cricket teams has not discarded his English patriotism, but put it 'on hold.' Indeed, the allegiances to the English team (and all that this signifies) may be partly constituted by his attachment to his locality and his shire.

Thus, the situationality of usage of pita, rattu, para and muhuda should not be interpreted to mean that their force is weak. The very subterranean-ness of the semantic patterning makes for an insidious power. As critically, at any temporal moment, each level of the expanding/contracting structure may not be attributed the same value. Situational shifts along Chinese Box structures of this type, therefore, may occur in circumstances where specific levels of the structure can be given greater significance than other levels. The argument here is that pita, rattu, para and muhuda together provided one of the enabling conditions for attitudes of exclusivity in the particular circumstances of colonial domination. Where a foreign invader looms, one would expect that the para saturan would be perceived as rather more awesome than the pitagañkarayo next door. But one should not conclude too readily that even such weightages are written in stone.

THE BRITISH TRANSFORMATION

The previous review has indicated that the Sinhala had rich cultural traditions linked to particular state forms. They also had manifold ways of communicating among themselves through oral story-telling in prose and poetry, religious and healing rituals, the mobilisation of labour under râjakâriya, painting and sculpture, pilgrimages, and the occasional grand procession of monarchs and chieftains. As indicated by the literature of the Matara Period (1750s-1900) there was increasing lay participation in both the written and oral expressions of high culture as well. Communication may have been slow, but this does not mean that exchanges were not meaningful and profound.

Partly because of these processes, partly because of the strength of the vamsa traditions and partly due to the series of wars against the Portuguese and subsequent imperial

intruders a collective Sinhala consciousness had taken root and was centred around the seat of Senkadagala (Mahânuvara) as the capital of Trisiñhala. This collective identity was not nationalist in the modern sense in so far as it did not posit an attachment to the egalitarian ideals of popular sovereignty. Nor did it espouse an explicit political theory of self-determination, though the continuous efforts to beat back foreign invasions amounted to a practice of liberation and self-determination.

In short, the Sinhalese did not require "modernity," Orientalists, and Western intellectual models to create cross-cutting allegiances and commonalities (contra Benedict Anderson and a whole school of his followers). These foundations, and the continuing force of oral story-telling in narrative and poetic modes among the Sinhala people till the mid-twentieth century, have to kept in mind in evaluating the considerable changes that took place after the British took control of the whole island in 1815-18.

These transformations are reasonably well-documented. I can take the liberty of summarising them in point-form.

- They effected an unification of the island, not only through administrative structures, but also through an extensive system of roads, bridges, railways and postal communications.
- They set up the institutional framework of capitalism, especially securing property rights, conveyancing and mobility of labour. The abolition of râjakâriya was a critical step in this process.
- These developments involved the growing dominance of English as the language of administration and (high) commerce (except in the Pettah). Along one dimension English thereby became the lingua franca linking people who spoke two different languages (replicating a common pattern in numerous colonies). Along another dimension, as we shall see, it became an instrument of privilege, domination and oppression.
- These developments promoted the growth of a plantation economy in a process of reciprocal influence.
- These developments and the British strategies of "alienage" (to borrow a term used by Donald Horowitz) enabled the smaller communities to take up ecological niches in the socio-economic order. The Burghers filled intermediary roles in the administrative and judicial institutions. The Ja (Malays) had key roles in the army and police. The Yon (Muslim Moors) were adjuncts as traders and import-exporters. The Chettiyars had a similar role, and together with the Muslim Moors possessed considerable financial power via the Pettah money market.
- From early on a few Ceylon Tamil families provided some of the key intermediaries in the banking world through their position as shroffs. In the twentieth century (especially after the Colombo-Jaffna railway connection was completed circa 1905) the Ceylon Tamils moved heavily into the administrative services and one saw the colonisation (in the standard dictionary sense) of Colombo and its environs by significant numbers.
- As the new order penetrated the foothills and the up-country districts of the former Kandyan Provinces, Low-Country Sinhalese were among those who were, so to

speak, in the the baggage train of the British overlords, participating in the burgeoning opportunities for trade and investment. This process generated resentments and sharpened the Low Country-Kandyan distinction. When the two regional seats for the Legislative Council in the Central Province were secured by Low Country Sinhala politicians in 1924-25, some Kandyan activists even presented a scheme for a federal system of government.

