

Sri Lanka and Eelam:
90 Published Letters
[1981-2000]

Sachi Sri Kantha - 66 Letters
[and his critics - 24 Letters]

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[Numbered letters with asterisks were authored by Sachi Sri Kantha; Authors of other letters are indicated, following the titles.]

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1

Observations on the Madurai Tamil Conference*[Lanka Guardian, March 1, 1981]*

I write in reply to your comment under 'news background' on 'MGR and Tamil sub-plot' (LG, Feb.1, 1981). Since this comment contains so many inaccuracies, and as a Sri Lankan delegate who was an eye-witness to many of the scenes which had been referred to in the comment, I am compelled to reply for the benefit of the LG readers.

Prior to commenting on the incidents which occurred in Madurai, I would like to draw the attention of the readers to a sentence which gives a serious misinterpretation of events which occurred in 1974. I categorically deny your statement that, "...In 1974 at the last Conference several persons were killed in Jaffna when police fired on demonstrators shouting slogans against the Bandaranaike government and demanding Eelam". Firstly, the columnist had erred in equating the incident of Jan.10, 1974 with the demand of Eelam. Eelam demand **had not been originated** at that time, if political records of this island have to be believed. This demand was first put forward vehemently by S.J.V.Chelvanayakam, the leader of the TULF, when he contested the Kankesanthurai by-election, held on the **6th February 1975**. Eelam demand was officially resolved and unanimously adopted for the first National Convention of the TULF held at Vaddukoddai on **14th May 1976**.

Secondly, regarding the incidents of 10th Jan. 1974, I would prefer to quote from the 'Report of the Commission of Inquiry, on the Tragedy of January Tenth, 1974', published on 18th Feb. 1974. The Commission consisted of Mr.O.L.De Kretser, Mr.V.Manicavasagar (both former Judges of the Supreme Court) and the Rt.Rev.Dr. Sabapathy Kulandran (former Bishop in Jaffna). To quote the inferences made by this Commission,

"The irresistible conclusion we come to is that the police on this night was guilty of a violent and quite an unnecessary attack on unarmed citizens. We are gravely concerned that they lacked the judgement which we expected of policemen in a civilian police force whose duties call for tactful handling even in the most difficult situation.

"The evidence establishes that this was not all that took place that night. The police in their armed might roved the city assaulting whomsoever they came across for no better reason than that the people were doing what they were entitled to do.

"We are of opinion that those who suffered physical injury and material damage, and those who lost their lives were the innocent victims of a chain of events set in motion by a completely wrong and unwise decision on the part of the police officer who made it. We can find no justification at all for the police assault on defenseless and innocent citizens."

These inferences made by the learned Commission, do not vindicate the assertion made by the LG columnist that “Police fired on demonstrators shouting slogans against the Bandaranaike government and demanding Eelam”. I give the choice for the LG readers to pick out what is correct.

Regarding the events at Madurai Conference, being an eyewitness, I agree with the LG columnist, that “pro-TULF Tamil expatriates sought to ‘internationalize’ the issue and to a greater extent they had succeeded.” Though the exhibition stall organized by the Eelam supporters who traveled from UK and USA, was demolished on the instructions of Tamil Nadu government, the administration could not stop the activists pasting the posters depicting the “Jan. 10 incidents of 1974 Conference” all over the Madurai city, again on 7th night.

As a matter of fact, large crowds converging to Madurai city, gathered around the places where these posters were pasted; the posters themselves were different in colour, content and appeal. In fact most of the commoners were blaming the MGR administration, for not allowing them to know what had really happened in the 1974 Tamil Conference.

It is strange that LG columnist had not been informed of the speeches made by our two Tamil ‘Generals’ of J.R.Jayewardene. If Amirthalingam delivered a very restrained address at the Opening Ceremony on the 4th of January, it seemed to us, the Sri Lankan delegates, that Thondaman had played the role what Amir was expected to play. Thondaman’s address at this function was more political, exceeding the limits warranted for; and mind you, he was pleading for the Tamil minority community. He went to the extreme of quoting General De Gaulle’s sympathy towards the French-speaking Canadians living in Quebec.

Though our Speaker of Parliament, had been recognized by the LG columnist, as the Tamil-speaking Moslem MP, in my humble opinion, he did not perform well to bring repute for this compliment. Bakeer Markar, made a smattering speech in Tamil, mainly reading a lengthy text with awkward accent and unwarranted pauses. Many of our colleagues commented that, Professor Asher from the University of Edinburgh delivered a better impromptu address in Tamil for a full fifteen minutes!

Sachi Sri Kantha
Colombo 4.

2

Polls in the US Press [*Lanka Guardian*, Dec.1, 1982]

Many of the Sri Lankans might have seen how the *Newsweek* of Nov.1, 1982 reported the Sri Lanka’s Presidential election as “J.R.’s Sunday-Best vote for capitalism”. For the benefit of the *Lanka Guardian* readers, I’m providing below a sampling of how the major newspapers in USA covered the election.

New York Times of Oct.20th carried a four-column article by William Stevens with a caption, “It’s capitalism vs socialism in Sri Lanka Election Today”. Photos of J.R. and Kobbekaduwa also accompanied this lengthy article. And on Oct.22nd, the results of the election appeared in *New York Times* with a caption, “6 More Years of Capitalism for Sri Lanka.” The *Chicago Tribune* of Oct.22nd, carried the story with a not-so exciting title, “President retained in Sri Lanka voting”; but it reported, “Unofficial results gave Jayewardene 55 percent of the vote”; and *Boston Globe* of the same date also reported the same figure of 55 percent vote for J.R., with caption, “Sri Lanka election reaffirms capitalism”.

The *New York Times* of Sunday Oct.24th, in its weekly round-up of ‘The World’ had a smiling J.R.Jayewardene photo; again commented on the Presidential election with a caption, “East Goes West in Sri Lanka Vote”. However, the most interesting caption was provided by the *Wall Street Journal*, in its editorial of Oct.29th: “Sri Lanka Keeps Its Rascals In”. The opening paragraph of this editorial read:

“From Sweden to Massachusetts to El Salvador to Greece the trend among voters in those few countries with free elections is to throw the rascals out. But the citizens of Sri Lanka have just handed a solid re-election victory to President Junius Jayewardene in a contest that has important implications for Third World development policies”.

Another feature is that *Boston Globe* of Oct.22nd, also cited the anti-Tamil vote in a paragraph: “Jayewardene won most of the 22 election districts in this island country in the Indian Ocean. He did not win those with predominantly Tamil-or South Indian origin – population. The Tamils, who constitute about a fifth of Sri Lankans, boycotted the election.” Why *Boston Globe* reported this specifically, the readers can come to their own conclusions.

Sachi Sri Kantha
University of Illinois, Urbana, USA.

3

New Name in Science [*Lanka Guardian*, May 1, 1983]

It is rarely that a scientist of Sri Lankan origin gets recognized for his contributions in the universities of USA, the so-called citadels of scientific research. To date, apart from the two respected Sri Lankan names, Cyril Ponnampereuma (University of Maryland) and Muttiah Sundaralingam (University of Wisconsin), we haven’t seen another Sri Lankan name which made the mark of newsworthiness among the scientific elite journals, for their genuine contributions in the field of science. However, there had appeared another name, Ariyadasa Udagama, an associate professor of dental oncology at the University of Texas, which we could proudly add to the list of Ponnampereuma and Sundaralingam.

In the recent issue of the reputed *Journal of American Medical Association* (March 18, 1983, pp.1415-1416), Udagama is featured in the Medical News column, for developing a surgical methodology of ‘using tiny gold rings to permanently attach a life-like artificial nose to the face of a cancer patient’. According to Udagama, this procedure, “can be used on other persons who have lost facial or other body parts from illness or injury”; and the ring used ranged in diameter from 0.63 to 0.25 cm, depending on the amount of tissue available for an anchoring base.

Sachi Sri Kantha
University of Illinois, USA.

4

Reply to Shan

[*Lanka Guardian*, July 1, 1983]

I read with interest the veteran Leftist leader N.Sanmugathasan’s views on the Tamil problem (LG, May 1, 1983). I fear that Sanmugathasan still lies buried in his rhetorics such as “all bourgeois Tamil parties”, “reactionary forces”, “Sinhalese masses” and “armed struggle”. Though he is entitled to his views on the perennial problem of Sri Lanka, his de-emphasis of the extra-parliamentary struggles initiated by S.J.V.Chelvanayakam and Amirthalingam in mid-[nineteen] fifties is as silly as pleading that the plane built by Wright brothers cannot be used for mass transport of present-day era and hence their navigational effort is worthless. Many of us in the younger generation hold the view that the satyagraha campaigns, ‘sit-in’ at Galle Face (1956) and the anti-Establishment demonstrations (1961) are obviously the forerunners of contemporary volatile activism of hyperactive Tamil youths.

Chelvanayakam was the first leader to kindle Tamil nationalism and he did it in grand style by practising extra-parliamentary struggles which had the backing of the Tamil masses. He was successful in uniting the Hindus and Christians of the Tamil population under one umbrella. Incidentally Sanmugathasan does not mention the term ‘Tamil masses’ anywhere in his article. Doesn’t he recognize the presence of this class among the Tamil speaking population of this island?

Sachi Sri Kantha
University of Illinois, USA.

Letters 5-9: First Debate on Sri Lankan Troubles, with Jayantha Herath.

5

Thugs, You Say?

[*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, July 5, 1987]

In 'War Without End' [Editorial, June 14], you try to portray President Jayewardene as a man of principled reason and the Tamil rebels as thugs. Gentlemen, have you visited the Jaffna peninsula?

My family lives there. A few weeks ago I received a letter from my sister. She wrote that one of my high-school friends, Dr.Kathamuthu Visvaranjan of Jaffna General Hospital, had been killed near Palaly Army Base. He'd been asked to identify himself and while he was doing just that he was shot by a Sinhalese soldier standing right behind him. My friend was in his mid-thirties and had a child. Do you expect the child will grow up a friend of the Sinhalese army? For ten years there have been thousands of Tamil kids in Sri Lanka's Northern and Eastern regions growing up without fatherly love. The government's actions are breeding a new generation of rebels.

Dr.Sachi Sri Kantha
Faculty of Agriculture,
University of Tokyo,
Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo, Japan.

6

That Word Again

[*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, July 26, 1987]

I was very happy to see the remarks by Dr.Sachi Sri Kantha of the University of Tokyo. [July 5] He complains that in a commentary published in your June 14 issue you 'try to portray President Jayewardene as a man of principled reason and the Tamil rebels as thugs'. Dr.Sri Kantha, please consider the following and suggest an appropriate word to distinguish people who support such activities.

All of Sri Lanka's Tamil-speaking engineers and doctors, and more than 90% of the island's Tamil-speaking scientists – including Dr.Sachi Sri Kantha – received their first degrees from universities located in the areas where Sinhalese live. However, not a single student with Sinhala as his or her mother tongue was permitted to receive a degree from Jaffna University. All the Sinhalese living in Jaffna, including those who went to study at Jaffna University, were either killed, robbed or chased out of the area.

