

# SOME ASPECTS OF THE CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF RECENT SOCIO-POLITICAL CONFLICTS IN SRI LANKA

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The objective of this essay is to examine the cultural dimensions of socio-political conflicts in Sri Lanka from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. No attempt is made to define the term culture, which has been used here in a very broad sense. The main themes focused on are the protest against colonial cultural influences, ramifications of the *Swabhasa* language issue, the politicization of culture particularly after 1956, identity consciousness of the Tamil people and Muslims and the emergence among them of militant movements, the J.V.P. and its stance on cultural issues, the debate on the *Jatika Chintanaya* and the treatment of socio-political conflicts in the creative arts. The themes are not exhaustively dealt with as they are wide in scope. The essay only surveys some of the trends relevant to an understanding of culture, society and politics in the recent past.

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The violent political protests against the British colonial government in Sri Lanka were restricted to two rebellions of 1818 and 1848 and the non-violent political protests were largely in the form of agitation for constitutional reforms and for a larger share of participation in the legislative process. But a succession of Sri Lankan social reformers, statesmen and scholars carried on a series of protests against colonial English education and the value system it imparted from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. Among them special reference may be made to James De Alwis (1823-1878), Arumuga Navalar (1822-1879), Ponnambalam Arunachalam (1853-1924), Ponnambalam Ramanathan (1851-1930), Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), Piyadasa Sirisena (1875-1941), John De Silva (1857-1922), Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) and Kumaratunga Munidasa (1887-1944).

All these reformers came from the middle class and their reform movements were forms of cultural self-assertion in the face of colonial domination. Almost all of them had received an English education, of course, at varying levels. The cultural consciousness and reform movements spearheaded by most of them were limited in scope and designed to buttress the indigenous middle class values and aspirations. Inequalities within the indigenous society, caste differentiations, the concentration of wealth in the feudal landlords or in the indigenous business community were not matters of importance for these reformers. Being the ruled in a colonial regime, their thrust was understandably against the colonial cultural influences which spread mainly through Christian missionary

activities and education. Consequently most of the reformers advocated a revivification of the languages, religions, arts and crafts, educational systems, habits and customs of the Sri Lankans. These advocates of indigenous culture were only a part of a natural offshoot of a much wider movement for social reform.

Most of the above mentioned leaders of protest adopted a non-confrontational attitude, and were acceptable to the British Raj. For example James De Alwis who had started his career as a court interpreter in 1841 and ended as a lawyer and a writer, was acceptable to the rulers of the time and was praised as "one of Ceylon's most distinguished men" by Governor W.H.Gregory.<sup>1</sup> Ponnambalam Ramanathan had the good fortune to win the goodwill of Governor Longden and to be nominated in 1879 to represent the Tamil speaking people in the Legislative Council and to be appointed Acting Attorney-General from 1894 to 1896. In describing the founding of the Ramanathan College in Jaffna, he stated that one of his objectives was to create "... an intelligent devotion to God [and] loyalty to the king...".<sup>2</sup> The Saivite educational reformer Arumuga Navalar, while struggling for a religious revival among the Hindus in Sri Lanka and for a linguistic and cultural awakening among Tamils, praised the colonial government, perhaps as part of his strategy, and stated that the Tamils were its loyal subjects.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, Anagarika Dharmapala vehemently opposed British rule, criticized it and accused Christian missionaries of subverting Buddhism and Sinhala culture. His ideal was primarily a Sinhala Buddhist state for Sri Lanka. He condemned Christians as "meat-eaters of low caste" and propagated the view that the "country of the Sinhalese should be governed by the Sinhalese".<sup>4</sup> Dharmapala, who founded the Mahabodhi Society in 1891 and the newspaper, *Sinhala Baudhdhaya* (The Sinhala Buddhist) in 1906, had as his avowed goal the resurgence of Buddhism and the Sinhala race. His movement was part of the Buddhist Sinhalese nationalist resurgence that began

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<sup>1</sup> Anagarika Dharmapala, *Return to Righteousness : A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of Anagarika Dharmapala*, ed. Ananda Guruge, Government Press, Colombo, (1965) 735.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* See also Gunanath Obeyesekere, 'Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon', *Modern Ceylon Studies*", vol. 1, no.1, (1970), pp.43-63.

<sup>3</sup> Saratchandra Wickramasooriya, "English Education and the Estranged Intellectual in Colonial Sri Lanka: The Case of James Alwis (1823-1878)", *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, vol. IV, nos. 1&2, (1978), pp.1-34.

<sup>4</sup> See: M.Vythilingam, *The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan*, Colombo, (1971), pp.151-152.

after 1860 and intensified after Colonel Olcott's arrival in the island in 1880. Being a tireless advocate of political and social reform, Dharmapala held up the past glories of the Sinhalese as worth resurrecting. In the tradition of the ancient chroniclers of the *Dipavamsa*, *Mahavamsa* and the *Culavamsa*, his view was that a primarily Sinhala Buddhist polity in the island should be restored and perpetuated. In fact Dharmapala identified the island with Buddhism and the Sinhala language.<sup>5</sup> More important is the fact that Dharmapala was among the first to advocate *swaraj* or self-government.

One common theme of the social and cultural protest during the period of British rule of Sri Lanka, was that the colonial education had pernicious effects on society and had undermined its moral and ethical values. James De Alwis called it linguistic and cultural "estrangement".<sup>6</sup> According to him, the educated Sinhalese, "in giving attention to English learning and literature, had entirely overlooked their own".<sup>7</sup> De Alwis saw the seeds of future social discord and upheaval, of socio-cultural tensions and conflicts in the alienation of the English educated Sinhala youth of the 19th century from his parents, brothers, neighbors, from his culture, language and traditions, and in the final analysis, from his native soil itself.<sup>8</sup>

Like James De Alwis before him, Ponnambalam Ramanathan saw quite clearly the inseparable connection between English education of the day and Westernization, with the attendant alienation of the English-educated from his own countrymen. According to him the education Hindu parents wanted for their children was "something more than a knowledge of the perishable things of life". In his view, the ultimate and most obnoxious consequence of pursuing English education as a status symbol was the estrangement of the intelligentsia of the country from the ordinary masses, and the decay and suppression of traditional customs, religions, cultures and ways of life. In essence Ramanathan also

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<sup>5</sup> See: S.Thananjaya Rajasingham, *The Education Activities of Arumuga Navalar*, Colombo, (1974), p.25.

<sup>6</sup> Saratchandra Wickramasooriya, *op.cit.*, p.5.

<sup>7</sup> James De Alwis, *The Sidat Sangarāva: A Grammar of the Sinhalese Lanugage*, translated into English with introduction, notes and appendice, Colombo, (1852) p. ccxi and viii.