- Taken together, all these processes generated a new social order, involving the rise of an indigenous bourgeoisie and its related 'twin,' the middle class.
- The concept of the "middle class" is necessitated by the fact that the modes of domination/superiority were not restricted to property/wealth, but included the English language (e.g. one was not allowed to speak Sinhala and Tamil in the precincts of the elite schools).
- This middle class absorbed and included the old aristocracies, that is, those headmen families of the Tamil, Kandyan Low Country Sinhalese areas which did not disappear altogether.
- With British rule, Sri Lankans were exposed to European literary and political influences, notably
    - Shakespeare and other cultural icons, including the works of the Romanticists;
    - nationalist theories and practices, both expressive and materialistic in the conceptual distinction suggested by Premakumara de Silva and Desmond Mallawaratchy;
    - Liberalism, especially its English variants in praise of the British constitution. Thus one had the infusion of democratic ideas and a value on parliamentary institutions, especially the Westminister model. In a colonial context the Liberal demand that the executive should be subject to the directions provided by an elected legislative assembly necessarily had nationalist implications (unless the Legislature was dominated by white settlers).
- One part of the Liberal philosophy and its implications was the language of rights (as opposed to that of petition and propitiation) and the emphasis on equality. This emphasis eventually included that of female emancipation and women's voting rights.

Within the context of the summary overview of the overlapping processes delineated above, I take up a development that is central to our concerns. As a consequence of these changes one sees the emergence in the English language of the concept "Ceylonese" (an usage which appears to have generated a new Sinhala adjective, namely, "Lânkika."). Used by Britons and locals 'alike,' the term "Ceylonese" developed a nationalist connotation from early on, especially in the Young Ceylon circles and the pages of the Ceylon Examiner from 1859 onwards, both organs commanded by Burghers. This was in part a response to the racism and the arrogance of the British residents in Ceylon (as the island was now known). Thus we see the beginnings of a Ceylonese nationalism of an all-island,

trans-ethnic kind. This emphasis was carried through into the demands (favoured by Burghers, Tamils and Sinhalese men of middle class background alike) for the Ceylonisation of the Ceylon Civil Service during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These forces eventually fostered the movement for constitutional devolution from the 1900s onwards as well as the temperance movement and Goonesinha's labour agitation.

As with so many European nationalisms nurtured by images of a glorious past, the nationalists drew inspiration from the achievements of the builders of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva. That is, a retrospective romanticism coloured the ideological productions of the Ceylonese nationalists. Thus, the past civilisational greatness of Sinhala state society was an invigorating building block for the Ceylonese nationalism of the Burgher, Tamil, Sinhala and other gentlemen and gentlewomen who spoke out on the subject. An individual like Arunachalam was able to draw inspiration from achievements in the past (Roberts 1979: 226). When D S Senanayake and such administrators as Edmund Rodrigo, L J de S Seneviratne, M Rajendra and K Kanagasundaram set out to regenerate agriculture in the old Rajarata regions from the 1930s through to the 1950s, they were, in part, inspired by this particular aspect of the past.

The emergence of a Ceylonese nationalism in representations presented in the English language, together with the everyday use of the term "Ceylonese" by British and Ceylonese alike, as I indicated above, promoted the emergence of a new Sinhala adjective, "Lankika," a term that seems to have come into use by the late nineteenth century if not earlier. But this is where one must mark a distinction between the retrospective romanticism-cum-nationalism of the highly Westemised Sinhalese and the non-Sinhala Ceylonese operating in English on the one hand and the Sinhala-speakers and bilingual ideologues whose mode of conceptualisation was based on Sinhala speech.