More than 80% of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka didn't live in Jaffna. They lived in harmony with the people in the rest of the island. But no Sinhalese or Muslims were allowed to do business or move freely in Jaffna. People in Jaffna discriminated against Tamils living in plantation areas and against low-caste Tamils. Villagers living in various parts of the country were robbed or threatened, public institutes destroyed.

The most suitable place for a Tamil homeland is Tamil Nadu, where more than 50 million Tamils live. In the 1950s and '60s, some people wanted to separate Tamil Nadu from India. The idea went nowhere then, but in considering the present Indian prime

minister's 'immediate relief supplies' of 200 grams of food per person in last month's Jaffna airdrop, I have to wonder whether Mr. Gandhi would not support such a proposal.

Jayantha Herath
Tokyo, Japan.

7

The Jaffna View

[*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, August 9, 1987]

I don't blame my fellow Sri Lankan Jayantha Herath [Letters, July 26] for the tone of his response to me. The fault lies with racist politicians. Discrimination along caste lines is not a custom restricted to Jaffna Tamils; for 40 years it caused havoc in the selection of Sri Lankan prime ministers. Why couldn't C.P.de Silva become premier after the assassination of S.W.R.D.Bandaranaike by a Buddhist priest in 1959? Some say it's difficult for Prime Minister Premadasa to aspire to the presidency: he wasn't born in the Sinhala Goigama caste which from 1947 to 1977 kept two feudal families – the Senanayakes and the Bandaranaiques – in power. Sri Lankans with Portuguese or Christian surnames (Perera, de Silva, Fernando, Matthews, etc.) have only a remote chance of reaching the 'throne'.

Mr. Herath should see the skeletons in the cupboards of Sinhalese society before casting stones at the Jaffna Tamils.

Dr. Sachi Sri Kantha
Tokyo, Japan

8

The Sri Lanka Troubles

[*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, October 2, 1987]

Dr. Sri Kantha [Letters, Aug.9] doesn't offer a suitable substitute for the word 'thugs' as used in your June 14 commentary. Instead he talks of discrimination and politicians. In fact, the civil war in Sri Lanka was caused entirely by attempts to distribute resources equally among the country's citizens. When such reforms are undertaken, an angry reaction from any relatively small number of people enjoying a large fraction of a country's total resources is unavoidable.

About 95% of Sri Lanka's free education facilities are concentrated in Jaffna and Colombo. More than 85% of the students live in rural areas outside those two centres. Though primary and secondary facilities aren't the same nationwide, everyone sits the same exam to get a higher education. Till 1973, students in at least 15 of Sri Lanka's 21 districts had no chance of entering the engineering, medicine and natural science institutes, filled by students from high-class families in Jaffna and Colombo. But in 1973, reformists opened the institutes to promising students from all over the country.

Those reforms also boosted the living standards of all Sri Lankans, including Tamil peasants, and this in turn affected wealthy Tamil and Sinhalese students who had had easy access to free higher education. With poor and rich people now competing for the same limited resources, fewer students from high-class families in and around Jaffna and Colombo got places in the institutes. Some Tamils misunderstood this, and formed small terrorist groups.

Though the present government halted it in 1978, the standardisation scheme did distribute education resources evenly among all citizens, including poor Tamils. An interesting footnote: Performance comparisons showed that students from rural areas always did better than others. Race made no difference.

Jayantha Herath
Tokyo, Japan

9

The Sri Lanka Troubles [*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, October 23, 1987]

So readers won't be taxed further with the facts of Sri Lanka's social ills, I will agree with the scholarly synopsis of Jayantha Herath [Letters, Oct.2]. What I like most is his reference to 'any relatively small number of people enjoying a large fraction of a country's total resources'. How true it seems now that those who have enjoyed their democracy and freedom during the last ten years of Dharmishta rule in Sri Lanka are a small segment consisting of ministers' minions, gem merchants, development project contractors and arms dealers. The peasants of Pallekelle, Point Pedro and Puttalam are still counting their pennies for daily bread!

Dr.Sachi Sri Kantha
Tokyo, Japan

10

The War in Sri Lanka [*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, Jan.18, 1988]

Dr.P.A.Samaraweera's views on the war in Sri Lanka [Letters, Nov.6] shouldn't go unchallenged. India played no role in the decision to pack the Sri Lankan armed forces with Buddhists in the 1960s. That policy created a rebel movement in northern Sri Lanka in the mid-1970s. Terrorism entered the scene in 1971, before the appearance of the Tamil Tigers. It was assumed to have been snuffed out with the 'neutralising' of about 15,000 young rebels by the Bandaranaike regime. But has terrorism in *southern* Sri Lanka subsided?

If the Tigers are to be blamed for the war and the violence, why was there rioting in Colombo after the Sri Lanka-India peace accord? Who assaulted Rajiv Gandhi while he

was reviewing a guard of honour in Sri Lanka? Who tried to kill UNP leaders in the Sri Lankan parliament last year?

Sachi Sri Kantha
Tokyo, Japan

11

The Veddah Revisited

[Asiaweek, Hongkong, June 17, 1988]

In 'Spirit People' [May 20], you say that according to legend the Veddahs of Sri Lanka 'are descended from the fabled founder of the Sinhala race, Prince Vijaya, who came from North India, 25 centuries ago and married a native princess'. [Actually] they're related to a wavy-haired Veda tribe living in Travancore, South India, and speaking a Malayalam dialect.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Tokyo, Japan

12

By Invitation Only

[Far Eastern Economic Review, Hongkong, June 30, 1988]

Bernard Wijedoru [Letters, 16 June] is barking up the wrong tree regarding the stationing of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka. In the first place, if it had not been for the tacit approval of Sri Lankan President J.R.Jayewardene and his ministerial cohorts Gamini Dissanayake and Ronnie de Mel, the IPKF could not have landed in Sri Lanka.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam did not request the IPKF to fight their war in Sri Lanka. To initiate a rift between the Tamils of India and Sri Lanka, it was Jayewardene who invited the IPKF to wallop the Tamil rebels on Sri Lankan soil. But his calculation has misfired.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Tokyo

Letters 13-15: Second debate on Colonial Reparation, with William Corr

13

Reparation

[Asiaweek, Hongkong, Oct.20, 1989]

I wish you had highlighted some of Muammar Gaddafi's serious thoughts at the NAM summit in Belgrade instead of telling us about his five camels and his 'anti-Western rhetoric' [Sept.22]

Col.Gaddafi's sensible suggestion that every colonial power pay reparations to its former colonies was not given prominence in the global media (including *Asiaweek*) owned by the colonial powers, because they hate being reminded of their inglorious past.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,
USA

14

Reparation

[*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, Nov.10, 1989]

The suggestion that former imperial powers extend reparations to their former colonies [Oct.20] is an interesting one.

Obviously the British should compensate the Sri Lankans, for example, but how much should the Dutch and the Portuguese pay? How much should the Italians pay the British as compensation for the Roman occupation? And who will pay the vast bills owed by the Carthaginians and Alexander's empire?

William Corr
Osaka, Japan

15

The Big Payback

[*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, Dec.8, 1989]

The question of reparations for colonial plundering is not as mind-boggling as William Corr of Osaka [Letters, Nov.10] implies.

For example, in the case of Sri Lanka, the British should pay more in compensation than the Dutch and the Portuguese because they – controlled the entire island; seriously altered its economy by introducing export-oriented plantation agriculture, and initiated chaos in the relationship between Sinhalese and Tamils by implanting the Indian Tamil population in the central highlands.

Experts distinguish between the colonial empires of the Classic era and those formed in the post-Industrial Revolution era. Colonies initiated by Macedonian and Carthaginian conquests lacked central power from the ruler and had no continuing contacts with the

empire state. They differed from those formed after the Industrial Revolution, when the need for raw materials and larger markets demanded continuing contacts and exploitation by the imperial power. For practical purposes, let colonial reparation be retroactive to the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, around 1750.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,
USA

16

Out for the Count

[*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, February 23, 1990]

In noting the Indian Foreign Minister's assertion that his country will likely pull the rest of its troops out of northeastern Sri Lanka by March 31, you say: 'Some 1,200 Indian troops and about 2,600 guerillas have been killed since New Delhi toop up arms against the separatists' [Headlines, Jan.12]. Do you want us to believe that the Indian troops, having failed to disarm the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, will have left without killing a single civilian? Or do those 2,600 'guerillas' include a sizeable number of Tamil civilians? How about some credible reporting?

Sachi Sri Kantha
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,
USA

17

Sri Lanka and Iraq

[*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, Oct.26, 1990]

Noting Deputy Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne's quip that 'sanctions are for the rich', you remark: 'Sri Lanka needs money, and punishing aggression isn't his job' [Editorial, Sept.7]. The Sri Lankan armed forces are engaged in a type of aggression similar to that for which Saddam Hussein is now being castigated. The plight of Kuwaiti civilians after Saddam Hussein's aggression does not differ much from the plight of people living in the northern region of Sri Lanka. It should not be forgotten that Saddam Hussein delivered quite a lot of heavy military equipment to the Sri Lankan government to the Sri Lankan government in years past. This being the case, how dare you cast aspersions on a Sri Lankan politician for practising the traditional wisdom of not offending his patron?

Sachi Sri Kantha
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,
USA

18

Forgotten Innocents

[*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, Nov.23, 1990]

Sachi Sri Kantha of Philadelphia [Oct.26] tries to discredit, in a very subtle manner, Sri Lanka's armed forces and deputy finance minister. It is a fact that the people of the north and east are suffering as never before. Thousands have been made homeless and their belongings plundered. By whom? By those self-proclaimed liberation fighters, the Tamil Tiges. To law abiding Tamils and Muslims, government forces, far from being instruments of repression, are angels of peace. Sachi Sri Kantha should take a long, hard look at your EYEWITNESS picture [Oct.26] of Muslim children gathered in prayer at a graveyard in Kattankudi.

To assert that Ranjan Wijeratne is beholden to Saddam Hussein for providing military equipment to Sri Lanka is to belittle, calculatingly, a politician who has spoken fearlessly for the poor and helpless nations caught up in the Gulf 'squeeze'. Has not Sri Kantha's adopted country provided arms to Saddam – the same arms now leveled against his American friends? *Asiaweek's* precious columns should be shut to purveyors of disinformation, particularly those nestling in comfort elsewhere.

Edward Gunawardene
Colombo, Sri Lanka

Letters 19-26: Third Debate on the Ethnic Identity of Tamils, with Izeth Hussain.*Explanatory Note:*

A paper presented by Mr. Izzeth Hussain on the ethnic identity of Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils at a B.C.I.S. Seminar on Indo-Sri Lankan Relations held in 1990 was published in the *Lanka Guardian* in three parts (Feb.1, 1990; March 1, 1990 and March 15, 1990). In it, Hussain had made some sweeping generalizations regarding (a) ethnicity of Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils, and (b) on the role played by the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran in 1987. He had concluded his paper as follows:

“The Tamil Nadu and Sri Lankan Tamils are distinct ethnic groups. At the same time they do share a cultural substratum, and that means an enduring linkage between them. But the ethnic distinctiveness means that their interests do not coincide all the time, and hence the notable ambivalence in Tamil Nadu attitudes towards their Sri Lankan brethren...”

