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### FROM CEYLON (1948) TO SRI LANKA (1975)

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This study of Sri Lanka in its socio-economic and political aspects provides a microcosm for the examination and analysis of other similar or related societies in South and Southeast Asia. There are, no doubt, differences arising especially from the fact of smallness. But transitions and upheavals are in process all around and the dynamics of change in Sri Lanka have their analogues in the "broken backed states", "states at risk" and "nations in dangerous equilibrium" in near and distant places. The essayists in this volume have attempted to portray the stability that accompanied independence and the rapid changes that followed in its wake in the twenty five odd years thereafter.

A quarter of a century is a useful point to look back as well as to look forward. What is distinct in the case of Sri Lanka is that the processes of change, with all their strains and stresses, have taken place within an orderly framework. The democratic system has functioned despite restrictions placed on it by hardpressed governments. We cannot say that this has been the case with the neighbouring states—India, Pakistan, Burma, Malaysia and in recent times Bangladesh. We cannot be certain that the stability that underlies rapid change will last. There are many 'ifs' the future has in store. But to look back on twenty five years of peaceful evolution, of governments holding together an ethnic mosaic that has within it sources of disintegration, while containing social discontent within safe bounds, are achievements that few of the new states of post-World War II can lay claim do. Despite many difficulties that loom ahead these are no mean accomplishments.

Howard Wiggins places the Sri Lanka situation in the context of South Asia when he compares the island's multi-ethnic problems with those of the neighbouring countries. In many ways his essay sets the pace for the rest of us who have written on related problems. Very rightly, Wiggins concludes that "communal" situations are not the proprietary monopolies of only South Asian states.

The notable tranquility that preceded and accompanied the transfer of power, the craft and diplomacy so reminiscent of Cavour, Garibaldi and Mazzini that "induced" independence, the farseeing nature of British diplomacy in easing the way to orderly independence are set out in K. M. de Silva's contributions on the subject.

Questions naturally arise concerning how the opportunities and responsibilities of independence were dealt with. The errors are stark but the accomplishments are not altogether unsatisfactory. The problems of a multi-religious and polyethnic society are commented on by Kitsiri Malalgoda ("Buddhism in Post-Independence Sri Lanka"), Donald E. Smith ("The Dialectic of Religion and Politics in Sri Lanka"), and K. M. de Silva ("Hinduism and Islam in Post-Independence Sri Lanka"), while the thorny question of Christians and privilege is examined by Paul Caspersz ("The Role of Sri Lanka Christians in a Buddhist Majority System"). The issue of the Tamils and separatism is dealt with in K. M. de Silva's contribution ("Nationalism and its Impact"). Many of the essays refer to the Tamil question directly or tangentially. It is crucial to the problem of Sri Lanka's unity as well as Sri Lanka's survival as a single national entity. The future has many question marks in this uncertain area. C. R. de Silva and V. K. Samaraweera in their "Leadership Perspectives 1948-1973: An Interpretive Essay" pull these perplexing questions together in an effort to provide an overall perspective while the divisive trends of a plural society are looked at by K. M. de Silva in his "Nationalism and its Impact". As he points out, "nationalism in Sri Lanka is a thing of a myriad shapes and forms;" that its "one point of consistency in the future", perversely, its "infinite changeability" and he concludes with paradoxical yet sustainable propositions to the effect that "the impact of nationalism will continue to be at once cohesive and disruptive".

Social welfarism is a byword in local politics and the conflict between parties centres on this local problem while religion, race, and caste are, as well, close to the centre of political dynamism. It is not without significance that the two leading statesmen who guided the island's destinies in its formative phase, Don Stephen Senanayake and Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike both came from the most conservative of environments. Don Stephen Senanayake inspired adequate confidence in Whitehall to obtain independence with goodwill and thereafter to reconcile the minority ethnic and religious groups within the national fabric of a Buddhist majority system. Solomon Bandaranaike with his western outlook and commitment to liberalism drew rural masses into political participation and while evoking the Sinhalese Buddhist "revolution" steered it within the safe confines of national unity. In the hands of an extremist leader, Sri Lanka's situation might have been no different from Biafra, Bangladesh or Cyprus. Dudley Senanayake provided the synthesis of the old and the not so old, the heir to his father's policies and the eclectic who adopted much of Solomon Bandaranaike's pragmatism. Mrs. Bandaranaike, for her part, has accomplished the unusual feat of accommodating the traditional marxists (Trotskyists and Moscow Communists) within the parameters of her social democratic Sri Lanka Freedom Party. Under her premiership, left of centre socialist policies are being put through by her United Front government utilising Parliament as the arena for debate and for shaping the majority votes required to attain these goals. Barring India, it cannot be said with any certainty that any other South Asian polity has had statesmen who have been so similar and yet so different within a limited span of twenty five years—a kind of continuity and change.