The latter were building on the intellectual foundations that I have specified earlier, notably a) the value on antiquity and custom; b) the consciousness of a collective Sinhala and/or Sinhala Buddhist self; c) the subterranean understandings of the political alignments in terms of a series of inside : outside dichotomies that became relevant when the ideologues looked back on the past and spoke of the Colas, Magha, the Portuguese etc. Thus, speculatively, I raise the question whether the new word "Lankika" possessed, for some or all of these Sinhala-speakers, the cross-cutting multi-ethnic connotations that the English word "Ceylonese" carried.

Question A: In what measure, and among which elements of the Sinhala-speaking population today, is the adjectival reference, "Lânkika," used -- whether explicitly or implicitly/unreflectively -- in ways that equate it with "Sinhala," thereby effectively subsuming the Lânkika within the Sinhala?

It is significant that when Dharmapala presented a letter to the "Ceylonese Youth" in the early twentieth century his text shades off imperceptibly from "Ceylonese" to "Sinhalese." Indeed, much of the text seeks to arrest the degeneration of the Sinhalese and castigates the Westernising elements, while placing value on "the sons of the soil, the Sinhalese Buddhists" (1965: 501-44). This sort of slippage marks a force that is as insidious as powerful. The adjective "Sinhalese" in effect subsumes that of "Ceylonese" in taken-for-granted ways. Parenthetically, it may be noted that in the long history of the British Isles

from the eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth the term "English" has operated in precisely the same manner. In sliding interchangeably and without any thought from "English" to "British" in the adjectival references to the collectivity, numberless Britons (some of them Scots or other Celts!) have marked and assisted the hegemonic place of the English in the institutional complex known as Great Britain in their time.

Thus, I am signalling here the likelihood that there was a conceptual mis-match, an area of tension, albeit one that may not have been evident to contemporaries, between the thinking of the Ceylonese nationalists -- with one lot using "Ceylonese" mostly in an all-island, trans-ethnic sense and others regarding it as more or less equivalent to Sinhalese. I stress here that, to the degree that this speculation is valid, there were Sinhalese in both camps (as, indeed, there now are).

The tendency towards an unselfconscious equation of Ceylonese-as-Sinhalese was assisted by the socio-political context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Here, let me mark five processes/strands that promoted Sinhalese nationalism, while encouraging those who embodied these ideas to lean towards hegemonic understandings of past history and the contemporary order.

(1) the struggle for hearts or minds on the religious front and the resistance to the denigration of their religion and the work of Christian proselytisation that is associated with the Buddhist revitalisation movement, especially from the 1860s.

(2) "noise as cultural struggle" -- procession disputes, usually localised, between segments of the Buddhist population and segments of the Catholic or Muslim population in the period 1880s to 1930s (Roberts 1990 and 1994: chaps. 7 and 8).

(3) a growing fear among many Sinhala activists that their culture and language were being contaminated to the point of severe decline. In other words an apocalyptic vision of cultural doom was presented by journalists, novelists, dramatists, poets and pamphleteers (Roberts 1994: 199-201). In terms of the volume of literature/articles in the prose writings of the time, my impression is that this theme, in fact, was far stronger than the emphasis on protecting Buddhism.

(4) Associated with this was a strong emphasis on tradition, on custom. The readings of tradition were always selective. Indeed, they were quite bourgeois and Western in some ways (Amunugama 1979 and Obeyesekere 1979), but the activists did not see their choices in this light.

5) There was also a strong emphasis on nativism/purism. This is illustrated, for instance, in (a) the campaign mounted against meat-eating; (b) the campaign advocating the wearing of the osariya by Sinhala womenfolk; and (c) the objection to miscegenation and mixed marriages. Thus, by way of illustration, take M C F Perera's address to the Sinhala Sahodara Samitiya on the 30th July 1910. In attacking the pronounced degree to which the "Sinhalaya" had taken to Western ways and lost their Aryan kulasirit and gunadharma (customs and virtues), he complained that some Sinhalese even side with the paradêsin (foreigners) against other Sinhalese, while some even married "Lansi, Demala, Ingrîsi, German, aadhi parajâtin". Perera, I should add, was the editor of the Sîhala Samaya.