This resulted in the following debate.

19

Ethnic Identity of Tamils

[*Lanka Guardian*, May 1, 1990]

I was flabbergasted with the conclusion of Izeth Hussain's thesis that "the Tamil Nadu and Sri Lankan Tamils are distinct ethnic groups" (LG, March 15). According to the *Encyclopedia Americana* (1989, vol.10), ethnic groups are "distinguished by common cultural and frequently racial characteristics. They also have a sense of group identity and the larger culture within which they live recognizes them as a distinct aggregation."

Ashley Montagu's 1964 definition of an ethnic group states that, "it represents one of a number of populations, comprising the single species *Homo sapiens*, which individually maintain their differences, physical and cultural, by means of isolating mechanisms such as geographic and social barriers. These differences will vary as the power of the geographic and social barriers acting upon the original genetic differences varies." (Current Anthropology, vol.5, p.317).

In this context, both Tamil Nadu and Sri Lankan Tamils belong to the **same** racial (Dravidian) groups and they speak the **same** language. So, it is ridiculous to assert that they are "distinct ethnic groups". Tamil Nadu Tamils and Malayalam speakers in the Kerala state of India are legitimate distinct ethnic groups, since the latter (though belonging to the same Dravidian race) separated from the Tamils a millennium ago, due to geographic barriers and developed their own language.

Hussain is also in error relating to the response of MGR to the IPKF-LTTE conflict (LG, March 1). He ignorantly writes that, "the Tamil Nadu government however raised no protest over the fighting, and even the prospect that MGR's protégé Prabhakaran might be captured or killed did not appear to disturb him in the least", while "Karunanidhi led a protest demonstration in Feb. 1988, as well as organized a fast and a protest march from Madras to Kanyakumari in March 1988".

Since he died on Dec.24, 1987, MGR should have arisen from the grave to counter Karunanidhi's demonstrational politicking. Furthermore, in Feb. 1988, Tamil Nadu was under President's rule and not under MGR's control. Contrary to what has been written by Hussain, MGR was in close contact with LTTE cadre, until he died. Salamat Ali wrote in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (Feb.4, 1988) that "until MGR's death, the LTTE's speed boats used to shuttle between Tamil Nadu and Jaffna's northern coast with impunity almost every night". Following MGR's death, J.R.Jayewardene cockily predicted the demise of LTTE. The *Time* (Jan. 11, 1988) reported that, "he [Jayewardene] is confident that the 35,000 Indian troops will soon 'finish' the Tigers". Well, we know now, that was another prediction of JRJ which went wrong.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Philadelphia, USA.

20

Two Groups of Tamils
[*Lanka Guardian*, May 15, 1990]

In his insulting letter (LG of May 1) Sachi Sri Kantha writes that he was flabbergasted by my conclusion that the Tamil Nadu and Sri Lankan Tamils are distinct ethnic groups. He need not have been had he understood the two quotations he himself provides, both of which could accommodate my conclusion. Thereafter he proceeds to state that my conclusion is ridiculous as the two groups of Tamils belong to the same racial group and speak the same language.

Obviously he is unaware of the controversy that has been raging for years over the question of what exactly constitutes an ethnic group. There are scores of definitions, and some scholars have even taken to arguing that there is no such thing as ethnicity. A vast body of literature on ethnicity has accumulated since the early seventies when historians, sociologists and others became really serious about ethnicity as a subject of scholarly inquiry. If Sri Kantha consults some of that literature, he will soon find that the consensus is against his simplistic notion that ethnicity is constituted just by race and language. For instance, Joseph Rothschild writes in his *Ethnopolitics* that language, religion, pigmentation, or tribe are primordial markers that are necessary but not sufficient for the consolidation of ethnic groups.

Let me explain. The Spanish of Latin America are of the same race, and share the same language and religion, but because of their different histories in different Latin American countries they have come to be culturally differentiated over the centuries and can be regarded as consisting of several distinct ethnic groups. So, can, say, the Arabs of Iraq and Syria. Consider also the fact that the Swiss Germans and the Germans of the two Germanies, or the Swiss French and the French of France, share commonalities of language and race but are all the same regarded as belonging to distinct ethnic groups. This point applies also to the Tamils of Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu. That my view is far from ridiculous, and acceptable at least to some Dravidians, is shown by the quotation at the end of paragraph three of my paper. It is from the *Peace Trap* by P.S.Suriyanarayana who argued that there is no 'symbolic cultural kinship' between the two groups of Tamils.

It might interest Sri Kantha to know one of the two discussants of my paper was Professor K.Sivathamby of Jaffna University, who acknowledged that my distinction between the two groups of Tamils was correct in an 'anthropological sense' but he thought I had pushed the distinction too far. He is too much of a scholar to make himself ridiculous by arguing that my distinction is invalid simply because the two groups belong to the same racial group and speak the same language.

I must say I am non-plussed by Sri Kantha's rigmarole about MGR. He writes that MGR died in December 1987, and seems to imagine that for that reason I am wrong about MGR and the Tamil Nadu government having failed to react against the IPKF-LTTE fighting. But that fighting erupted weeks before MGR's death. It erupted in

October 1987, as I wrote plainly in my paper. Sri Kantha seems to be ignorant of that fact, or he chooses to ignore it. As far as I am aware, it has never been seriously disputed before that the LTTE was disappointed that the AIADMK had not exerted pressure on Delhi to stop the fighting.

He makes the point that as MGR died in December 1987, he would have had to rise from his grave to counter Karunanidhi's politicking in February 1988. At least on that point I am in total agreement with Sri Kantha, as I myself wrote in my paper that when Janaki was Chief Minister in January 1988 she was the "widow of MGR".

Izeth Hussain
Colombo 7

21

Determination of Ethnicity by biomedical evidence

[*Lanka Guardian*, July 1, 1990]

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy", wrote Shakespeare in *Hamlet*. In rebutting my criticism, Izeth Hussain brings to his defence the names of Joseph Rothschild, P.S.Suriyanarayana and K.Sivathamby, on whose scholarship, he had inferred that the Tamils in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka are distinct ethnic groups (LG, May 15). I presume that none of those cited scholars are biomedical scientists. Whether Sivathamby is "too much of a scholar" or a mediocre academic is not the question of interest. But whether he is trained in biomedical sciences is relevant to this discussion. With respect to Sivathamby's scholarship, I have to answer in the negative.

That the controversy of "what exactly constitutes an ethnic group" seems to remain unresolved mainly in the cultural anthropological circles due to the fact that they depend on polygenic traits (skin color, face form etc.) for classification. But the exact mode of inheritance of these polygenic traits are not known yet. However, since World War II, biomedical scientists and geneticists have come out with genetically well defined characters such as blood groups, hemoglobin types, haptoglobins, transferrins and finger prints (dermatoglyphics) to classify the different ethnic groups.

There are many merits in using gene frequencies as the scale to measure the divergence of humans. They are more objective measures and they could be quantified as well. For example, both Tamil Nadu Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils possess only transferrin C (with same frequency 1.000). In contrast, the frequency of transferrin C in Sinhalese and Veddah are 0.988 and 0.890 respectively. Whereas Tamils from Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka do not possess other transferrin types, Sinhalese do have two more transferrins; transferrin B with frequency 0.006 and transferrin D with frequency 0.064. The Veddahs do not have transferrin B, but do possess two subtypes of transferrin D (source: *Races, Types and Ethnic Groups*, by Stephen Molnar, Prentice Hall, NJ, 1975, p.84).

If Hussain is ignorant of this development during the past four decades, I would suggest that he refer to the contributions of A.E.Mourant, W.C.Boyd, C.S.Coon, S.M.Garn, L.L.Cavalli-Sforza, M.Nei and A.K.Roychoudhury. Based on the data published by these biomedical scientists, one can conclude that there exists hardly any distinction between the Tamils of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. I assert again that Izeth Hussain's thesis is made ridiculous by the biomedical data reported in the last three decades. In this field, for those who are interested, I also wish to mention that N.Nagaratnam (ex-consultant physician at the Colombo General Hospital) has published a well compiled review entitled, 'Hemoglobinopathies in Sri Lanka and their anthropological implications', *Hemoglobin*, vol.13, pp.201-211, 1989) recently, which traced the origin of the Sinhalese.

Finally, about the role MGR played while he was alive, during the IPKF-LTTE confrontation (Oct.-Dec.1987), I am of the opinion that Hussain is still ignorant of MGR's multi-faceted role in the Eelam issue. So he hides his ignorance with the qualifying phrase, "as far as I am aware", without challenging the article of Salamat Ali (a well known observer of the Indian scene) which I had quoted. Those who have studied MGR's professional career hold the view that his public posture was made of one thing but his private actions mostly contradicted his public posture. And he made it look that way to confound his critics. And though Janaki Ramachandran, the widow of MGR, functioned as the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu in Jan. 1988, as any astute Tamil Nadu watcher (but hardly Izeth Hussain!) would state, she was just a puppet of one faction of MGR's party. This was later proved by her quick exit from the local political scene. So, it is ridiculous again for Hussain to compare the actions of MGR's widow to that of MGR.

22

Ethnic Groups

[*Lanka Guardian*, Sept.1, 1990]

It is evident from his letters in the LG of May 1st and July 1st that Sachi Sri Kantha can read. It is equally evident that he cannot understand what he reads. As if this is not enough of a handicap for someone who obviously has a taste for polemics, he has the additional handicap of habitually reading what is not there in the text.

In his July 1st letter he states that in rebutting his criticism I had brought to my defence the names of Rothschild, Suriyanarayana and Sivathamby, on whose scholarship I had inferred that the Tamils of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka are two distinct ethnic groups. I nowhere stated that I had come to my conclusion just on the basis of their scholarship. Sri Kantha has therefore read what is not there in my text. In support of my conclusion I referred in fact to the extensive literature on ethnicity which has been accumulating since the early 'seventies, about which I wrote a whole paragraph in my letter of May 15th. Sri Kantha had evidently read that paragraph. Equally evidently he failed to understand it.

In his July 1st letter Sri Kantha pontificates on ethnicity, basing his arguments on the findings of biomedical scientists. In my May 15th letter I had already provided material to show that racial identity does not dispose of the problem of what constitutes an ethnic group, in which connection I pointed to the ethnic distinctiveness of the Spanish, Germans, French and Arabs in different countries. In fact, it is not just a case of ethnic distinctiveness but sometimes of murderous hatred between ethnic groups who share a racial identity, as shown by the communal conflicts that are endemic in India. Bengali Hindus and Muslims regard themselves as virtually identical in terms of race as the infusion of Mogul blood in Bengali Muslims was minimal. Yet they certainly have regarded themselves as constituting distinct ethnic groups, and what is more they were responsible for some of the worst internecine massacres in pre-partition India. If Sri Kantha can understand what he reads, he has to acknowledge that biomedical criteria cannot suffice by themselves to define an ethnic group.