During the years of independence, and particularly after the Bandaranaike 'revolution' of the mid 1950's, Ceylon's rural population showed greater political involvement and discrimination than the rural population in any other Southern Asian state. At each election they rejected the incumbents and insisted that the Opposition be given a chance to rule, since those who had been in control had not been able to deal with economic, political or other issues in a way to satisfy enough of the people to gain a majority. A major issue for the future will be how such an awakened, politicized rural population can be sufficiently "satisfied" to permit continuity of a regime beyond a single term in office.

The dynamics of political confrontation, of bi-polarity in politics is examined by Calvin Woodward in his "The Party System in Comparative Perspective: An Assessment". Impressed by the rapid development of the party system, Woodward compares the Ceylonese experience favourably to that of other new states and that of the established democracies during the early years of party politics. Jeyaratnam Wilson draws attention to the change and continuity in foreign policy that has, despite its ups and downs, now become common ground between the major parties. Wilson further examines the question of the system's durability in his "The Future of Parliamentary Government". He concludes that the form that Parliament will take will be conditioned by the results of the next elections. Whatever the outcome, it is a safe guess that the trend will be increasingly authoritarian.

How does a system so fluid and yet so stable sustain itself? V. K. Samaraweera assesses the situation in his interpretation of "The Role of Bureaucracy". The steel framework was maintained much as it had been in pre-independence times until 1956, when the floodgates were breached. Thenceforth, impersonality, inflexibility, distance and a lack of sympathy—characteristics of the old British trained higher civil service have given way to flexibility, fear of political authority inducing bureaucratic indecision, responsiveness to political pressure accompanied by a foreboding apathy. Blame for this partly lies on political leadership that draws back from taking firm decisions. Consequently, as Samaraweera states, a spoils system has replaced merit and selection through the competitive process. Not that there was a complete absence of favouritism under the old order. But jobbery and nepotism have become endemic in the post-1956 phase—race, caste, religion and politics directly influencing the choice of administrators. The change, as Samaraweera very rightly points out, was "inevitable" in that "the bureaucracy could mirror the values dominant in the socio-political process in the island". One can only hope that there will be a return to a more appropriate balance. Sri Lanka in this respect may fall short of the standards of India and Malaysia. But will these states be able to adapt and change in the effective way that Sri Lanka's bureaucracy has responded to social and political upheaval?

Inextricably intertwined with bureaucracy and politics is the state of the economy. The plight of an export-import economy seeking to switch to light industries in the post-1956 phase and struggling to sustain itself on expanding paddy cultivation are analysed by H. M. Gunasekera in his "Economic Changes in Sri Lanka 1948-1973". Based on extensive statistical data covering many years Snodgrass takes the whole period in one sweep. A productive, dynamic economy is

vital to sustain orderly political change, whether under democratic or authoritarian rule. Despite his references to the optimistic pronouncements of other economists Snodgrass has his own misgivings of the future. "With saving and investment rates still low and the foreign exchange and overpopulation problems worse than ever", Snodgrass argues that the prospects of raising national income "appear dim". This indeed is one of the most critical dilemmas that Sri Lanka faces now and in the near future. Failure to solve the economic problem spells political and national disaster. Again this is a problem that faces other states in the neighbouring area as well. Whereas Malaysia has successfully kept her population within some limits that thus far have been supported by its export-import economy, India's problems are staggering while Bangladesh appears to be overwhelmed by numbers. In contrast, Sri Lanka's smallness gives her an advantage.

However, it is the persisting failure to grapple successfully with the economic problem that will in all probability change the course of Sri Lanka's politics in the coming years. New groups are making themselves more articulate, revolutionary solutions are projected by a radically different type of leadership that despises and rejects Parliament and all the paraphernalia that goes with it. The expected reaction from the conventional forces which could very well combine in a single grand national coalition is already evident. To compound matters, the separatist movement among the Tamils is gathering strength. The political threat in a sense has obliged the conventional parties to lay aside the problems of inter-ethnic rivalries—exploitable political issues only some years ago. The problems posed by a new leadership, coming as it does from the majority youth sector of the population, are investigated by Charles Blackton in his "The Marxists and the Ultra Marxists of Sri Lanka since Independence". Blackton concludes that a long period of cultural civility and British style politics ended with the insurgency of the Ultra-Marxists.

It is not easy to conjecture what the future holds in store. In 1948, at independence, Ceylon could not have been a safer bet, the model colony. But sweeping changes accompanied by some turmoil have occurred since then. The one significant factor is that despite the turmoil, change has been accepted by those affected adversely, the exception being the Tamils. The years 1948, 1956, and 1970 are in this respect landmarks that heralded change, sometimes peaceful, on other occasions turbulent. But underpinning these has been a foundation of solidity. Given however the many variables, there are a number of possibilities—the abandonment of Parliament, foreign intervention nation-breaking revolutionary situations accompanied by endemic or sporadic violence. But this is little different from what has already taken place in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Burma and Malaysia. Sri Lanka can be proud that in the last twenty-five years a certain level of stability has accompanied change. That in itself is a claim to achievement.