This sort of criticism and the framework of thought espoused in such texts as Piyadasa Sirisena's earliest novels reveal, quite clearly, that a caste ideology coalesced with the

exclusive racist ideas that had been recently imported into Lanka through Western writings, especially the opposed categories of "Aryan" and "Dravidian." In other words, caste notions became, in effect, re-worked and then combined with the imported European theories of race to shore up the boundaries of the Sinhala world and Sinhala culture by building barriers of exclusion (see Roberts et al 1989: chap.1). It is on the foundations provided by this type of research, and especially a content analysis of Sirisena's three earliest novels, that I produced the Chart that is part of this presentation in People Inbetween in 1989 (see Chart).

Subsequent work among the war poems of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries indicates that this conceptual framework occurs frequently within their representations. That such is the case is hardly surprising given the aggressions and depradations that the Sinhala people had to face from the Portuguese and other imperial forces from the sixteenth century onwards. Significantly, these war poems reveal that one could add a whole list of threatening Others to the list of outsiders. These included the Tuppâsi and the Kâberi (or Kappiri), namely, and respectively, the Mixed Euro-Asian descendants and the Kaffirs or Blacks of African descent. Thus, Sirisena's use of Samkara (mixed), that is, Tuppahi, as an ethnic category is not a nineteenth century innovation. In their turn Philip Gunawardena, W S Karunaratne and other ideologues of the '1956 revolution' were building on Sirisena's work (and perhaps even on the war poems?) when they directed the disparaging term tuppahi at the Westernised brown sahibs of the UNP and the English-speaking classes that dominated Sri Lankan society at that stage.

QUESTION B: Thus, given this background, given such practices, one can ask what Lankika meant to these Sinhala activists, and their audience, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? Or rather what are the explicit and implicit meanings attached to "Lânkika " when it is used in everyday talk and writing today?

Tentatively, I suggest that, today, the term Lakväsi has shed its middle-period connotations of "Sinhala" and now encompasses all the (implicitly permanent and/or native) residents of the island. But I am less sure of Lânkika as an adjectival/adverbial form of collective self-representation. I ask whether in the implicit meanings attached to this concept in the everyday usage of Sinhala-speakers there is a tendency to equate Sinhala and Lânkika and to subsume the latter within Sinhala -- in much the same fashion as the Magyar aristocracy subsumed "Hungarian" within the concept "Magyar" during the nineteenth century and the manner in which the English (and others) subsumed "British" within "English" during the eighteeenth and nineteenth centuries.

I cannot answer this question because I do not take in communications in Sinhala on a daily basis. Therefore, I leave it to those engaging the Sinhala people in Sinhala in the course of their daily lives (and thus taking in the media representations as well) to take it up. In effect, I end here where I began: with the significance of Sinhala-talk. The explicit point I make is that for any modus vivendi to be worked out we must ensure that Lânkika secures a pluralistic meaning that encompasses all the ethnic and religio-ethnic categories of people in this island.

The Early Twentieth Century: the Primacy of Ceylonese Nationalism

The thrust of my narrative has led me to move rapidly from the pre-British period to the late nineteenth century and then on to the contemporary situation. The question I have

raised at the end, however, cannot be fully comprehended without reference to the transformations effected in 1956-and-afterwards. And for the latter to be understood one has to comprehend the socio-political scene in the first half of the twentieth century and what it was that the forces behind 1956 were challenging.