<sup>8</sup> Saratchandra Wickramasooriya, *op.cit.*, p.29.

opposed unequivocally the form of contemporary English education.<sup>9</sup>

Radical protest against the colonial system of English education can also be traced in many of the writings of Ananda Coomaraswamy. His views can be summed up in one of his own statements: "English influence and education have robbed us of much that we had, so that we no longer know or trust ourselves and are likely to become a generation of spiritual bastards, discontented with our own ...."<sup>10</sup> According to Coomaraswamy, owing to western education and Westernization, India and Sri Lanka had become "a mere suburb of Birmingham and Paris" and the English educated elite in these two countries "intellectual parasites".<sup>11</sup> However, Coomaraswamy envisaged a system of education which would be an amalgam in which the advantages both of the western system of education and traditional Eastern system would be preserved.<sup>12</sup> Ponnambalam Arunachalam while holding similar views, was alarmed at the increasing gulf between the English educated class and the ordinary masses.<sup>13</sup>

While the above personalities used the medium of English to voice their protest against colonial cultural influences, Albert de Silva, John De Silva, Simon de Silva, Piyadasa Sirisena, Munidasa Kumaratunga, *Bhikkhu* Migettuwatte Gunananda, Anagarika Dharmapala and others primarily used the medium of the Sinhala language to effectively convey their message to the masses. Their audience was the educated Sinhalese or the bilingual intelligensia. Of them, Albert de Silva, John de Silva, Simon de Silva and Piyadasa Sirisena, in their creative works, vehemently criticized and satirized the anglicised Sinhala middle class. For example John de Silva, who was a prominent figure

<sup>9</sup> Saratchandra Wickramasooriya, 'Something More than a Knowledge of the Perishable Things of Life: A Study of Educational ideals of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan', *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, vol. II, no. 2, (1976), p.90,94,95,107.

<sup>10</sup> Ananda K.Coomaraswamy, *The Religious Basis of the Forms of Indian Society*, New York, (1946), p.32. For a detailed study of Coomaraswamy's writings, see: Saratchandra Wickramasooriya, 'A Generation of Spiritual Bastards and Intellectual Pariahs', *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, vol.II, no.1, (June 1976), pp.1-31.

<sup>11</sup> Ananda K.Coomaraswamy, *Art and Swadesh*, Madras,n.d., pp.14-15.

<sup>12</sup> Saratchandra Wickramasooriya, *op.cit*, p.14.

<sup>13</sup> Ponnambalam Arunachalam, *Speeches and Writings*, vol.I. H.W.Cave & Ltd., n.d., pp.292-93

in the Sinhala Buddhist revival led by Anagarika Dharmapala, employed the theatre as a vehicle for arousing in the people a sense of national identity. By basing his plays on historical themes and Buddhist legends he expected to bring the heritage of the Sinhala people closer to the audiences of his time.

As one of the salient features of the cultural protests against colonialism was that they were directed primarily at the Colonial cultural influences, there was no semblance of manifestation of a cultural conflict among the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Even Anagarika Dharmapala who articulated the slogan "Sinhalese Awake", mainly aimed his attack on the colonial traditions and Christian missionary activity. This protest, it may be observed, did not manifest itself in an effective political form throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It did not surface on the political platform even at the time of political independence in 1948.

This was mainly because of the fact that the constitutional agitation for independence was carried on by the English educated elite both of the Sinhala and Tamil communities who virtually accepted the Westminster parliamentary model. Their chief rivals were the Marxists, the leaders of whom also came from the English educated elite. Most leaders of both categories fitted well into Tarzi Vittacchi's satirical term 'Brown Sahibs',<sup>14</sup> which means people with an alien outlook and values and estranged from their cultural roots.

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The cultural protest, combined with opposition to Western values, manifested itself effectively on the political platform during the 1956 General Elections. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, leading the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (People's United Front), campaigned on the traditional cry 'Religion, Language, Nation' while advocating some socialist policies in order to transform the economy. At this time movements for the resurgence of Buddhism as well as the resurgence of traditional Sinhalese culture were gaining ground in the country, as the *Buddha Jayanthi*, or the 2500th anniversary of the Buddha's *parinibbana*, coincided with the election year.

One of the major issues that surfaced during this period was the language issue, namely the replacement of English by *Swabhasa* as the official language. Although there had been a tendency among some to attribute all or most ills of the post-1956 era to the policy of the replacement of English by *swabhasa*, the surfacing of the *swabhasa* policy was a historical inevitability. From the beginning of the twentieth century, even some of the English educated Sri Lankan intellectuals, such as James De Alwis, Ananda

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<sup>14</sup> Tarzi Vittacchi, *The Brown Sahib*, London, (1962).

Coomaraswamy, Ponnambalam Ramanathan and Ponnambalam Arunachalam while emphasizing the importance of English, lamented the neglect of *swabhasa* education. They opposed the use of English as the medium of instruction in education not for purely nationalistic reasons. They could in fact grasp quite clearly that the best features of Western culture and civilization could only be imbibed by those who had already acquired proficiency in their mother tongue. According to Ponnambalam Arunachalam, the use of English as the medium of instruction in schools had led to serious debilitating psychological consequences on the nation as a whole.<sup>15</sup> He also vehemently deplored the gulf between the English educated and the rest which was endangering the social fabric.<sup>16</sup>

In 1944, J.R.Jayawardena moved in the State Council that the medium of instruction in schools should be Sinhala, with the long term objective of making Sinhala the official language. Later on, the issue of the replacement of English as the official language, which was understood only by 6 per cent of the population, with *swabhasa*, worked itself intensely into the socio-political fabric. In the early 1950's almost all political parties, ranging from the U.N.P., S.L.F.P. and the F.P. to the T.C. and the L.S.S.P. had accepted in principle the need to replace English. But the issue was whether it was to be replaced by Sinhala, or both Sinhala and Tamil. When the M.E.P., led by S.W.R.D.Bandaranaike advocated Sinhala as the official language<sup>17</sup> and won a landslide victory at the General Elections of 1956 and introduced legislation to make Sinhala the official language, the relations between the Sinhala and Tamil communities became strained. Later developments resulted in Sinhala-Tamil riots of 1958. It is well-known that after the riots Bandaranaike entered into an agreement with the F.P. leader, S.J.V.Chelvanayakam, to grant a certain amount of autonomy to Tamils and allow the reasonable use of the Tamil language in official transactions. But due to the pressure

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<sup>15</sup> Saratchandra Wickramasooriya, 'Decoration before Dress: A Study of Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam's Attitudes to Colonial English Education in Sri Lanka', *Ceylon Historical Journal*, vol.25, nos.1 & 2, (1978), pp.213-238.

<sup>16</sup> Ponnambalam Arunachalam, *op.cit.* pp.292-93.

<sup>17</sup> Even the U.N.P. led by John Kotalawala, in its election campaign vouched that Sinhala only will be made the official language. However, at an election meeting in Kokuvil in Jaffna Kotalawala stated that he was going to give parity of status to both Sinhala and Tamil as official languages. But with the growing demand for Sinhala only on the part of Sinhala voters, he went back on the previous proclamations. In the course of the subsequent election campaign Kotalawala assured the people that if the U.N.P. was re-elected to power, the first bill he would introduce was the Sinhala only Bill.

brought in by the U.N.P. as well as some of the groups which supported the M.E.P., Bandaranaike had to abandon his plans. Sadly a struggle that should have been directed against colonial and imperial influences by all communities the Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and others-took a communal form after 1956.