The biomedical authorities he cites may use the term ‘ethnic group’ for their limited scientific purposes. But no one today writing of ethnic problems in a political context will be so jejune as to try to dispose of the problem of what constitutes an ethnic group in purely biomedical terms. No one, that is, who really knows what he is talking about. The two quotations Sri Kantha himself provided in his May 1st letter demonstrate my point. In the first it was stated that ethnic groups are “distinguished by common cultural and frequently racial characteristics”. The term ‘frequently’ means that ethnic groups cannot be defined always and only in terms of racial characteristics. Likewise his second quotation referred both to ‘physical and cultural’ characteristics. He provided those quotations in what he thought was a triumphant refutation of my argument. What they do refute is his simplistic notion that ethnic groups can be defined in purely biomedical terms. Sri Kantha can transcribe quotations. He cannot understand them.

It might be supposed that Sri Kantha merely exhibits the fairly commonplace phenomenon of slovenly reading habits, compounded by confusions arising out of his obvious unfamiliarity with the problem of ethnicity. But his rigmarole about MGR and Janaki also shows a startling inability to understand simple declarative sentences, and a persistent habit of reading what is not there in the text. In his May 1st letter he quoted me as having written (March 1st, LG) that MGR and the Tamil Nadu government had raised no protest over the IPKF-LTTE fighting, after which he quoted my references to Karunanidhi’s protest demonstrations in February and March 1988. He thereafter went on to write “Since he died on December 24, 1987, MGR should have arisen from the grave to counter Karunanidhi’s demonstrational politicking”. The point that I made was that MGR and Tamil Nadu government did not protest over the fighting, which should have been possible as the fighting erupted in October 1987 while MGR died only in December. I wrote absolutely nothing whatever to suggest in any way that MGR or the Tamil Nadu government should have countered Karunanidhi’s demonstrations in February 1988. This again demonstrates Sri Kantha’s ability to read what is not there in the text. His presumption was that I was unaware of the fact that MGR was dead by February 1988. But just two paragraphs later in my paper (March 1st LG) I referred to Janaki as being a widow in January 1988. Sri Kantha must have read it, but he failed to understand that simple declarative sentence.

In his July 1st letter he writes that though Janaki functioned as Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, “as any astute Tamil Nadu watcher (but hardly Izeth Hussain!) would state, she was just a puppet of one faction of MGR’s party”. I had not stated in my either that Janaki was a puppet or not a puppet as it was no part of my purpose to make an assessment of her political ability. Again Sri Kantha has read what is not there in my text. He concluded, “So, it is ridiculous again for Hussain to compare the actions of MGR’s widow to that of MGR”. I had made no such comparison anywhere, neither in my last letter. Yet once more Sri Kantha has read what is nowhere in my text. As for the astuteness he ascribes to himself and others in assessing Janaki as a puppet, I must express surprise as it was surely obvious to everyone right through the length and breadth of India, as well as to every Tamil Nadu watcher outside, that Janaki was infinitely less than a political lightweight and could easily have functioned as a puppet. His assumption of astuteness in grasping so obvious a point suggests that apart from knowing nothing about the problem of ethnicity, he knows next to nothing about the politics of Tamil Nadu.

True, I did not deal with Sri Kantha’s deductions from the Salamat Ali quotation. Must I really waste my time, and LG space, exploding every bit of nonsense I encounter? Furthermore, I thought I had done enough to dissuade Sri Kantha from again exhibiting the results of his curious reading habits. The point at issue is whether or not MGR and the Tamil Nadu government raised a protest over the IPKF-LTTE fighting. They did not, and the LTTE was disappointed. That does not mean MGR broke links with the LTTE, or turned hostile towards it, and certainly speed-boats could have plied every night as stated by Salamat Ali. The fact remains that, as I wrote, there was no protest, and no amount of quotations about speed-boats is going to change that fact. I have yet once more to point to Sri Kantha’s genius for reading what is not there in the text. He preceded the Salamat Ali quotation (LG of May 1st) with this: “Contrary to what has been written by Hussain, MGR was in close contact with LTTE cadre, until he died”. I wrote absolutely nothing about MGR being in contact or not in contact with LTTE cadre.

In Sri Kantha’s rather limited polemical lexicon two words figure prominently, one of which is ‘ridiculous’ and the other ‘ignorant’. They are made to function as substitutes for reason and argument, in fact as not much more than abusive expletives. There is a problem of communication in dealing with Sri Kantha as he cannot understand the plain meanings of plain words. I will therefore use the language to which he is accustomed, and advise him to stop making himself look ridiculous by polemizing on matters about which he is ignorant. Should he wish to engage in further polemics, I suggest that he first take some reading lessons.

Izeth Hussain

23

Defining Ethnicity: A Reply
 [*Lanka Guardian*, Oct.1, 1990]

Well – Izeth Hussain had tested my ability to read and comprehend (based on two 600-word letters, which strongly criticized his interpretation of the term ‘ethnic group’) and I have flunked (LG, Sept.1). It certainly is a christening experience to be bapitized like this by an ex-Sri Lankan diplomat.

Mr.Hussain’s main gripe is that I am suffering from a “persistent habit of reading what is not there in (his) text”. Not being a diplomat, I have learnt to read “between the lines” in addition to reading what is “in the lines”. If this habit irks him, let be it. This should suffice for my final comments on what Hussain wrote on the MGR government’s role with the LTTE.

Casting aside Mr.Hussain’s nonsensical broadside about my “inability to understand simple declarative sentences”, for sake of objectivity, I wish to recapitulate what had transpired so far in this on-going dialogue on ethnicity.

Hussain’s hypothesis: “Not withstanding the commonalities of language, culture and religion, the Tamils of Tamil Nadu and of Sri Lanka constitute two distinct ethnic groups” (LG, Feb.1 and Mar.15).

My criticism: The common language and cultural characteristics shared by the Tamils of Tamil Nadu and of Sri Lanka makes them belonging to the same ethnic group (LG, May 1). The biomedical evidence does not show any distinct differences between the Tamils of Tamil Nadu and of Sri Lanka (LG, July 1).

I will let the LG readers to decide who has failed to grasp the “plain meanings of plain words”. In this dialogue, the problematic words are, “distinct” and “ethnic group”. The conventional dictionary meanings of these two words as well as anthropological evidences should show my point of view to be correct. If Mr.Hussain believes in his interpretation of the meaning of these words he is welcome to have it. But, he should provide an acceptable new definition of what he means by “distinct” and “ethnic group”. Finally, if some folks can still hang on to the belief of flat-earth hypothesis, even after 400 years of Galileo, I can excuse Mr.Hussain for his ignorance in dismissing the biomedical criteria for defining ethnicity as limited in scope. Amen.

Sachi Sri Kantha
 Philadelphia, USA.

24

Plain Words

[*Lanka Guardian*, Nov.1, 1990]

I see that Sri Kantha has failed to profit from my advice that he should take some reading lessons before engaging in further polemics. In reply to my detailed demonstration that he cannot understand what he reads, he writes (LG of Oct.1) that he was reading between the lines. I do not see how he can possibly succeed in metaphorically reading between the lines when in the first place he cannot grasp the plain literal meanings of plain words. Consequently I am certainly not going to waste LG space taking up his quibble about the term ‘distinct’ in relation to ethnicity.

His problem is the same as Carroll’s Humpty Dumpty, who said “When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less”. I suggest therefore that he take to writing nonsense literature, a genre that has not been properly exploited since the great days of Carroll and Lear. He should make his mark, provided he remembers that there is a difference between nonsense literature and tommy rot.

Izeth Hussain

25

Separatism

[*Lanka Guardian*, Aug.1, 1991]

Izeth Hussain in LG of March 1, 1990 stated that “the Tamil Nadu and Sri Lankan Tamils constitute two distinct ethnic groups” (p.19, last para). In the LG of July 1, 1991, he states that they can be regarded as distinct groups “in some senses” (p.4, para 5). How come, this qualification?....

M.P.de Silva
Colombo 6.

26

Distinct in some senses

[*Lanka Guardian*, Sept.1, 1991]

M.P.de Silva (LG, Aug.1, 1991) must not abstract statements from their contexts. He writes that in LG of March 1, 1990, I stated that the Tamil Nadu and Sri Lankan Tamils constitute two distinct ethnic groups, while in LG of July 1, 1991, I state that they can be regarded as distinct groups “in some senses”. Reference to my 1990 article will show that I referred to its introductory part in LG of Feb.1, 1990 where I wrote, in paras two and three, that the two groups might be regarded as “constituting a single ethnic” in terms of certain factors, while it could be argued in terms of other factors that

they were “two distinct ethnic groups”. In other words my original position, which has not changed, was that they are distinct “in some senses”...

Izeth Hussain

Letters 27-33: Fourth Debate on Tamil Tigers and American Founding Fathers, with an anonymous Correspondent

27

Sri Lanka's Tamils

[Asiaweek, Hongkong, Aug.10, 1990]

In ‘Caught in the Crossfire’ [July 20], you quote a Tiger leader as saying: ‘We’ll fight to the last and we’ll get Eelam’. The Tigers certainly want Eelam, but who else does? You don’t say.

According to the latest census, about 2.7 million (18%) of Sri Lanka’s 1981 population of nearly 15 million were Tamils. Of these, 1.3 million lived among the 11 million Sinhalese outside Northern and Eastern provinces. Of the people in Northern Province, 92% were Tamils. In Eastern Province, 41% were Tamils.

In 1976, mainstream Tamil political opinion represented by the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) resolved that survival of Tamils as a national minority required the setting up of a separate state, Tamil Eelam, consisting mainly of Northern and Eastern provinces (which add up to about a third of the country’s area). Of the 1.3 million Tamils living outside Northern and Eastern provinces, the 740,000 Indian Tamils explicitly dissociated themselves from the demand. The remaining 510,000 were not explicitly asked. In the 1977 general election only 48% of the voters in Northern and Eastern provinces voted for the TULF, which sought a specific mandate to create a special state.

Perhaps that is why almost all Tamils (except the Tigers) supported the Indo-Sri Lankan accord of 1987, which went a long way towards fulfilling Tamil aspirations within a single Sri Lankan state. The accord provided for a referendum by the end of 1988 to enable the people of Eastern Province to decide whether to remain linked with Northern Province.

The Tigers set out to prevent implementation of the accord. They killed more than 1,500 Indian soldiers (and wounded nearly 3,000 more) sent to help the peace. They still seem determined to fight to the last, especially the innocent teenagers. As your correspondent remarks, one cannot help feeling sad knowing that many of these kids are going to die. Not their leaders, though: British citizen Anton Balasingham will probably survive and go home.

The Tigers murder anyone – Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, Indian – who blocks their path. They have not hesitated to execute even former comrades who gave up the mad pursuit. So please do not divulge my identity.

Anonymous

28

Sri Lanka's Tamils

[Asiaweek, Hongkong, Aug.31, 1990]

A reader says the Tamil United Liberation Front, which sought a mandate for a separate state in Sri Lanka's 1977 general election received only 48% of the votes cast in Northern and Eastern provinces [Letters, Aug.10]. According to a study by Rev.Fr.Tissa Balasuriya, the TULF received 49.9%. Fr.Balasuriya left out the votes cast for other parties and independent groups who canvassed on the platform of a separate state for Tamils. Therefore more than half of the Tamils living in Northern and Eastern provinces voted for a separate state.