Let me reiterate this point in other vocabulary, in terms with some analytical implications: I am saying that we can understand who began to get what from 1956-onwards only if we know who had what in the preceding half century. The short answer here is that the 1956 forces (a convenient shorthand: see below) in the critical southern districts were challenging

1) the English-speaking Westernised elites, including the Christians, of all ethnic groups as a category of privileged, the varaprasâda lat aya;

2) the British economic interests, especially in the tea, rubber and import-export trades; and

3) adjunct minority trading communities, such as the Borahs, Sindhis, Chettiyars and perhaps the Memons and the Muslims, who were represented as beneficiaries of the British-created economic order;

4) the disproportionate share of places the Ceylon Tamils (effectively Jaffna Tamils) were believed to hold in the highly-valued government sector of white collar employment;

5) the Catholics -- who were Sinhalese, Bharatha, Tamil, Burgher and other in affiliation, and thus, trans-ethnic-- as a specific block ("Catholic Action") that was believed to have cabalistic networks and undue influence in the white collar job market and key arenas;

6) the lack of weight, of status, that was afforded to Buddhism, even though it was the language of the majority and was regarded as the civilisational-cum-historically-supreme religion of the island;

6) the lack of status and practical efficacy afforded to the two vernacular languages in general and the Sinhala language in particular.

The emphasis on the Buddhist religion and the Sinhala language coalesced with an explicit programme of cultural regeneration. The cultural nationalism that all these strands added up to had a considerable streak of indigenist purism. One expression of this tendency was the sartorial emphasis on what was known as the "Arya Sinhala" dress (a label that is significant, given the innovativeness of the vestments). The indigenism and the economic nationalism associated with 1956 were carried through into the insurrections of the Janatâ Vimukti Peramuna, both in its Mach I (1965-71) and Mach III (1987-90) variants. The JVP, as I have briefly suggested elsewhere, were (are?) the children of 1956 as much as the children of the Old Left-gone-Maoist and Guevarist. That is, they embodied a synthesis of two powerful streams of ideology with the further twist provided by Marighella (? - spelling), Guevara and Mao.

Moreeover, perhaps implicitly rather than in overt statements, the Sinhala cultural nationalism expressed by the 1956 forces was challenging the Ceylonese nationalism of the trans-ethnic, all island variety that had dominated the scene from the mid-nineteenth century and had negotiated the process of constitutional devolution that secured independence in 1948. This is central. In 1956-and-beyond one witnesses the processes

that have effected a decline in the strength of Ceylonese/Lankan nationalism through its displacement by vigorous Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms that have nurtured each other in conflictual ways. The end result has created a situation where, today, Ceylonese/Lankan nationalism is a weak and marginalised force within the firmament, albeit not dead.

In its power and status, then, Ceylonese/Lankan nationalism today stands in contrast with the leading edge it possessed at the beginning of the twentieth century. Let me provide a brief outline of the early twentieth century scenario so that one can grasp the inversion that has taken place.

In the first place one must understand that institutional power in most dimensions lay with the British. This meant the domination of the English language. It also meant that those best placed to question and challenge the British hold on power were those with a fluency in the English idiom -- unless one took the path of revolutionary and violent resistance that a few did in India (and even the latter were a distinctly subordinate strand within the sub-continent). Thus, the Western-educated classes, and the lawyers in particular, provided the personnel (predominantly male) who became activists agitating for alterations in British policy while also demanding greater representation (Roberts 1978).

Many of these individuals had attended the same elite schools and were members of rather similar recreational clubs in the main towns. Though kin, caste and ethnic nepotism and competition was found among all the local communities, there were cross-cutting affinities in life style that cemented a strong measure of commonality and encouraged a cross-ethnic patriotism. These linkages were especially pronounced in Colombo, the island's hegemonic centre from about the 1850s to the 1970s (Roberts et al 1989). The power of these attitudes was assisted by the fact that the most powerful modes of public opinion were the English-language newspapers. As critically, the associational sites of discussion and 'conspiracy' were (i) the legal corridors of Hulftsdorp; (ii) the Orient Club; (iii) middle class drawing rooms; and (iv), at various times, such associations as the Ceylon Social Reform Society (1905?-11), the Ceylon Total Abstinence Society (1911?-1915?), the Ceylon Reform League (1917-19), the Ceylon National Congress (1991-51) and the Lanka Maha Jana Sabha.