The official language issue has been an important factor in the cultural dimensions of the ethnic conflicts until the movement for a separate state for Tamils manifested itself in 1976. But the ethnic conflict had ramifications beyond cultural cleavages, such as the fear of curtailment of Government employment for Tamils, especially in areas where there was a Sinhala majority. Taking culture as a special factor, it has to be emphasized that Tamil Hindu cultural elements had been to a considerable extent successfully integrated with the Sinhala Buddhist culture for centuries. There was no domination by the Sinhala Buddhist culture or the Hindu Tamil culture over the other. There was co-existence as equals, which resulted, not in one supplanting the other but in each supplementing and enriching the other. This cannot be said of the influence of Western cultures on both Sinhalese and Tamil cultures.

While *swabhava* and the implementation of the Sinhala only policy became sensitive issues in 1956, resulting in occasional conflicts between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, and disturbed the equilibrium of ethnic forces within the Sri Lankan territorial entity, there existed a small but very powerful social category, who resented the *swabhava* policy altogether, whether it was Sinhala or both Sinhala and Tamil. This category was the English speaking upper middle class, who spoke English even at home, and patterned their lives and interests on those of the former British colonial masters. This was indeed a special cultural and linguistic group of Sinhala and Tamil peoples. Their interests surfaced in the body politic only in a small way, at least in the period between 1956 to 1977. It may be that it was the representatives of this group who attempted a coup in 1962 to overthrow the Sirimavo Bandaranaike's government.

Although the *swabhava* issue resulted in tensions and conflicts, it led to the effective introduction of Sinhala as well as Tamil as media of instruction in education up to the University level and opened up opportunities for rural children. Even in university education *swabhava* became the predominant media of instruction, particularly in Social Sciences and Humanities streams. Several texts were translated from English to Sinhala and Tamil. Along with this shift, Hindu Culture, Buddhist Civilization, Arabic and Islamic Culture were accepted as subjects in higher education. There was also a resurgence of Sinhala as well as Tamil literary activity, dance forms, drama and music. Buddhist as well as Hindu religious rituals gained greater importance. The post-1956 period also witnessed the proliferation of translations of a large number of works on Marxism, which contributed to the politicization of youth to a great extent.

With the politicization of culture in and immediately after 1956 and the transfer of political power mainly to the Sinhala-speaking Buddhist population, religio-cultural nationalism became a viable political force. This phenomenon to some extent contributed to the gradual transformation of the attitude of Sri Lankan society towards Western values.

The post-1956 governments particularly the M.E.P. government of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and the S.L.F.P. led governments of Sirimavo Bandaranaike, were receptive to populist pressure and socialist ideology. They created the atmosphere for many political, social and cultural changes, but the changed socio-cultural setting had its own limits. The new elite group, which emerged from the supporters of these governments, were keen to amass wealth through political patronage, which in turn changed their attitude to socialist measures. As they rose higher and higher in the social ladder, some of them at least wanted their children to embrace superficial values of the Western culture, which they had rejected earlier. Some of the products of the 1956 change, having benefited from the change and secured good jobs and social position, also had changed their values once they secured their position. For example, most government or semi-government institutions, to which they were recruited, offered them career progress and assimilated them into the establishment if they were competent in English and were willing to adjust themselves to the operational apparatus, which was to some extent a continuation from the Colonial period. Perhaps some of these products of post-1956 change, who climbed the social ladder and established themselves in careers or in business, were among the ardent supporters of the post-1977 U.N.P. government of J.R. Jayawardena, which virtually reversed the post-1956 trends.

On the other hand, there was a large group of "children of 1956 change", whose aspirations were shattered. Irrespective of the receptivity to adopt a socialist programme while encouraging indigenous education and promoting indigenous culture, all post-1956 governments politicized the employment avenues. Besides, there was very little employment generated in society. The proportion of population of young dependants in the age group of 0-15 years rose from 37 per cent in 1946 to 42 per cent in 1963. In 1969/70 a proportion as high as 83 per cent of the total number unemployed belonged to the age category of 18-24 years.<sup>18</sup> It was mainly these circumstances that led to the insurgency of 1971 which was spearheaded by unemployed Sinhala educated youth. It may be that similar conditions triggered off the L.T.T.E. and other movements among the Tamil youths.

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<sup>18</sup> H.M. Gunasekara, 'The Economy of Sri Lanka 1948-73', *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, vol. VI, nos. 1 & 2, (1974), pp. 74-75.



The post-1977 era has witnessed drastic changes in the socio-political atmosphere. The establishment of an executive Presidency, the suppression of opposition forces, "liberalization of the economy", coupled with the encouragement of private enterprise even in areas such as education, and J.R.Jayawardena's pro-Western policies, seem to have resulted in economic prosperity and affluence, but at the same time eroded social and cultural values to an unprecedented degree. As Jayawardena has stated on several occasions, he created an atmosphere for anybody to make money. This "anybody" turned out to be a small segment of the population, but the policy changed the attitudes of the whole society in favour of predominantly pecuniary interests and consumerism. A 'business culture' took root in the country.

But the hard fact is that by the second quarter of 1990 the unemployment rate, even after the North and the East figures were excluded, had risen to 16.2 per cent.<sup>19</sup> The pro-Western attitudes and the importance given to the English-educated elite kept out the rural youth from the mainstream of politics. Their employment prospects were shattered. The tensions in the body politic found expression on and off in political violence, both by the extremist opponents of the Government and, on the part of the government, in its suppression of opposition and revolt.

Besides the post-election harassment of opponents, the earliest instance of the surfacing of tensions under the J.R.Jayawardena government was the anti-Tamil riots of August 1977, just one month after his electoral victory. In addition to arson and looting, well over 100 people were killed. About 35,000 persons sought protection in the refugee camps, which had been set up by the defence forces in many parts of the island during the troubled period. While the government played parochial partisan politics and accused the defeated political parties of arousing communal feelings,<sup>20</sup> it took one month for the government to contain the riots, even with its five sixth parliamentary majority. This caused some political observers to suspect that communal issues were a welcome distraction for the rulers. Six years after, in July 1983, communal violence affecting many Tamils pervaded the body politic. This was a sequel to the massacre of armed forces at Tirunelveli by Tamil guerilla groups headed by the L.T.T.E. an organization, which was first heard of in July 1975, when Alfred Durayappah, a former mayor and the M.P. for Jaffna was murdered. Partly as a result of the 1983 violence, the movement for a separate state for Tamils, articulated by the T.U.L.F. in 1976, was taken over actively by the groups headed by the L.T.T.E., which advocated violent action against the Sri Lankan armed forces, and later, against on Sinhala and Muslim civilians in the North and Eastern provinces and in regions bordering these provinces.

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<sup>19</sup> *Quarterly Labour Force Survey*, Department of Census and Statistics, (1990).

<sup>20</sup> Sun, August 24, 1977, *Ceylon Daily News*, August 25 and 27, 1977.

The extent to which the cultural factors have contributed to the ethnic conflict and violence perpetrated by Sinhala groups against the Tamils and Tamil groups against the Sinhalese is an important question, the answers to which may vary. However, besides language, other cultural factors have never been serious obstructions for harmony between Sri Lankan Tamil Hindus and Sinhala Buddhists. They have lived together in harmony for thousands of years in the island except for brief periods. Hindu gods have been assimilated into the Buddhist pantheon, the best example of which is the recognition of the Hindu god of war, Karthikeya or Skandha, as the Kataragama deity of the Sinhala Buddhists. Religious strife, even of a polemical nature between Sinhala Buddhists and Hindus, has been rare. In arts and crafts, literature, drama, dress and attitudes there are more similarities than differences.