Only a minority of Americans supported the revolution in the 1770s. John Adams noted that about a third of the population were hostile to the idea and a third were quite indifferent. That did not deter America's founding fathers from fighting British colonialism.

As a student of psephology [election statistics] I would add that three U.S. presidents – Truman, Kennedy and Nixon – were elected on less than 50% of the vote. Carter and Reagan barely managed 50%. Since only 50%-55% of Americans exercise their voting rights, the popular vote received by these presidents represented about 25% of the total registration. Should all of their political decisions be considered null and void because they did not receive majority support from their constituencies?

Sachi Sri Kantha
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,
USA

29

Sri Lanka's Tamils

[Asiaweek, Hongkong, Oct.19, 1990]

Citing John Adams, Sachi Sri Kantha of Philadelphia [Letters, Aug.31] implies that America's founding fathers, like the Tamil Tigers, represented a minority when they fought British colonialism. It would be interesting to know whether they, like the Tamil Tigers, summarily executed fellow citizens who did not share their revolutionary fervour. Sri Kantha does not deny that the Tamil Tigers murder anyone in their path, including other Tamils.

Sri Kantha reasons that more than 50% of those who voted in Northern and Eastern provinces in 1977 voted for a separate state. When he deduces that more than half of the Tamils living in the Northern and Eastern provinces voted for a separate state, he is guilty of the fallacy of transcendental inference. Half of those who voted in those provinces constituted many fewer than half of the Tamils in those provinces if only because about 25% of the Tamils were under 18 and so did not vote. And since the Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim electorate voted by secret ballot, Sri Kantha has no right to be sure that all those who voted for parties standing for a separate state were Tamils.

Anonymous

30

Revolution's Other Side

[Asiaweek, Hongkong, Nov.16, 1990]

Perhaps the reader who wrote 'Sri Lanka's Tamils' [Letters, Oct.19] should read more history instead of musing whether America's founding fathers, 'like the Tamil Tigers, summarily executed fellow citizens who did not share their revolutionary fervour'. As many as 100,000 people who supported British rule (almost 1 in 30 of the people in the original thirteen states) chose to leave the newly formed U.S. for England, Canada and the West Indies. Why? Historians say countless loyalists were tarred and feathered. Why are there hardly any versions of the loyalist point of view? Simply because they were not tolerated by the founding fathers. Consider the fate of hero-turned-traitor Benedict Arnold. After the war he had to leave Philadelphia for London, where he died in obscurity.

The reasoning that about 25% of Tamils were under 18 and thus did not vote for a separate state in 1977 is flawed. The majority of those who currently support the fight for a separate state come from this young population. [The reader suggests] that some Sinhalese and Muslims might have 'voted for parties standing for a separate state'. In fact all four Muslim candidates on the Tamil United Liberation Front ticket in '77 were defeated – in predominantly Muslim electorates.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,
USA

31

Tamil Tigers

[*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, Dec.14, 1990]

Thanks to Sachi Sri Kantha of Philadelphia [Letters, Nov.16] I now know the difference between Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers and America's founding fathers. The fathers merely tarred and feathered dissidents; the Tigers summarily execute them.

I made the point [Oct.18] that Sri Kantha had no right to be sure that in an electorate of Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese all those who voted for separatist parties like the TULF were Tamils. The self-proclaimed psephologist's counterpoint defies psephology, logic and even common sense. He points out that all four Muslim candidates on the TULF ticket in 1977 were defeated. So what? A single non-Tamil vote among the 26,496 votes they received would validate my point.

Anonymous

32

Tigers and Founding Fathers

[*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, Feb.8, 1991]

The naïve and anonymous reader who thinks America's founding fathers 'merely tarred and feathered dissidents' and did not execute them [Letters, Dec.14] is wrong. In many cases tarring and feathering was only the preliminary phase of the punishment of loyalists and was followed by hanging.

For example, in 1774 one John Malcomb, an officer of the Customs at Boston, was 'tarred, feathered and led to the gallows with a rope about his neck' [*Oxford English Dictionary*, 1989]. On June 27, 1776, Thomas Hickey became the first American soldier to be executed in New York City. He was condemned as a traitor for conspiring to deliver George Washington to the British [*The Encyclopedia of American Facts and Dates*, Harper & Row, New York, 1987]. In March 1779 John Mason of the Loyal American Rangers warned that the loyalists would henceforth hang six rebels for every loyalist so dealt with [*Secret History of the American Revolution*, Viking Press, New York, 1941].

Trying to portray America's founding fathers as paragons compared to the Tamil Tigers is preposterous. One also should not forget that almost all the leaders of the American Revolution owned black slaves. One of them, George Washington, kept 200. Is it not a paradox that they fought for liberty while owning slaves?

Sachi Sri Kantha
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,
USA

33

Sri Lanka's Tamils

[*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, March 15, 1991]

From the observation that more than 50% of Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese *voters* in Sri Lanka's Northern and Eastern provinces voted for a separate Tamil state in 1977, Sachi Sri Kantha of Philadelphia deduces that more than half of the Tamils *living* in those provinces voted for a separate state. From the observation that all four Muslim candidates on the Tamil United Liberation Front ticket in 1977 were defeated (though they pulled 26,496 votes) he infers that *all* those who voted for the TULF were Tamils.

This thinker now has the temerity to call other people 'naïve' [Letters, Feb.8]. Sri Kantha does not deny that the Tamil Tigers have massacred thousands, including other Tamils, in their fight for a separate state. He defends them by arguing that the Tigers are no different from the likes of George Washington. One cannot argue against such a value judgement. Your comment on Sri Kantha's latest exercise in comparative history says it all: George Washalingam indeed!

Anonymous

34

The Other Dicky [J.R.Jayewardene]

[*Lanka Guardian*, Sept.1, 1990]

When I read ex-President Junius Richard Jayewardene's pretentious pontification on power that, "it was wisest to retain (power) with the help of the devil, if necessary, rather than to lose and then seek to regain it" (LG, July 1), I could only think of another scheming politician, who shared the same name Richard, and the same sentiments about power – the one and only Richard Nixon. Both did their best to cling onto power by many devious means, though expressing vocal support for democracy.

In fact, Jayewardene's political career shows much resemblance to that of Nixon. Both made their entry into the political arena in the 1940s as exponents of right-wing ideology and in early 1950s reached their first peak of their respective careers – Nixon as the Vice President and JRJ as the finance minister of the first UNP government. Then in 1956 (JRJ) and in 1960 (Nixon) lost the "power" which they more or less worshipped. Even in 1956, Eisenhower seriously thought of dropping Nixon from the Republican Party ticket, though ultimately he kept him. In 1965, JRJ regained the power, albeit as second in command. Nixon reached his political pinnacle in 1968, won a landslide victory in 1972 and resigned in disgrace in 1974. Meanwhile, JRJ consolidated his power after Dudley Senanayake's death in 1973, reached the top in 1977, won a re-election in 1982 and made his exit much humbler in 1988.

While the first terms of Nixon and JRJ (Nixon, 1968-72; JRJ, 1977-82) were quite constructive, their second terms after re-election (Nixon, 1973-74; JRJ, 1983-88) turned out to be disastrous to their respective countries.

Whatever expertise both claimed on military strategy, they lacked active combat experience. They were both 'arm chair Commander-in-Chiefs'. Nixon's nemesis was Vietnam, and a commander named Giap. Though he outsmarted many Tamil politicians (Suntheralingam, Ponnambalam, Chelvanayakam, Amirthalingam) on the parliamentary battle ground by his "isolate, weaken and destroy" tactics, Jayewardene met his match in the shape of a tough, wily guerrilla (or in his terminology, 'terrorist') Prabhakaran.

Finally, for all his extensive reading on the tactics of power and wisdom, I guess J.R.Jayewardene has not read what Einstein wrote: "The attempt to combine wisdom and power has only rarely been successful and then only for a short while". If expressed in Einstein's scientific format, it reads as, the concentration of power is inversely proportional to the accumulation of wisdom.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Philadelphia, (USA)

35

Indian Tamil Issue in the 1952 Election

[*Lanka Guardian*, Sept.15, 1990]

Just because crow is black and charcoal is also black, one cannot equate crow to charcoal. But Boyd Almeida purports to do just that in his letter on the Indian Tamil issue (LG, Aug.1, 1990). His comments that the Federal Party made the 1948 Citizenship Act and the 1949 Parliamentary Elections Amendments Act "an election issue in the 1952 general election and the voters of Jaffna gave him [Chelvanayakam] and his party a severe drubbing" is an exaggeration of facts.

The FP won two of the 7 seats it contested in the 1952 election. C.Vanniasingham won in the Kopay electorate and N.R.Rajavarotheyam was a victor in the Trincomalee constituency. It also received a cumulative total of 45,331 votes for its candidates. In comparison, the Tamil Congress of G.G.Ponnambalam won four of the 7 seats it contested and got a cumulative total of 64,512 votes for its candidates. In terms of the total votes polled, the FP did not receive a "severe drubbing", considering the fact that it was a newly established political party contesting a general election for first time. With the exception of Chelvanayakam and Vanniasingham (then sitting MPs), the other nominees of the FP for this election were new faces to the Tamil voters. Consider the case of a young 23-year old Amirthalingam, contesting a parliamentary seat for the first time as a FP nominee, who lost the Vaddukodai seat, not to a Tamil Congress nominee, but to a much respected veteran independent candidate Veerasingham. One should also note that in the south, the newly-formed SLFP also contested the 1952 election for the first time and only 9 of its nominees were lucky to be elected.

Though Almeida's statement that S.Natesan belonging to the UNP defeated Chelvanayakam with a large majority is correct, the implication that the loss of Chelvanayakam was mainly due to the fact that he supported the cause of Indian Tamils is not a convincing one. As Prof.A.J.Wilson has noted in his book, *The Break-Up of Sri Lanka* (1988), "I.D.S.Weerawardena explained Chelvanayakam's defeat in 1952 on two counts: the allegation that high caste Tamils might dominate the lower castes in the event of federalism and the fact that the federal issue has not been explicitly espounded, so that federalism was often confused with secession or separate statehood" (p.102). Chelvanayakam's support to the Indian Tamil issue was not a prominent factor in his defeat for representing the Kankesanthurai seat in 1952.

At best one can infer that the majority of the Ceylon Tamils were indifferent to the plight of the Indian Tamils in the 1952 election. But it is inaccurate to state that they "overwhelmingly supported the legislations" of 1948-49 concerning the Indian Tamils.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Philadelphia, (USA)

36

Lalith [Athulathmudali]'s Friends

[*Lanka Guardian*, Nov.15, 1990]

I wonder how the Minister of Education Mr.Lalith Athulathmudali reacted when he learnt that the Israeli military contacts and secret services his party used in trying to liquidate the LTTE had double crossed the UNP. Ostrovsky has claimed in his recently released book, *By Way of Deception*, that Sri Lankan commandos and their Tamil rivals were trained on different sides of the same base (by the MOSSAD) with Israel selling arms to both sides.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Philadelphia, (USA)

37

Whither Parliament?