In pressing for greater power these middle class elites were undoubtedly seeking greater influence for themselves as well as places for kinfolk and friends. But one must not dismiss the ideological commitments and the anti-colonial imperatives that inspired their work. Some of the political activists of the time had enormous wealth and influence locally; and, if they so wished, could have bought out the (British) properties of the British administrators who held the reigns of power. Their activities gain in significance when set against the many middle class families that lived the good life and eschewed politics.

Together with their English-media skills it was this wealth and power that enabled the Ceylonese nationalism of these particular elites to wield greater influence in critical arenas than those members of elite circles (such as Dharmapala) and the intermediary elites who embodied the currents of Sinhala nationalism. Thus, Piyadasa Sirisena served as a lieutenant to these elites on occasions. Few scholars today will know who M C F Perera was, but more would be familiar with the names of a D R Wijewardena or an E W Perera. Arguably even Dharmapala, who hailed from a wealthy nouveaux riches family, had less

clout in leading middle class circles during the first three decades of the twentieth century than, say, the Corea family of Chilaw.

In espousing the interests of the Sinhala people, moreover, advocates like Dharmapala, Sirisena and John de Silva had to confront the fact that they did not hold the moral high ground in leading middle class circles. As in India during the early twentieth century, demands in favour of a sectional communal interest were deemed to be "communal." "Communalism" was a dirty word, carrying the same import as "racism" today in the West and "chauvinism" in southern Asia. Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala activists who pressed for special electorates and focused on their sectional collectivity were castigated in demeaning manner from the 1910s through to the 1940s. The advent of the Left Movement in the 1930s added another voice to this line of denigration (though the Leftists also disparaged the "brown bourgeoisie" who led the Ceylonese movement for devolution).

When Bandaranaike and others launched the Sinhala Maha Sabha (SMS) in the mid-1930s, therefore, they were on the defensive till the 1950s. In pressing his case for the fostering of "Sinhalese nationalism" as a preliminary building block for "friendly relations with other communities" in speeches made in 1939 and the 1940s, Bandaranaike argued that the "Sinhalese must first try to unite the Sinhalese." The explicit argument here was that it was vital initially to focus on building "unity" across the caste, religious and Up Country/Low Country distinctions that prevailed within the Sinhalese community (Roberts 1994: 254 and 1979b: 356). Indeed, he himself took a pragmatic step towards bridging the regional divide through a strategic marriage with the Ratwattes (a Kandyan family of aristocratic lineage) at about this time.

1956 and its Transformations

The principal thrusts of the forces associated with 1956 have been outlined in the section above, so I will make an immediate link here with the point that I ended on. Bandaranaike, the SMS and others of like mind continued to be on the backfoot during the 1940s. They did not have legitimacy in leading middle class political circles or among the Left radicals. So this was what the 1956 forces achieved. They transformed the situation and provided Sinhala cultural fervour with legitimacy. What was "communal" before became "national" afterwards. Not only in the eyes of spokespersons and true believers, but even in that of observers, whether a Farmer, Kearney or Kodikara.

This legitimacy derived in part because the massive electoral victory of the SLFP-led MEP in 1956 was driven by socialist slogans and included a Leftist party led by Philip Gunawardena. It was, and was seen to be, a movement of the underprivileged. Socialism went beyond economic programmes seeking the nationalisation of specific enterprises, especially foreign-owned ones. The cry for language reform had economic implications and possessed a democratic impulse. For another, the overwhelming nature of the triumph, and the several symbolic moments that marked it, as well as the evocative phrase "apê añduva" (our government), emphasised the democratic character of the transformation. In effect, the whole movement received a majoritarian sanction. This meant that Sinhala-ness was legitimised as "Sinhala nationalism" (Roberts 1994: chap. 10).