At the same time it has to be noted that a strong Sinhala Buddhist consciousness and equally strong Tamil consciousness are key features in the Sinhala and Tamil societies respectively. This feature became more visible from the last three decades of the nineteenth century with the Buddhist as well as the Hindu religious revival which were reactions against Christian missionary enterprise. On the eve of political independence in 1948 and after, Sinhala and Tamil consciousness pervaded the body politic in virulent form and the language issue which surfaced violently only gave expression to the sentiments of both communities. It also became an issue of a wider political conflict due to the limitation of employment opportunities as a result of the slow rate of economic development in post-independent Sri Lanka. The present antagonistic attitude of the L.T.T.E. towards the Tamil-speaking Muslims in the North and the East is a clear example of the fact that the language issue in previous decades was only a passing phase.

The extremist armed struggle for a separate Tamil state in the North and the East gathered momentum during the last decade. In spite of the fact that the L.T.T.E. with its built-up armed strength had adopted fascist tactics of exterminating their key opponents among the Tamil community and resorted to extortion, forced recruitment, desecration of some of the Buddhist and Muslim religious shrines and the massacre of innocent Muslims and Sinhala civilians, the demand for a separate state has strengthened a strong Tamil consciousness. In the past, due to minor cultural differences and caste factors, the Tamil community was divided into Jaffna Tamils, Trincomalee Tamils, Mannar Tamils and Batticaloa Tamils. But the emergence of a strong Tamil consciousness has submerged these differences, resulting in a belief of collectivity of Tamil-speaking persons. Even the differences between the Indian Tamils in the plantation sector and Sri Lankan Tamils are being gradually reduced.

It is certainly a good sign that cleavages between different groups of Tamils in Sri Lanka are disappearing. But what is alarming for the Sinhala Buddhists as well as for the Muslims is the L.T.T.E.'s attempt to advocate pan-Tamilian nationalism outside Sri Lanka. The political-cultural space in which the L.T.T.E. desires to carve out a long-

lasting niche for itself is no doubt pan-Tamilian solidarity. Particularly, the culture of the post-1990 L.T.T.E. can be distinguished by two salient and essential festivals: Muthamizh Vizha and Maveerar Thinam. The former exalts the Tamil language, the latter "the great warriors" of the Tamils in South India. Prabhakaran, who commands the L.T.T.E militarily, demonstrates his commitment to the ideals signified by these festivals by personally appearing at them.<sup>21</sup>

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The Muslims of Sri Lanka, 7.5 per cent of the total population,<sup>22</sup> have generally adopted a policy of peaceful co-existence with both Sinhala and Tamil communities throughout history. Culturally there are greater differences between the Muslims and the Sinhalese, or the Muslims and the Tamils than between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. They are also very much concerned about their own culture and the community feeling among them is stronger than among the Sinhalese or the Tamils. Until recently, they have maintained a low profile in respect of political issues owing to their commercial interests and they have avoided any overt involvement in Sinhala-Tamil ethnic conflicts. However, with the L.T.T.E. terror tactics for a separate state for Tamils in the North and the East, which intensified from 1985 onwards, the Muslims in these regions have suffered to a considerable extent. In various incidents in areas such as Akkaraipattu, Muttur, Valacchenai, Kattankudi, Arayipattu and Mannar, several Muslims were killed by the L.T.T.E. As a by-product of Tamil militancy, a Muslim militancy has also surfaced, particularly in the Eastern Province, after 1985. This has arisen as a spontaneous response against the domination of armed Tamil groups. Being victims of Tamil separatist violence, the Muslims of the North and the East formed Mosque Committees of the local settlements to find solutions to their immediate problems. Federations of mosque associations, in which several mosque committees joined, were formed in Kattankudi, Muttur, Kinniya, Kalmunai and Erukkalampidy, and these mosque committees were the basis for the growth of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress in 1987/88.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Taraki, 'The L.T.T.E.'s Culture', *Sunday Island*, 1st December, 1991.

<sup>22</sup> Source: *Department of Census and Statistics*, (1981).

<sup>23</sup> For details see S.H.Hasbullah, 'Muslims and the Ethnic Conflict: Dynamics of Muslim Politics, with Special reference to the Indo-Lanka Accord', *International Conference on Ethnic Peace Accords*, Colombo, Sri Lanka, July 25-27, (1991).

The socio-political tensions and conflicts in predominantly Sinhala areas surfaced on an unprecedented scale in the J.V.P. insurgencies of 1971 and 1987-89. The leadership for both insurrections was provided particularly by educated unemployed Sinhalese rural youth. Of the cadres of the J.V.P. more than 80 per cent were Buddhist by birth. As mentioned earlier, while the aspirations of most of the 'children of 1956 change' were shattered in subsequent years the aspirations of those who were privileged enough to benefit from that change rose higher and higher. Most of those beneficiaries later on identified themselves, or aspired to be identified, with the elite and the rich. This category looked up to the English educated professional and business upper middle classes. The established Marxist movements, represented by the C.P., the L.S.S.P. and several other small parties who stood for equality and for a socialist economy, were also dominated by the English-educated upper middle class individuals. Although the tactics adopted by the J.V.P. were ruthless and unacceptable by any standards, the J.V.P. movement may be understood as a movement in which the Sinhala-educated unemployed youth asserted themselves in order to transform society and the economy to their own advantage.

The second insurgency of 1987-89 was worse than the 1971 episode. Perhaps the greater degree of the alienation and anger of the Sinhala-educated rural youth after 1977 than before 1971, may have contributed to the violent nature of the second insurrection. The socio-political changes after 1977 ushered in an era in which a good knowledge of English enhanced one's potential for employment than in any other era in post-independent Sri Lanka. This was one of the factors which destroyed the aspirations of even the very bright youth from the rural sector. Yet, it must be emphasized that the J.V.P. at least for tactical reasons, avoided the *swabhasa* language issue. In fact the J.V.P. overtly stood for a broader language policy. Addressing a public rally opposite the Wellawatta textile mills in mid 1982, Wijeweera stated that if the J.V.P. was voted to power at the Presidential Elections of 1982, the teaching of major foreign languages including English, to students would be among the salient features of the party programme of action.<sup>24</sup> In September 1988, in the short-lived United Front's National Programme aimed at defeating the U.N.P., the J.V.P. accepted equality among various races as a solution to the ethnic problem, and categorically stated that their separate languages should be treated equally. It accepted the right to receive education in any national language and the freedom to transact business with the Government or with the rest of the community in any national language.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Rohan Gunaratne, *Sri Lanka: A Lost Revolution*, I.F.S. Kandy (1990), p.155.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p.65.