[*Lanka Guardian*, May 15, 1991]

I received the LG January 1 issue here only yesterday, almost a month after its issue date in the cover. To me, your homily entitled, 'Whither Parliament?' sounds like an old, broken record repeated umpteenth time. Why not face the naked fact that the parliament is a microcosm of the representative Sri Lankan society? Where there is distrust, tension and violence (inter-ethnic as well as intra-ethnic varieties) among the population at large, it is reflected like a mirror in the parliament. Are we so naïve to believe that when a man with a pus in his face looks at a clean mirror, the appearing image will be without any deformity? And what is the purpose in maintaining a 'cosmetic beauty' in the 'face' (parliament), while the whole 'body' (country) is in 'fire'?

The caption of the homily ‘Whither Parliament?’ itself is erroneous. For something to whither, first it should have flowered. Unlike the other British export, cricket, the parliamentary system never flowered in the continents of Asia and Africa since it could work only where the population is basically mono-ethnic and mono-religious. In countries with multi-ethnic and multi-religious populations, the parliamentary system has long been aborted in preference to the *durbar* system of ‘kings’ (and queens) with a support cast of ‘ministers’, though they pretended to act within the boundaries of the parliament system. Even in a predominantly mono-ethnic, mono-religious country like Japan, the parliamentary system has given way to a form of *durbar* of the feudal lords (*shoguns*), in which each head of the five factions of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party functions like a contemporary *shogun*.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

Editorial Note:

Wither: make to become dry; decline, decay.

Whither: To what place or point? (Concise Oxford Dictionary)

38

Whither Etymology

[*Lanka Guardian*, July 1, 1991]

Tamil being my native tongue, I wish to acknowledge that I goofed in not differentiating between ‘wither’ and ‘whither’ (LG, May 5). I should say that I also underestimated your penchant for bringing archaic words back into popular currency. To satisfy my curiosity, I checked the unabridged Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 1987, Compact Edition, volume 2).

You have stated in your ‘note’ to my letter, only one interpretation of whither; “To what place?”. In p. 3767, just above this meaning, it is also stated, “Now, in all senses, only archaic or literary”. The first set of definitions given for ‘whither’ in the same page states, “a violent or impetuous movement, a rush; a blast or gust of wind; a quivering movement, a tremble; a rushing or whizzing sound; *fig.* an access or attack of illness.”

I felt comfortable that the usage, “an access or attack of illness” does not differ much in context of what I have misinterpreted for ‘wither’, in relevance to parliamentary democracy.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

Editorial Note:

Wither Sachi Sri Kantha? Satisfied Sachi.

39

The etymology of ‘Ceylon’
[*Lanka Guardian*, Aug.1, 1991]

Dr. Jane Russel points out that the Portuguese ‘Ceilao’ (which gave rise to the word ‘Ceylon’ was derived from Sanskrit word, ‘Simala’, which is equivalent to ‘Sinhala’ (LG, July 1). This interpretation relies more on myth than on the marine history of Indian Ocean.

Medieval China controlled the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf due to the vision of naval commander Cheng-Ho in the 15th century, before the advent of Portuguese naval power. Cheng-Ho commanded a fleet of 62 ships and 28,000 men – bigger than most European navies of his time. Cheng-Ho is also no stranger to Lanka. He first visited the island in 1405 and according to K.M.de Silva, “five years later he led another expedition which seized the Sinhalese king, his queen and some of the notables of the kingdom and took them prisoner to China” (A History of Sri Lanka, 1981, pp.86-87).

This being the case, the Portuguese word, ‘Ceilao’ (or its English variant ‘Ceylon’) can be attributed as a derivation of the Chinese name, ‘**Hsi-Lan**’* for Lanka. Chinese also have left their mark on many other place names which were in their sphere of control in the 15th century, such as Cochin (‘Ko-chih’), Mogadishu (‘Mo-ku-ta-shu’) and Jidda (‘Shih-ta’). These details are presented in the book, *Way of Sea and Abuse of the Oceans* (1988), authored by Richard Green, the managing director of a British shipping company. Green also states that though Chinese navigators were the first to put magnetic compass into practice in marine navigation around A.D. 270, their contributions to ocean exploration have been overlooked by the Occidental historians who wrote history glorifying the discoveries of medieval European explorers like Vasco da Gama.

An able historian like Jane Russel also should recognize that when Portuguese first came into contact with the Kotte kingdom in 1505 (almost a century after the visit of Cheng-Ho to the island), they could not have encountered Sanskrit speaking ethnics. Furthermore I also have not come across any references to Portuguese adventurers in medieval India and Ceylon showing great inclination to study a dead language.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

Post script: In 1996, I asked a Chinese colleague who worked with me about the meaning of the word *His-Lan*. He suggested that the two components, His and Lan of the word, can be interpreted to refer ‘pleasant smell’ and ‘land’; i.e. the land of pleasant smell. This relates well to the image of medieval explorers (including Marco Polo) that the island of Ceylon as the place of spices, which produce pleasant smell.

40

[Rajiv] Gandhi Assassination
[Lanka Guardian, Aug.1, 1991]

Note: What appeared in the Lanka Guardian was only an edited version, which deleted (shown in italics below) what I considered as significant comments, in items 2 and 3. Hence I provide the complete version of the letter I mailed on July 17, 1991.]

I wish to make the following comments regarding your coverage of the Gandhi assassination (LG, July 1).

- (1) In your News Background, you quote Minister Lalith Athulathmudali as stating that, Rajiv Gandhi may not have died if Mrs. Indira Gandhi had accepted the Sri Lankan proposal for joint patrolling of the Palk Straits. I wonder why minister Athulathmudali's memory has failed to see that Rajiv Gandhi was given a second lease of life on July 1987, only because the naval rating who swung the gun at Gandhi in Colombo missed his attempted target.
- (2) The India Today report which you republished calls poet Kasi Anandan, the LTTE emissary to Rajiv Gandhi in Delhi, an insignificant political figure among Sri Lankan Tamil circles. Those three reporters who wrote the story have not checked their facts. Between 1972 and 1976, Kasi Anandan was a political prisoner under the Sirimavo Bandaranaike regime. He was one of the three political prisoners (other two were Maavai Senathirajah and Vannai Ananthan) who symbolized the change in the traditional Tamil political leadership. He tried to infuse this change by attempting to oust the veteran FP stalwart of the Eastern Province, C. Rajadurai in the 1977 general election. This did create a headache for the TULF old guard and Kasi Anandan paid the price for losing in that general election. Nobody loves a loser. But to say that "he was never taken seriously as a political figure", in my opinion, is flawed. Looked in another angle, compared to the 'influence' of Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam (who was an appointed TULF MP for a while, and who had the fortune of being the son of FP leader M. Tiruchelvam) generated among the Tamils, Kasi Anandan's influence among the younger generation of Tamils in the 1970s was greater.
- (3) What confidence one can have in the opinion of Congress (I) sources, regarding the Rajiv Gandhi-Kasi Anandan meeting of March 5th? Isn't these same sources which denied such a meeting in the first instance? Since now it has been acknowledged that such a meeting did take place in Rajiv Gandhi's private residence, how about asking Sonia Gandhi about what transpired between Rajiv and Kasi Anandan? Certainly Rajiv Gandhi would have discussed this issue frankly, as opposed to the 'diplomatic niceties' exchanged between him and the Deputy High Commissioner of Sri Lanka on March 10th. The three reporters make no mention about whether they approached Sonia Gandhi about verifying the truth of Rajiv-Kasi Anandan meeting. And this cable no.222 sent by the Deputy High Commissioner to the foreign ministry in Colombo is really interesting. Has the complete transcript of this cable been released to the public,

if it is really revealing? Has the LG able to receive a copy of this purported cable no.222? If so, will you publish it in full for the record?

- (4) Jon Swain's republished report which states that Nadesan Satyendra also met Rajiv Gandhi on March 5th has been exposed as incorrect and the London *Sunday Times* did print a correction and an apology. Will LG also do the same?

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

Editorial Comment: (relating to item 4 in the above letter)
We did not spot the *Sunday Times* correction. We regret the error.

41

Lincoln's Definition of Democracy

[*Lanka Guardian*, Sept.1, 1991]

So, the former President J.R.Jayewardene believes in the poetic conception of Abraham Lincoln's definition of democracy, as "a government of the people, by the people, for the people" (LG, July 15). For a pragmatic view of this definition, I would suggest that he better read what Bernard Shaw wrote in his preface to the play *The Apple Cart* (1928).

Shaw stated, "Abraham Lincoln is represented as standing amid the carnage of the battlefield of Gettysburg, and declaring that all that slaughter of Americans by Americans occurred in order that democracy should not perish from the earth....the American Civil War was not fought in defence of any such principle, but, on the contrary, to enable one half of the United States to force the other half to be governed as they did not wish to be governed. It seems impossible for statesmen to make speeches about democracy, or journalists to report them, without obscuring it in a cloud of humbug....Government by the people is not and never can be a reality; it is only a cry by which demagogues humbug us into voting for them...."

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

42

Edmund Samarakkody*

[*Lanka Guardian*, Feb.15, 1992]

The news of veteran Samasamajist leader Edmund Samarakkody's death saddened me (LG, Jan.15). In my opinion, he was one of the handful of Sinhalese political leaders who commanded respect among the Tamils for the stand he took on the ethnic conflict. He never compromised his principles for office.

Though you have mentioned his victories in the 1952, 1956 and July 1960 general elections which enabled him to serve as a member of parliament, what I

consider of more significance are the two losses he suffered in the 1947 and 1965 general elections.

In 1947, he contested against the ‘father of the nation’ D.S.Senanayake in the Mirigama constituency and garnered 10,000 votes against 25,000 received by the first prime minister of Ceylon. It was certainly a pyrrhic victory for D.S.Senanayake and I think that young Samarakkody’s 10,000 votes scared the ‘old man’ out of his wits. The 1965 election loss of Samarakkody, as a sitting MP in Bulathsinhala electorate, where he couldn’t even save his deposit and polled less than 500 votes showed the Tamils, how much Sinhala opinion had hardened on the parity of status for languages question on which he campaigned. After Samarakkody’s exit from the parliament, there was hardly any Sinhalese leaders who gained the trust of Tamils.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

*Edmund Samarakkody died on Jan.5, 1992, at the age of 80.

Letters 43-46: Fifth Debate on Sivarajan and Udupiddy mileau, with P.Kirupananthan

43

Udupiddy Electorate

[*Lanka Guardian*, Nov.1, 1991]

I read with interest, D.B.S.Jeyaraj’s investigative article entitled, ‘Who was Sivarajan?’ (LG, Sept.15). Though I am not sure about the accuracy of most of its contents, the information provided about the politics in the Udupiddy electorate seems incomplete and twisted a little. For sake of completeness, will you note the following?