The powerful legitimising effects of the 1956 turnover are revealed in the insidious effects it had on scholarship. In an essay written in 1970 celebrating the political impact of the 1956 forces Shelton Kodikara referred to the grievances of the "Sinhala nation" and

clarified the character of "Sinhalese nationalism," while referring -- in passing mind you -- to the Tamil "communal programme" (1970: 100-03). The phrasing was, I suspect, without reflection, but gains in significance for that very reason.

The Sinhala Commission makes more explicit use of this vocabulary today. They refer to the UNP and SLFP having to depend on the "communal parties" for a majority in parliament. They speak of "communalists and external forces" -- a significant juxtaposition this -- who breed on "disunity." And allege that the contemporary Sinhala leaders are "not patriotic ... and are ignorant of the history of this country and have no feeling for the Buddhist ethos that is a part of the very soil of this land" (1999: 12).

A certain measure of reading between the lines appears to be called for here, but such statements suggest that the majoritarian ground of justification attached to Sinhala cultural nationalism remains today. I speculate that whether implicitly or explicitly, it is part of the reasoning presented by such bodies as the Sinhala Commission, Jâtika Chintanaya and Sinhala Veera Vidâna. But, the geo-political situation of numbers and regional power read in the framework of long-term history is such that many Sinhala nationalists see the world without the confidence of a conventional majority. As so many scholars have emphasised, they are a majority with a minority neurosis.

This point has been indicated so often that it need not be belaboured. It is not a new phenomenon of the 1990s. Even as Sinhala cultural nationalism was on the upswing in the early 1960s, a parliamentarian could say that the "Sinhalese are a minority in Dravidastan ... [and] are carrying on a struggle for existence against the Dravidian majority" (quoted in Kearney 1973: 164). These fears are not restricted to politicians. Scholars have dwelt on this issue, albeit in more measured tone. As Sankaran Krishna's recent analysis of Tamilanadu politics reveals (1998), in effect a number of our leading historians, including K M de Silva, have totally misread the political agenda of the principal parties in Tamilnadu and the strength of Dravidian separatism in India. But such misreadings and fears remain "real" and must be addressed. Speculatively, I suspect that a significant number of Sinhalese in contemporary Sri Lanka in the 1990s continue to believe in the lurking danger of the southern Indian gonibilla or hobgoblin (when, now, the more truly real gonibilla may be the BJP).

The 1956 transformation, as we know, also ushered in a radical shift in Tamil politics. The conceptualisation of Tamil-ness as a "nationalism" had, perhaps inspired by the expression of this position by the Ceylon Communist Party in 1945, appears to have been advanced by the Federal Party (i. e. the Thamil Arasu Katchi Party or Lanka Tamil State Party) in 1949. But the FP was a second rung Tamil party then and fared poorly in the 1952 elections. At this point the Sinhala Only cry of 1955-56 pitchforked the FP into the status of the predominant Tamil party. Jaffna Tamils also stopped the active programmes directed towards learning Sinhala which they had launched earlier. In brief, the positions and the associations were in place for both extremes of Tamil and Sinhala nationalism to feed vigorously (and unhappily of course) upon each other.

The particular spatial distribution of the two bodies of people and the respective numbers/proportions has made the situation particularly intractable and conducive to the reproduction of conflict. This is what I conceptualise as "the geo-political demographic factor." The territorial concentration of Tamils in the northern districts, with the Peninsula

as its hegemonic centre, as well as the concentration of Muslims in the southern part of the Eastern Province, is a source of political strength and a foundation for territorial claims. Numbers add up to power, but must be understood relationally and with reference to the patterns of spatial distribution. In effect, the claims and the strength of the Sri Lanka Tamils have a stronger grounding (literally as well as metaphorically) than the Chinese in Malaysia even though the latter have about 32 per cent of the total population today. Sorting out these claims and effecting accommodation was rendered difficult in the period 1947 to 1977 by the institutional structure of parliamentary elections. Given a first-past-the-post scheme of constituency elections and the absence of proportional representation, a small swing in voting percentages delivered a large majority to the major party in the Sinhala-majority districts. To grant concessions to the Tamils was political suicide for these politicians. Politicians may be all manner of things, but suicidal thay are not. There was, in brief, an in-built restraint on concessions to the Tamils (as distinct from the Muslims). In other words there was no restraint on populism and on extreme chauvinist positions on the Sinhala side. This encouraged/impelled the Tamil peoples, initially under the hegemony of the Jaffna activists, to move towards more extreme positions.