While the J.V.P.'s overtly expressed language policy was broad, the Party generally adopted an anti-Indian stance from its inception.<sup>26</sup> The fourth of the series of five indoctrination lectures given to new members of the J.V.P. in 1968-71, viz. the lecture on 'Indian Expansionism', advocated a hostile attitude towards the large Indian expatriate communities of traders and workers in Sri Lanka, and other neighbors of India. According to the J.V.P., these groups were made use of by India as a fifth column. It has to be emphasized that the lecture on 'Indian Expansionism' was aimed at mobilizing various Sinhala groups, whose employment opportunities were limited. However, during the 'democratic phase' of the J.V.P., from 1977-1983, the class on 'Indian Expansionism' was replaced by a class on the 'History of the Party', but the former was re-introduced once the Party went underground after it had been proscribed in 1983.

On the whole it seems that the 'Theory of Indian Expansionism', coupled with the idea that a revolutionary had always to be a patriot, has served as one of the main mobilizing platforms of the J.V.P. As Chandraprema has pointed out, there had been noticeable changes in this theory. Sometimes the object of hate and fear was the government of India seated in the north; this particularly surfaced in the Indo-Lanka Accord period. At other times it was the Tamilian nationalist movement in southern India.<sup>27</sup> In the lecture on the 'Indian Expansionism', the J.V.P. even accused the Tamil plantation workers of having usurped the most salubrious climatic zone in the country for themselves, while the Sinhala *chena* cultivators sweated it out in the scrub jungles of the Dry Zone. The lecture also emphasized the "Indian cultural aggression" on Sri Lanka, particularly in the form of Hindu and Tamil movies, literature and music.<sup>28</sup>

The J.V.P.'s stand against the Tamil separatist movement in the North and the East, particularly after 1984, was part of its disapproval of the Tamilian nationalist movements in Southern India. In a J.V.P. leaflet printed on 6th December 1984, Wijeweera alleged that the American foreign policy makers were also involved in the Tamil separatist movement which was supported by the Tamilnadu Government. In this leaflet Wijeweera made a differentiation between the Indian central Government and the Tamilnadu State Government. According to Wijeweera, the objective of the American

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<sup>26</sup> For example, when Wijeweera wrote the book on Solutions to the *Tamil Eelam Struggle* which was published in 1986, the J.V.P. adopted a more liberal attitude towards India.

<sup>27</sup> C.A.Chandraprema, *Sri Lanka: The Year of Terror, The J.V.P. Insurrection 1987-1989*, Colombo, (1991), p.78.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, pp.84-85.

support for the Tamil separatist movement was to destabilize India. In fact Wijeweera categorically stated that the Central Government of India and the people of Sri Lanka had a common interest in defeating this American conspiracy to divide the two nations.

But this position completely changed after 1986 when the J.V.P. discovered that anti-Indianism could be a massive mobilizing force when combined with the opposition to Indian inspired 'solutions' to the Tamil question.<sup>29</sup> The J.V.P. also vehemently opposed the demand for a separate state in the North and the East by Tamil militants. In its pamphlets and posters, it even accused President J.R.Jayawardena's government of being soft towards the Tamil separatists.

The J.V.P., along with the C.P. and the N.S.S.P., was proscribed on 31st July 1983 by the government on the charge that these parties had been involved in the ethnic violence of July '83. But there is hardly any evidence to support this accusation. In a letter sent to the President on 8th October 1983, Rohana Wijeweera categorically stated that the J.V.P. was totally opposed to any brand of communalism - Sinhala or Tamil - and also that the J.V.P. would fight against communal violence without any hesitation.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, in some of the proclamations of the J.V.P., it accused the S.L.F.P. and the U.N.P. of exploiting the racial conflict, and stated that both these parties promised a privileged status to one ethnic group over the other, and had linguistic and religious biases instead of governing the country on the basis of equality.<sup>31</sup> In the ill-fated United Front's National Programme produced by the J.V.P. in September 1988 to defeat the U.N.P., equality among various races was accepted, and the programme categorically stated that their separate languages would be treated equally. It also accepted the right of any race to receive education in any national language, and the freedom to transact business with the government or with others in society in any national language.<sup>32</sup>

While the J.V.P. had adopted a different stance on India and the ethnic issue on different occasions, the movement was certainly anti-systemic. Chandraprema is correct when he states that it was the only genuine anti-systemic political grouping in independent Sri Lanka.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, pp.88-90.

<sup>30</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, *op.cit*, pp.195-196.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p.248.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p.265.

<sup>33</sup> Chandraprema, *op.cit*, pp.72-77.

But Chandraprema certainly oversimplifies the phenomenon of the J.V.P. violence when he argues that violence "was a manifestation of a very indigenous trend deeply rooted in the mass psychology of the Sinhalese".<sup>34</sup> While attempting to arrive at a fashionable sociological view, he further states that the use of organized violence as a necessary evil, has been very much part of the Sinhala tradition.<sup>35</sup> To substantiate his view Chandraprema brings forth beliefs regarding *niraya* or the *narakadiya* (hell), *yamapallas* (those who inflict punishment in hell), *suniyam* and *kodivin* (rituals which have been used to invoke curses on wrong doers), *dasa vada* or ten tortures, and the *vada tis deka* or thirty two tortures prevalent among some sections of the Sinhalese. In order to substantiate his views, he even cites the Sri Lankan flag, where the lion is depicted clutching a sword, as symbol of aggression. He also cites several legends in the *Mahavamsa*, such as the Vijayan legend and the Dutthagamani legend, to prove his point.<sup>36</sup> If such simplistic views on the J.V.P. violence or even the counter insurgency violence are to be proved, "lamp-post killings" and atrocious and vile massacres of innocent civilians by the L.T.T.E. may also have to be explained in terms of a phenomenon of violence in the Hindu or Tamil tradition, such as the goddess Bhadrakali's activities of divine destruction. Similarly, the violence in the Christian world may have to be traced to the Crusades, or to the burning at the stake of thinkers like Giordano Bruno and Lucilio Vanini during the period of the Inquisition in Rome. The point to be emphasized here is that some of the fashionable Western sociological views on religions like Buddhism, faithfully followed by Chandraprema (and several others of course) do not help one to arrive at correct conclusions of the cultural ethos of traditional societies like that of the Sri Lankans.

Although the J.V.P. cadres had been largely recruited from the culturally estranged Sinhala Buddhist rural youth, the movement neither capitalized on the religious sentiments nor advocated cultural revivalism. At least the main professed aim of the J.V.P. was the elimination of the social injustices of the capitalist system. Rohana Wijeweera, in an issue of *Ginipupura*, stated: "Every state has its own class nature. The class basis of the Sri Lankan state is made up of individuals who profess a variety of religions. Thus it is not really possible for the state to have one religion. Religion is at all times a purely personal activity of a citizen. Yet, every exploitative class state places one religion above all others... The prominence given to religion by bourgeois governments is a class manipulation to trick the masses in order to secure and defend the existing system of exploitation and to mislead and delude the masses. This capitalist

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p.123.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, pp.118-124.

government of Sri Lanka<sup>37</sup> will continue the same process, just as the previous governments did.... Behind the screen of the wheel of righteousness (*Dharmacakra*), the book of preaching (*banapota*) the cross and the Bible are the rifles, bayonets and bombs aimed at the masses to oppress them".<sup>38</sup> On an earlier occasion, Wijeweera criticized Colvin R.De Silva, the architect of the 1972 Republican Constitution, for having introduced a clause accepting Buddhism as the State religion.<sup>39</sup>