1. Udupiddy electorate was constituted in 1960. M.Sivasithamparam (then belonging to the Tamil Congress) was returned in three general elections: March and July 1960 as well as 1965. K.Jeyakkody of the Federal Party became a winner only in the 1970 general election. Jeyaraj’s observation that “the political star of Udupiddy in those days was a leftist called R.R.Dharmaratnam of the LSSP” is somewhat exaggerated. This is like saying that turkey rather than peacock was the star attraction. In reality, Sivasithamparam was ‘the political star of Udupiddy’ in the 1960s.
2. Though Jeyaraj has stated, “Chandrasekaram Pillai and his young son (‘Sivarajan’) defied the local current and support the Tamil nationalist candidates, K.Jeyakkody of the Federal Party and T.Rasalingam of the TULF, against Dharmaratnam”, according to the year of birth given in the article, Sivarajan (born in 1958) would have been only 12 years old when Jeyakkody of the Federal Party was elected to the parliament in 1970.
3. If I am not wrong, R.R.Dharmaratnam of the LSSP did not contest the 1977 general election in Udupiddy in which T.Rasalingam of the TULF was elected with a majority of 14,747 votes. Rasalingam won that election by receiving

61.3% of the votes polled. Of the 8 other candidates who contested with Rasalingam, only one was able to save his deposit. In the neighboring Point Pedro electorate, the TULF nominee received only 56 percent of the votes polled. Even in the Jaffna electorate, the TULF nominee won the seat with 56.6 percent of the votes polled. This being the case, the statement that “Chandrasekaram Pillai and his young son...incurred the displeasure of the people of Udupiddy” seems not quite accurate to me.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

44

Udupiddy

[*Lanka Guardian*, Nov.15, 1991]

I was amused at the observations made by Sachi Sri Kantha on the investigative article “Who was Sivarajan?”, written by D.B.S.Jeyaraj. I have observed many a time that Sachi has a tendency to challenge and contradict the views of other writers, without having grasped what they were saying.

First, Jeyaraj, in his article meant **Udupiddy village** only and not **Udupiddy electorate** as mentioned by Sachi. While agreeing with Sachi that “the political star of Udupiddy” was Sivasithamparam at that time, R.R.Dharmaratnam of the LSSP was drawing sizeable support in his native Udupiddy village.

Sachi says that 12 years of age is too small to be a supporter of a political party. That is irrelevant today at a time when many a 12 year old is fighting in LTTE ranks. R.R.Dharmaratnam of the LSSP did contest in the 1977 general election in Udupiddy where he confronted another Untied Front candidate Pon.Kumarasamy, of the CP. Of course the LSSP and Communist Party ignored the issue simply because they never believed in winning a seat in the North!

May our learned friend Sachi stop and think twice before rushing in to find fault with others, and show his ‘great knowledge’.

P.Kirupanathan
Karanavai North, Valvettiturai

45

Udupiddy

[*Lanka Guardian*, Dec.15, 1991]

I’m grateful to reader P.Kirupanathan for correcting me by informing us that “R.R.Dharmaratnam of the LSSP contested in the 1977 general election in Udupiddy” (LG, Nov.15). However I would have been pleased if he had included how many votes Dharmaratnam attracted against TULF’s nominee and ultimate winner T.Rasalingam, and whether he saved his deposit. What does Kirupanathan mean by saying that Dharmaratnam was “drawing sizeable support in his native Udupiddy village”? Was there exit polls conducted in any of the general elections

contested by Dharmaratnam to corroborate the voter preference in the Udupiddy village, if not the Udupiddy electorate? In the absence of such an indicator, how could one infer that the Udupiddy village was supporting Dharmaratnam (who had been a loser at every election he contested) exclusively and not the winning candidate?

I grant that in 1991, “many a 12 year old is fighting in LTTE ranks”, as asserted by Kirupananthan. But Sivarajan, the alleged mastermind in Rajiv Gandhi’s murder was a 12 year old in 1970, and not in 1991. The political and social environment in Udupiddy of 1970 was completely different from the one in 1991.

Kirupananthan also need not unduly worry about being battered by my ‘great knowledge’. All the comments which I send regularly to the LG are sieved and screened by an erudite editor and only those what he feels deserve to be printed appear in the LG.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

46

Udupiddy

[*Lanka Guardian*, Jan.1, 1992]

I read with interest the letter of Sachi Sri Kantha responding to my comments made on his previous letter on the D.B.S.Jeyaraj’s article “Who was Sivarajan?”.

First I wish to point out Udupiddy village is only a small part of a larger Udupiddy constituency. So getting votes there alone would not suffice for Mr.Dharmaratnam to save his deposit. Apart from that, 1977 general election was declared by the TULF as a referendum for a separate Tamil state and the people took it seriously. Mr.Rasalingam himself could win the election not because he drew popular support in the Udupiddy electorate but because he contested on a TULF ticket. Elections cannot be the one and only yardstick to measure one’s popular support. Whereas in a democracy people vote for a political party and not for individuals. Moreover my observation that Dharmaratnam was “drawing sizeable support in his native Udupiddy village” was based on the fact that Mr.R.R.Dharmaratnam headed the Udupiddy village council for almost two decades.

Sachi says, the political and social environment in Udupiddy of 1970 was completely different from the one in 1991. While agreeing with him one cannot deny that political enthusiasm was present among young boys even during earlier elections. I can vividly remember how my friends and I, as 10 year old boys, roamed the streets with Federal Party flags during the 1965 general election.

The trouble with Sachi is that he fails to grasp the essence of the articles while looking for silly statistical mistakes. In politics Sachi’s “great knowledge” should accommodate many other things to make evaluations correctly. Sachi need not call the editor to his support because one’s comments are not accepted on the grounds that they are in print.

P.Kirupananthan

Karanavai North, Valvettiturai

Letters 47-49: Seventh Debate on Rajiv Gandhi Assassination, with U.Pethiyagoda.

47

Looking for scapegoats

[*Far Eastern Economic Review*, Hongkong, Oct.3, 1991]

I agree with Hamish McDonald's report on the murder of Rajiv Gandhi [12 Sept.], that though 'the involvement of ethnic Tamils, the location and the suicide element all point to the LTTE', the murder theory formulated by the Indian investigation team 'looks almost too neat' to believe.

In his last interview in *The New York Times* [22 May] shortly before he was killed, Gandhi stated that 'India and Indian leaders could be targets of outside powers as the country took on a larger role in the region.' It was also reported that when asked whether he had the CIA in mind as the outside force, he 'smirked'. Gandhi's reference to 'a larger role in the region' is not too cryptic a remark to fathom what he had in mind.

According to news reports released after the murder, Khaled el-Sheikh, the PLO's chief envoy in India, said that he gave Gandhi a warning from PLO leader Yasser Arafat 'about a plot to assassinate him' some five weeks before he was killed on 21 May. The warning could have been about the activities of the Mossad, the secret service arm of Israel. And Gandhi's reference to outside powers could be interpreted as a natural extension of his 'intelligence' received from the PLO>

If the LTTE planned to murder Gandhi, how could one explain that Arafat came to know about this plot? It is ridiculous to believe that Arafat spied on the LTTE in Jaffna or in jungles of the Vanni region of Sri Lanka. Mossad's motives in eliminating Gandhi are not incomprehensible, since India under Gandhis (both Indira and Rajiv) has openly supported the causes espoused by the PLO. Last year, Mossad also suffered a loss of face when one of its former agents, Victor Ostrovsky, exposed its nefarious activities in his much publicized book, *By Way of Deception*. So it is not improbable to expect that Mossad could have been tempted to redeem its tarnished image among clients, which included the military establishment of Sri Lanka.

One wonders why Arafat cannot be contacted and asked in detail about what kind of warning he gave Gandhi and whom he had in mind as the suspects.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka

48

Gandhi's killers

[Far Eastern Economic Review, Hongkong, Nov.7, 1991]

In reference to the letter by Sachi Sri Kantha [Letters, 3 Oct.], a 'smirk' by the late Rajiv Gandhi shortly before his brutal murder, the purported 'warning' five weeks before his killing, and a specious assumption that Mossad had 'lost face' by the publication of a book by an ex-Mossad agent is apparently good enough evidence to suspect hands other than those of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for Gandhi's murder.

The painstaking and impressive evidence uncovered by an Indian investigating team which fairly points the finger at the perpetrators pales into insignificance before the novel line of reasoning of your correspondent. Such impeccable logic of LTTE apologists is not unfamiliar to Sri Lankans. Clearly 'looking for scapegoats' continues!

U.Pethiyagoda
Colombo

49

Backed by the President

[Far Eastern Economic Review, Hongkong, Nov.28, 1991]

One Colombo correspondent [Letters, 7 Nov.] feels irritated by my linking of Israel's secret service to the murder of Rajiv Gandhi. I wish to note that Mossad's involvement in the politics of South Asia has been corroborated by Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa himself. On 24 September, Premadasa openly accused Mossad of trying to topple him.

In his address to the Sri Lankan parliament, he said: 'You know that immediately after the sending back of the IPKF [Indian Peace Keeping Force], I had the Israeli Interests Section removed. In such a context there is nothing to be surprised about the Mossad rising up against me. Please remember that there are among us traitors who have gone to Israeli universities and lectured there and earned dirty money. Don't forget that for a moment.'

Curiously, when you covered the impeachment crisis faced by Premadasa, this accusation was left out in your news reports. Also one should not forget that a serious assassination attempt was made on Gandhi in Colombo after he signed the now disgraced Gandhi-Jayewardene Peace Accord in mid-1987. Only the poor targeting by the assassin allowed Gandhi to have an additional four years of life.

Being more inclined to get involved in polemics, the Colombo correspondent makes fun of the warning given to Gandhi five weeks before his death. This warning had come not

from an ordinary person. It was given by Yasser Arafat. While some in Sri Lanka may be impressed by the ‘painstaking evidence uncovered by an Indian investigating team’ which pointed fingers at the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the performance of the Indian sleuths resembled more closely a page from a Marx brothers’ comedy script. The Tamil Nadu State police, the Central Bureau of Intelligence and the Research and Analysis Wing of the Indian search team bungled at every step from 21 May to 21 August. The so-called ‘impressive evidence’ could not track the personal details of the female assassin. Nothing is known about her background. The alleged mastermind Sivaraman has been identified by an investigative journalist as one who belonged to the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation until 1986. It was this rebel group which received official patronage from the Indian Government between 1983 and 1986.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka

50

History supports the Gun

[Far Eastern Economic Review, Hongkong, June 18, 1992]

I wish to differ from the view expressed by one correspondent from Sydney [Letters, 21 May], that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are ‘fascists’. By the same yardstick used by him, the groups led by Mahatma Gandhi and Mao Zedong should also be categorized as ‘fascists’. Firstly, historical records show that the Congress movement led by Gandhi and the Communist Party in China also did not tolerate dissent. Secondly, neither Gandhi nor Mao stood for any election in a democratic manner and canvassed for the popular vote, when they led their liberation movements.

The Sydney correspondent had further noted that the Tigers, ‘which have established a quasi-government in the north, have done so with the aid of the gun’. Does he know how independence was obtained by a rebel named George Washington, for his then 13-state country called the United States of America? Is he so ignorant about the Second Amendment to the US constitution and why it is still retained? If possession of guns is enshrined in the Bill of Rights of the country which is labeled as the cradle of modern democracy, what is wrong with the Tigers using the gun to establish their supremacy?