Besides the structural inducements towards hardline positions opposed to devolutionary accommodations, however, I would draw attention to the attitudinal blockages among a significant segment of the Sinhala population. The burden of this essay has been directed towards outlining the the historical strands supporting these ways of thinking. My conclusions rest as much on the implicit as on overt expressions. The reluctance to grant devolutionary concessions to the Tamil people, I believe, arises in part from the force of historical consciousness and the value attached to tradition in Sinhala culture. In particular I suspect that the Dhammadîpa and Sîhaladîpa concepts are deeply entrenched in the thinking of some segments of the Sinhala population. These perspectives encourage people to dwell on the Rajarata civilisation and to think of the island as "a land of the Sinhala" with a full stop attached to this phrase, even though local circumstances have moved beyond that era and even beyond the Kandyan era into the multi-ethnic social order of today.

Whether for this reason and/or other attitudinal or materialistic reasons, from the 1940s if not earlier, any proposal for accommodative concessions emanating from within the Sinhala side of the fence has invariably been challenged on the ground that it will worsen the situation (for the Sinhalese) and lead to more minority demands or separation. For my illustration I choose one such moment. This is a particularly illuminative instance because it was prior to the populist politics of the 1950s-and-beyond. The occasion was the year 1940. As President of the Ceylon National Congress, G C S Corea entered into a dialogue with some Ceylon Tamil leaders as part of a "new policy of reconciliation." This project was immediately subject to slashing criticism by D R Wijewardene and his journalists:

> ... the more are the seats conceded the greater is the demand. The communal appetite increases with what it feeds. ... When British statesmen ask the people of India to compose their differences, they merely encourage the minorities to raise their price.

This sort of tale has been repeated thereafter. The B-C Pact, the district council scheme of the late 1960s, the DDCs of 1981 and the devolution proposals of the 1990s have been criticised by a number of Sinhala activists as a pandering to the Tamils and the pathway to separation. At each instance the alarmed cry is that the Tamil claims will rise in tempo.

But, standing here in 1999, it is manifest, indeed, starkly manifest, that these refusals of accommodation, of reconciliation, have compounded the grievances of the principal Tamil parties and led them to progressively raise the tempo. Indeed, many of them have jettisoned their Sri Lankan-ness. Their nationalism has moved from being a sectional nationalism within the rubric of Sri Lanka to the position of a separatist nationalism.

Few independent observers would reject the statement that there are, in heart and mind, two nations within Sri Lanka today. And, indeed, one of the most powerful and ruthless parties on the Tamil side, the LTTE, has been a state within a state for over a decade (besides also being a multi-national corporation in the service of this state, the Tamil people and their liberation drive).

So it is rather a puzzle to me that the staunch Sinhala activists today argue that devolution will divide the country. They do not seem to recognise the stark division one faces in Sri Lanka today. So they must be referring to the final, legitimised, juridical division. But this is perhaps to put a rational veneer on their thinking. In other words there is something deeper here, something that is not easy to understand. But understand it we must.

Question C: And, speaking rationally, I also ask: how is it that these protesting voices do not see that in the recent past, a past they are fully cognisant of, the regular failure to grant concessions only pushed the Tamils further down the track towards separatism and worsened the situation for the Sinhalese. Retrospectively, this should be self-evident. But it is not recognised.

My anthropological training has cautioned me against overdone rationalism at the same time that it has always encouraged me to try and understand people in their own terms, so the issue is for me as observer to transcend these difficulties and to work out the reasoning-cum-emotions of those Sinhalese nationalists or chauvinists who read the contemporary world in this manner.

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