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Some aspects of the cultural conflicts in the Sri Lankan socio-political milieu, though not surfacing directly in the form of a political struggle like that of the movement of the J.V.P., manifested themselves in the recent debate on the *Jatika Chintanaya*. The term *Jatika Chintanaya* was first used by Gunadasa Amarasekara in an article of the *Sunday Divayina* in 1986. Later, he and Nalin de Silva have elaborated the theme of the *Jatika Chintanaya*. The theme has not been defined, and according to Nalin de Silva, the *Jatika Chintanaya* has no definition because "it is a continuous cycle of related events". The basic assumption of the *Jatika Chintanaya* is that "knowledge is relative to the senses, mind and culture".<sup>40</sup>

Both Gunadasa Amarasekara and Nalin de Silva have popularized the *Jatika Chintanaya* through their main publications *Ganadura Madiyama Dakinemi Arunalu*<sup>41</sup> ("A Streak of Light in the Midnight Gloom"), *Arunalu Seyin Arunodaya*<sup>42</sup> ("From Streak of Light to Dawn"), *Jatiya, Sanskrutiya ha Chintanaya*<sup>43</sup> ("Nation, Culture and Thinking") and several other writings and interviews, particularly in the national press.

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<sup>37</sup> Wijeweera here refers to J.R.Jayawardena's government.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Rohan Gunaratna, *op.cit.*, p.75. I have slightly modified Rohan Gunaratne's translation, without losing its meaning.

<sup>39</sup> Rohan Gunaratne, *ibid.*, p.140.

<sup>40</sup> Nalin De Silva, *The Island*, 20th July 1991; See also Gunadasa Amarasekara, *Desatiya*, February 28, 1990, p.26.

<sup>41</sup> Gunadasa Amarasekara, *Ganadura Madiyama Dakinemi Arunalu*, Nugegoda (1988).

<sup>42</sup> Gunadasa Amarasekara, *Arunalu Seyin Arunodayata*, Maharagama, (1991).

<sup>43</sup> Nalin De Silva, *Jatiya, Sanskrutiya Ha Chintanaya*, Maharagama, 1991.



Though they have highlighted the *Jatika Chintanaya* in the recent past, as Amarasekara himself has stated, it is not a new concept.<sup>44</sup> There have been numerous attempts by Anagarika Dharmapala, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Munidasa Kumaratunga, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and Martin Wickramasinghe to articulate the concept of the *Jatika Chintanaya* in various fields.<sup>45</sup> Both Amarasekara and Nalin have been much influenced by the writings of Dharmapala and indeed, they do not hide that fact. Yet, irrespective of what Amarasekara has clearly stated, a few of the critics hostile to the *Jatika Chintanaya* have cynically suggested that it has become the property of one or two individuals.<sup>46</sup>

Some of the views of Gunadasa Amarasekara and Nalin de Silva may be summarized as follows: (a) As a result of the colonial experience, Sri Lankans have become a nation of imitators in everything they do, unable to think independently and make their own choices<sup>47</sup> (b) Moral and ethical values are not universal in the strict sense, but are culture-based (c) The Marxist socialist movement in Sri Lanka did not take root in the hearts and minds of the people because the Marxist ideology was introduced into the country in an alien form (d) The nation will have to maintain its identity, or *Jatika Chintanaya*, before it becomes part of a global village or before it accepts the *Loka Chintanaya* (e) Sri Lanka's heritage is a Sinhala Buddhist heritage, and the multi-national and multi-religious concept is basically an alien concept imposed on the country (f) Sri Lanka should be an integrated nation, and the core of that nation's culture should be Sinhala Buddhist. The Tamils and the Muslims should, while retaining their identity, develop their own cultural traits under the umbrella of Sinhala Buddhist culture (g) For the realization of the *Jatika Chintanaya*, *Jatika Arthikaya*, or the national economy, has to be built up, basing the traditional rural sector which has been neglected and be fully integrated into the economy. The urban economy should be re-shaped according to rural needs and not the other way round.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Gunadasa Amarasekara, *Aranalu Seyin*, op.cit, p.156.

<sup>45</sup> Gunadasa Amarasekara, *The Island* of 7th, 15th and 20th October, 1991.

<sup>46</sup> See Simon Navagattagama, '*Seemasahita Jatika Chintanaya*', *Sunday Divayina*, 21 July 1991.

<sup>47</sup> As mentioned at the beginning of this essay, several have articulated this view from the late 19th century.

<sup>48</sup> *The Island*, 20th July 1991 and 7th, 15th and 22nd October 1991; *Sunday Divayina*, August 18, 1991; Gunadasa Amarasekara, '*Aranalu Seyin*'... op.cit, pp. 71-102, pp. 165-176.

While the above are common ground to the *Jatika Chintanaya* articulated by Gunadasa Amarasekara and Nalin de Silva, one notes some contradictions between their views. For example, Nalin de Silva in one instance accepts the class cleavages, when he states that though English is important, it is being used nowadays as a class tool to suppress the poor of the Sinhala or Tamil speaking masses.<sup>49</sup> But the class conflicts are completely overshadowed in the idea of the predominance of the Sinhala Buddhist culture and polity. On the other hand, Amarasekara totally rejects the class basis of the economy.<sup>50</sup>

One can also question the view that Buddhism is exclusively for the Sinhalese and whether such an idea conforms to the tenets of Buddhists. Is it possible to promote the *Jatika Chintanaya* in a practical sense politically. And if so, what type of groups will make use of it to gain their political ends? What would be the consequences? are also questions that pose themselves as relevant in this context. Culture, when unpoliticized, is the creative expression of people, and the very moment it is politicized, it tends to result in divisive tendencies. 'Pure Sinhala Buddhist thinking' may also obstruct going beyond the boundaries of past ethnic conflicts and present travails and may prevent peaceful cultural co-existence. In passing, it may be mentioned here that Amarasekara uses the term 'Tamil racialists' (*Dravida jativadins*),<sup>51</sup> adding confusion to the relative use of the term 'racialist' (*jativadins*). What is important is to create an awareness that one must respect the cultures of ethnic and religious groups other than one's own, and that every such group has a right to the maintenance of its identity and cultural traditions and to develop its own cultural life.<sup>52</sup>

Though the *Jatika Chintanaya* has these shortcomings, it has performed an important social function during the last few years in highlighting and reiterating the dangers of imitating Western values and superficial cultural traits. Saratchandra has lucidly pointed out its merits in the following words. The *Jatika Chintanaya* can be regarded "as a call to the intelligentsia to be conscious in their thinking and their activities, of their identity as a nation, their national self-respect, and in the barrage of

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<sup>49</sup> Nalin De Silva, *The Island*, 20th July 1991.

<sup>50</sup> Gunadasa Amarasekara, 'Arunalu Seyin', *op.cit.*, p.162.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p.170.

<sup>52</sup> Three important articles along this argument are: A.J.Gunawardena, "Some Questions about Multi-Culturalism", Radhika Coomaraswamy, Towards Multi-Cultural Society and Reggie Siriwardena Towards Multi-Culturalism in Sri Lanka', in *Sri Lankan Culture*, A Symposium, Colombo, (1991), pp.1-19.

technological culture that we are subjected to today, to be discriminating in the choice of what can be absorbed into our culture and what should be rejected, so that there will emerge something in which the elements are integrated into a wholesome natural flowering of what we have inherited from the past, enriched by what we can gain from the present".<sup>53</sup> More important, of course, in the context of present crisis, is to pose the question how best the ideal "one Sri Lankan nation" could be achieved in a practical and political sense.

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The creative arts too, to some extent, have focused on the socio-political conflicts in the recent past. The initial trend under British rule was to extol the virtues of traditional Sinhala culture as against the Western influences. Among others, Piyadasa Sirisena and A. Simon de Silva in their novels, John de Silva in his dramas and S. Mahinda in his poetry, championed this course in the first half of the twentieth century. In the post 1956-era, the trend changed and the idea of "Socialist realism" became fashionable. This resulted in the proliferation of poster and slogan type creative works directed in attacking the social evils of the capitalist system.

In more recent years, the novel, the short story, drama and poetry have been used much more than earlier to depict the ramifications of Sri Lankan socio-political conflicts. Of the novels, Sugatapala de Silva's *Ballo Bat Kati*<sup>54</sup> ("Dogs will have Their Day") portrays the rivalries between the rightist and leftist politicians during an election campaign and highlights the manner in which a rightist politician utilized the state machinery to secure victory. In the novel, the author also analyses the weaknesses of the leftist politicians as well as the leftist movement. Somaratne Balasooriya's *Vap Magula*<sup>55</sup> ("Ploughing Festival") is an indictment of politicians whose ostensible development programmes in rural areas are mere tamashas and fanfare. Sumitra Rahubaddha's *Kelimalala*<sup>56</sup> ("Playground") is another notable creative depiction of the hypocrisy of politicians. *Rajapaksa Walawwa*<sup>57</sup> ("Rajapaksa Manor") by K. Jayatillake has as its theme the rise of a 'Lower caste' youth to the middle class as a result of the social

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<sup>53</sup> *The Sunday Observer*, July 7, (1991).

<sup>54</sup> Sugatapala de Silva, *Ballo Bat Kati*, Colombo (1976).

<sup>55</sup> Somaratne Balasooriya, *Vap Magula*, Colombo (1988).

<sup>56</sup> Sumitra Rahubaddha, *Keli Mandala*, Colombo (1984).

<sup>57</sup> K. Jayatillake, *Rajapaksa Walawwa*, Colombo (1984).

changes after mid 1950's. The story is unfolded as a conflict between two manors, or *walawwas*, one supporting social change and the other averse to these changes. Gunasena Vithana's *Pama Novi Vehapan Vahi Walawe*<sup>58</sup> ("Oh Rain Cloud! Shed your Showers without Delay") and *Viplavaye Kerali Karayo*<sup>59</sup> ("Revolutionary Fighters"), T.B. Illangaratne's *Peraliya*<sup>60</sup> ("The Change") are three other important novels which portray similar socio-political conflicts. K. Jayatillake's *Matu Sambandhai*<sup>61</sup> ("To be Continued"), A.V. Suraweera's *Heyiyammaruwa*<sup>62</sup> and *Noyan Putuni Gama Harada*<sup>63</sup> ("Son! Leave Not Your Village"), E.R. Saratchandra's *Heta Ecchara Kaluvara Na*<sup>64</sup> ("Tomorrow wont be so Dark") Gunadasa Amarasekara's *Asatya Katavak*<sup>65</sup> ("An Untrue Story") and *Premaye Satya Katavak*<sup>66</sup> ("A True Story of Love"), H.A. Seneviratne's *Mehema Noviyani Kisi Daka*<sup>67</sup> ("This Should Never Happen Again"), Sugathamuni Gnanasiri's *Ovuhu Nomaga Giyaha*<sup>68</sup> ("They Went Astray"), Sarath Ariyaratne's *Hetteve Kolaniya*<sup>69</sup> ("The Colony of Seventy"), Kulasena Fonseka's *Udu Sulanga*<sup>70</sup> ("Winds Above") are some of the novels which most sympathetically portray the aspirations of the youth who struggle to build a new equitable social order.

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<sup>58</sup> Gunasena Vithana, *Pama Novi Vahapan Vahi Walawe*, Colombo (1974).

<sup>59</sup> Gunasena Vithana, *Viplavaye Karali Karayo*, Colombo (1976).

<sup>60</sup> T.B. Illangaratna, *Peraliya*, Colombo (1972).

<sup>61</sup> K. Jayatillake, *Matu Sambandhai*, Colombo (1975).

<sup>62</sup> A.V. Suraweera, *Heyiyammaruwa*, Colombo (1971).

<sup>63</sup> A.V. Suraweera, *Noyan Putuni Gama Herada*, Colombo (1975).

<sup>64</sup> E.R. Saratchandra, *Heta Ecchara Kaluvara Na*, Colombo (1975).

<sup>65</sup> Gunadasa Amarasekara, *Asatya Katavak*, Colombo (1978).

<sup>66</sup> Gunadasa Amarasekara, *Premaye Satya Katavak*, Colombo (1973).

<sup>67</sup> H.A. Seneviratne, *Mehema Noviyani Kisi Daka*, Colombo (1973).

<sup>68</sup> Sugathamuni Gnanasiri, *Ovuhu Nomaga Giyaha*, Colombo (1972).

<sup>69</sup> Sarath Ariyaratna, *Hetteve Kolaniya*, Colombo (1987).

<sup>70</sup> Kulasena Fonseka, *Udu Sulanga*, Pannipitiya (1990).

H.A.Seneviratna's *Pem Kala Nohaki Geheniya*<sup>71</sup> ("The Woman Who Cannot Love") depicts the tragic tale of a rural girl who becomes a prostitute and a singer in a Colombo night-club through sheer poverty. Sunanda Mahendra's *Idoraya*<sup>72</sup> ("The Drought") too deals with the theme of socio-political conflicts and passes on the message for the formation of a government of peasants and workers.

Of the most important recent collections of short stories which contain stories dealing with social conflicts, inequalities and iniquities with the undertone of the need to change the society as well as the political system, special mention may be made to Gunadasa Amarasekara's *Gal Pilimaya ha Bol Pilimaya*<sup>73</sup> ("The Stone Statue and the Hollow Statue"), Dayasena Gunasingha's *Ketumati Hotale Ratriyak*<sup>74</sup> ("A Night in the Ketumati Hotel"), Somaratna Balasooriya's *Karattaya*<sup>75</sup> ("The Cart"), S.G.Punchihewa's *Danduwama*<sup>76</sup> ("The Punishment"), Jayatillaka Kammallaweera's *Kalu Sapattu*<sup>77</sup> ("Black Shoes") and *Minissu, Yakku Saha Deviyo*<sup>78</sup> ("Humans, Gods and Demons") and Chandraratna Bandara's *Kani Mandala Ginigat Da*.<sup>79</sup> ("The Day the roof caught Fire").

Over the last few decades some of the Sinhala poets, particularly of the younger generation, have expressed their feeling of unrest against the established social order. They have also emphasized the need for a drastic change in the political and social system in accordance with the aspirations of the poor segments of society. In some of their poetry the message is that youth, instead of waiting passively, should fight to eliminate social injustices through a revolution. As Meddegama has pointed out, in their poetry they have often made heroes and heroines of poor workers, estate labourers, beggars,

<sup>71</sup> H.A.Seneviratne, *Pem Kala Nohaki Gahaniya*, Colombo (1988).

<sup>72</sup> Sunanda Mahendra, *Idoraya*, Colombo (1978).

<sup>73</sup> Gunadasa Amarasekara, *Gal Pilimaya Ha Bol Pilimaya*, Colombo (1988).

<sup>74</sup> Dayasena Gunasinghe, *Katumati Hotale Ratriyak*, Colombo (1990).

<sup>75</sup> Somaratne Balasooriya, *Karattaya*, Dehiwala (1991).

<sup>76</sup> S.G.Punchihewa, *Danduwama*, Warakapola (1990).

<sup>77</sup> Jayatillaka Kammallaweera, *Kalu Sapattu*, Colombo (1985).

<sup>78</sup> Jayatillaka Kammallaweera, *Minissu, Yakku Saha Deviyo*, Colombo (1986).

<sup>79</sup> Chandraratne Bandara, *Kani Mandala Ginigat da*, Veyangoda (1990).

housemaids, prostitutes and similar characters. Some of the specific themes of such poetry collections are the weaknesses of the educational system, problems of unemployment, political interferences in day to day life, persecution, discrimination and racial violence.<sup>80</sup> In this regard particular reference may be made to Tilakratne Silva's *Deviyo Teti Gena Maha Polowata Eti*<sup>81</sup> ("Alarmed, Gods descend upon the Earth"), Buddhadasa Galappatti's *Para Wasa Ata*<sup>82</sup> ("Road Closed"), Monika Ruwanpatirana's *Thahanam Desayakin*<sup>83</sup> ("From a Forbidden Country") and *Angulimalage Sihinda*<sup>84</sup> ("Dreams of Angulimala"), Siri Kahawala's *Obe Gita Mage Kandulu*<sup>85</sup> ("Your Songs: My Tears"), Parakrama Kodituwakku's *Podi Malliye*<sup>86</sup> ("O! Younger Brother") and *Akikaru Putrayekuge Lokaya*<sup>87</sup> ("The World of a Disobedient Son"), Sarath Tennakoone's *Layime Hedawa*<sup>88</sup> ("The Shade of the Estate Shanty") and *Hendirikka Malak*<sup>89</sup> ("A Hendirikka Flower"), Ratnasiri Wijesinghe's *Biyavanan Ayyandi*<sup>90</sup> ("Elder Brother, Fear Not"), Kumara Hettiarachchi's *Ruvan Sakmana*<sup>91</sup> ("Golden

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<sup>80</sup> U.P.Meddegama, "Youth Unrest - A Modern Literary Perspective", paper read at the American Studies Association Seminar on youth unrest in Sri Lanka, October 18-19, (1991), Colombo, pp. 1-23.

<sup>81</sup> Tilakaratna Silva, *Deviyo Tetigena Mahapolowata Eti*, Colombo (1971).

<sup>82</sup> Buddadasa Galapatti, *Para Wasa Eta*, Colombo (1974).

<sup>83</sup> Monika Ruwan Patirana, *Tahanam Desayakin*, Colombo (1972).

<sup>84</sup> Monika Ruwan Patirana, *Angulimalage Sihina*, Colombo (1974).

<sup>85</sup> Siri Kahawala, *Obe Gita Mage Kandulu*, Colombo (1973).

<sup>86</sup> Parakrama Kodituwakku, *Podi Malliye*, Colombo (1972).

<sup>87</sup> Parakrama Kodituwakku, *Akikaru Putrayekuge Lokaya*, Nugegoda (1974).

<sup>88</sup> Sarat Tennakoon, *Layime Hedawa*, Nugegoda (1974).

<sup>89</sup> Sarat Tennakoon, *Hendirikka Malak*, Colombo (1976).

<sup>90</sup> Ratnasiri Wijesinghe, *Biya Novan Ayyandi*, Colombo (1979).

<sup>91</sup> Kumara Hettiarachchi, *Ruvan Sakmana*, Imaduwa (1989).

Walk"), Dharmasiri Rajapaksa's *Itin Sahodaravaruni*<sup>92</sup> ("Well! Comrades"), K. Ananda's *Nava Kelani Palama*<sup>93</sup> ("The New Kelani Bridge"), Tudor Amarasena's *Alugosuvage Sihinaya*<sup>94</sup> ("The Executioner's Dream"), Bandara Wewalagedara's *Arunodaya Kavi*<sup>95</sup> ("Poems at Dawn"), Dhammika Bandara's *Aho Mitravaruni*<sup>96</sup> ("Alas! Dear Friends") and Sudat Gamini Bandara's *Samichiya*<sup>97</sup> ("Friendly Discourse").

Of the creative arts, the drama has been the most powerful medium which has highlighted social conflicts and injustices in society. Though not given wide publicity and commercialized, Gamini Hattotuwegama's street drama or *Vidi Natya*, has always selected themes of socio-political conflicts and conflict of values for purposes of dramatization. Dharmasiri Bandaranayaka's *Dhawala Bhishana* ("Men without Shadows"), K.B. Herat's *Naga Gurula* ("The Griffin"), Sunanda Mahendra's *Socrates* and Parakrama Niriella's *Uttamavi* ("The Visit") deal with stories from foreign backgrounds, but are indictments of the oppressive and exploitative political and socio-economic systems. The nature and manner in which social injustices are perpetrated are also portrayed in Asoka Handagama's *Maghata* ("The Great Massacre"), R.R. Samarakoon's *Jailor Unnehe* ("Mr. Jailor"), Jayanta Chandrasiri's two plays *Ar* ("Hands") and *Mora* ("Shark") and Ranjit Dharmakeerti's *Modara Mola* ("The Mill at Mutuwal"). Somaratne Disanayaka's *Meepura Vasiyo* ("The city of Mice"), which is a parable dealing with animals, also aims at highlighting a political message.

In summing up this brief essay, it may be reiterated that there have been many ramifications of cultural and socio-political conflicts in Sri Lanka in the recent past. They have ranged from intellectual discourse, non-violent protests, manifestation in Parliamentary forum and at elections, ideological conflicts, portrayal in the creative arts to the most horrible forms of violence.

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<sup>92</sup> Dharmasiri Rajapaksa, *Itin Sahodaravaruni*, Colombo (1975).

<sup>93</sup> K. Ananda, *Nava Kelani Palama*, Colombo (1982).

<sup>94</sup> Tudor Amarasena, *Alugosuvage Sihinaya*, Colombo (1990).

<sup>95</sup> Bandara Wewalagedara, *Arunodaya Kavi*, Kuliyaipitiya (1989).

<sup>96</sup> Dhammika Bandara, *Aho Mitravaruni*, Colombo (1990).

<sup>97</sup> Sudat Gamini Bandara, *Samichiya*, Colombo (1990).