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka

51

Prabhakaran’s Mentors

[Lanka Guardian, Aug.1, 1992]

D.P.Sivaram’s thought-provoking analysis on the history of Tamil militarism (May 1, May 15, June 1 and July 1) was a delight to read. However, he has omitted an essential contributing factor to the militarism of the LTTE. It is too simplistic to believe

that the historical traditions of the different castes among Tamils in Tamil Nadu and Jaffna alone contributed to the emergence of Tamil Tigers. If that is so, which caste does Clint Eastwood belongs to? I pose this question because Prabhakaran had gone on record to acknowledge the influence of Clint Eastwood movies in developing his own martial acumen.

While Sivaram had commented the links the current DMK leader M.Karunanidhi developed with the Maravar community, he has failed to note that more than Karunanidhi's journalistic skills, it was the movies of Kandy-born M.G.Ramachandran which brought a sense of martial pride to the Tamil masses, both in Tamilnadu and Sri Lanka. In the late 1940s and whole of 1950s, MGR acted in a series of Tamil historical costume-adventures to highlight the Tamil martial tradition. Especially successful as box office 'hits' were the movies with names that began with the first syllable 'Ma'. The names of these movies told the past glory of Tamil. These include, *Manthri Kumari* (Minister's Daughter), *Marutha Naatu Ilavarasi* (Princess of Marutha Land), *Marma Yogi* (Mysterious Ascetic), *Malai Kallan* (Mountain Thief), *Madurai Veeran* (Hero of Madurai), *Maha Devi* (The Great Devi) and *Mannaathi Mannan* (King of Kings). In all these movies, MGR exhibited his martial skills to thrill his fans. There is no doubt that Prabhakaran and his original band were more influenced by these MGR movies than by anything else.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

52

Rajiv Gandhi Assassination Case [*Lanka Guardian*, Oct.1, 1992]

I thank you for publishing in detail the 'Final Report in 9/S/91/CBI/SCB/Madras-(Rajiv Gandhi Assassination Case) Under Section 173 Criminal Penal Code' (LG, Aug.15). What strikes me vividly is its selectivity and superficiality in regurgitating the political events which happened in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. For instance, nothing of the following has been included in this document.

- 1) The role of Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) in training the Tamil militant groups in Tamil Nadu.
- 2) The assassination attempt on Rajiv Gandhi in Colombo, after the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord on July 1987.
- 3) The training and arming of the Tamil National Army by the Indian Peace Keeping Force.
- 4) Maldives invasion by the PLOTE mercenaries and the Indian "assistance in restoring peace".

Even for a non-lawyer like me, it is apparent that the so-called 'Final Report' resembles the field note book of a RAW agent, than a legal document.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

Letters 53--55: Eight Debate on Democracy, with Izeth Hussain

Note: I initiated this debate since there have been so much junk written about the ‘virtues’ of democracy by many who pretend as pundits of history, philosophy and cultural anthropology.

53

The non-democracy phenomenon

[*Lanka Guardian*, Oct.1, 1992]

Now that I have read somewhat in detail the purported thesis on Sri Lanka’s non-democracy by Izeth Hussain (LG, July 15 and Sept.1), will you permit me to comment briefly?

- 1) The non-democracy phenomenon is not peculiar to Sri Lanka. Even if one excludes the countries with communist influence such as China and Vietnam, none of the other nominally Buddhist countries in Asia (Japan, Thailand and Burma) are bastions of democracy either.
- 2) The non-democracy phenomenon exists in almost all the Muslim-dominated countries, beginning from Algeria in Africa, via all the oil-producing Arab states and non-Arabic Iran in Middle East to the Gen.Suharto-led Indonesia in South east Asia.
- 3) Among the nearly 175 UN-recognized states, only 16 (of predominantly White Anglo-Saxon Protestant heritage) subscribe to the ‘concept’ of democracy. These are as follows:
 - 4) 12 NATO member countries (Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom, USA and Germany)
 - 5) 2 neutral European countries (Sweden and Switzerland)
 - 6) 2 Oceanian countries (Australia and New Zealand)

In popular image, it is these 16 countries which constitute the “advanced world”, though these are the major league members who patented imperialism and colonialism. Therefore, in my view, the blind adulation for ‘democracy’ is nothing but another example of slavish mentality exhibited by the oppressed to the oppressors.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

54

The Mirage of Democracy

[*Lanka Guardian*, Nov.15, 1992]

I wish to respond briefly to Izeth Hussain’s letter entitled, “Defining Democracy” (LG, Oct.15). He has faulted me for excluding India and Japan from my list of democratic nations (LG, Oct.1). If one is willing to accept that a circus clown perched on a 20-meter totem pole is actually 21-meters tall, then I will buy the view that democracy has thrived in India and Japan since the end of Second World War. True,

there have been general elections at frequent intervals since 1950 in both countries. But does that trumpet the triumph of democracy?

Since 1947, three generations of the Nehru family governed post-colonial India for almost 38 years (out of 45 years). The current Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao owes his position to the reluctance of Italian-born Sonia Gandhi to enter the Indian political stream. If Sonia Gandhi has expressed her willingness to lead the Congress Party after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination last year, the Prime Minister's position would have been hers without asking. Even now, most Congress Party members are just abiding time for Rajiv Gandhi's children to attain the 'coronation age' of 25 years, to make one of them the leaders of modern India. Analysts like Izeth Hussain may assert that democracy prevails in India. But it is an Indian version, which should be aptly labeled as *Dharbar Democracy*. One would also note that Mahatma Gandhi, the founding father of modern India, was not a democrat in its truest sense of the word. He did not contest any popular election during his life time to become the adorable leader. This is true for his illustrious contemporary in China, Mao Ze Dong, as well. Mahatma Gandhi and Mao Ze Dong are excellent examples which show how the Asian societies choose their leaders. In text book description they may not be monarchs, but in practical sense, they behaved and made decisions like monarchs, and the masses accepted them without any elections.

Having lived in Japan for a total period of almost five years, I can also assure Izeth Hussain that democracy is hardly practiced in Japan. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is the Japanese equivalent of the Congress Party in India. It has been in power since 1955 and has not been defeated by the weak parties of the Opposition for the past 37 years. The LDP is just a coalition of more than four personal factions of politicians who negotiate for power. If Indian democracy is 'Dharbar Democracy', the Japanese version should be called as 'Shogun Democracy'. In fact, democracy is an utterly irrelevant concept in the highly hierarchical society of Japan. Japanese themselves feel uncomfortable with the Douglas MacArthur's notion of American democracy. In Japan too (like in India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh), blood-relationships pave the way to power than the democratic route. Nobusuke Kishi and Eisaku Sato (despite their different family names) were siblings who enjoyed a combined total of 11 years as prime ministers of Japan between 1957 and 1972.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan).

55

Democracies

[*Lanka Guardian*, Dec.1, 1992]

Sri Kantha denies that India and Japan are democracies (LG of Nov.15). According to how democracy, more specifically liberal democracy, is understood today a country has to meet two criteria to be regarded as democratic. One is that the people should be able to choose their government from among competing political parties at free and fair elections. The other is that the government must respect democratic freedoms, the most important of which is freedom of expression.

It is beyond dispute that India and Japan meet those criteria. That is why they are invariably listed among the democratic countries in the proliferating literature on the subject, for instance in Robert Dahl's books or in Fukuyama's *The End of History*.

Certainly democracy as practised in one country will not exactly replicate what prevails in any other. Cultural determinants, such as the family in South Asia or hierarchy in India and Japan, can be expected to give a localized shape to democracy, and some countries can seem to be less democratic than others. All the same, a country is regarded as democratic provided the two criteria mentioned above are met.

We can, of course, posit an ideal form of democracy and argue that not just India and Japan but the Western countries as well are not properly democratic. Democracy in an idealized form has not been realized anywhere, for which reason Robert Dahl prefers the term 'polyarchy' to 'democracy'. It remains, however, that as Churchill once observed democracy with all its imperfections is the worst form of government, except for all the others.

It is important that we Sri Lankans should not be confused about democracy. That confusion led to the failure to recognize the dangers posed by the brutal and stupid 1977 regime, which spat on democracy and transformed the paradise isle into a blood-drenched horror. The horror continues under our system of 'nonsense democracy'.

Izeth Hussain
Colombo 7.

56

Utopia in Federalism?

[*Lanka Guardian*, March 1, 1993]

What a change two decades can make? I met N. Shanmugaratnam who had contributed the article entitled, 'Narrow Nationalism and Militarism' (LG, Feb.1) for the first time in 1974. Then, he had recently returned from Japan, and I was an undergrad at the University of Colombo. I was a supporter of S.J.V. Chelvanayakam and his principles of federalism then, though Shanmugaratnam vehemently criticized the then Tamil political leadership for their parliamentary politics. In our dialogues, Shanmugaratnam advocated that what Tamils needed was a Chinese model of communism based on Mao Ze Dong's ideals. Now, the Tamils are under the leadership of LTTE which shuns parliamentary politics. But Shanmugaratnam had come a full circle and now finds utopia in the federalist model.

We need not go back to the 12th century imperial Chola king, Raja Raja Cholan, to find a model for Prabhakaran. How about looking at recent times? For their reputation for ruthlessness and intolerance to other competing groups, one can see parallels in the leadership of Mao Ze Dong and Prabhakaran. Chelvanayakam followed the Gandhian path and was fooled by both the SLFP and UNP between 1958 and 1968. His failure gave birth to Prabhakaran's militancy and Mahatma Gandhi was replaced with Mao. I pose this question to Shanmugaratnam; what is wrong when Prabhakaran does exactly what Mao did between 1927 and 1949. Even now, one billion Chinese are being ruled by a Mao's colleague, who himself was a 'terrorist'.

Shanmugaratnam reports that Muslim people have been ill-treated by the LTTE. I am sure he should have learnt the fate of 6.6 million Uighur Muslims and 4.7 million Tibetan Buddhists in China. I would suggest that he should read the cover story which appeared in the *Newsweek* of April 23, 1990. Why Dalai Lama, the 1989 Nobel Peace laureate, has to circle the world like a vagabond since 1959 rather than meditating in his native Tibet? And why the self-proclaimed protectors of Buddhism among the Sri Lankan ruling elites have ignored China's atrocities in Tibet? Can Shanmugaratnam explain why Muslims and Buddhists have been ill-treated by the Chinese power holders?

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, Japan.

57

Suu Kyi's Burma and Sri Lanka

[*Lanka Guardian*, May 1, 1993]

Suvimalee Karunaratna has observed that "Suu Kyi's Nobel prize winning book, *Freedom from Fear* [was] written under house arrest in Rangoon" (LG, April 1). I wonder whether she had really read the contents of the book if not the Introduction written by Suu Kyi's husband Michael Aris, before making such a foolish comment.

In his Introduction, Michael Aris had noted, "Suu's writings in this collection fall naturally into two parts: firstly those she completed in Oxford, Kyoto and Simla before her return to Burma in 1988, and secondly a medley of later essays, speeches, letters and interviews...". The first part (the meaty section) consists of four lengthy essays, namely 'My Father' (1984), 'My Country and People' (1985), 'Intellectual Life in Burma and India under Colonialism' (1990) and 'Literature and Nationalism in Burma' (1987). The figures in parentheses were their publication dates. Suu Kyi was placed on house arrest from July 1989. Almost all the 16 short items collected into the medley in the second part by Michael Aris were written (or delivered) by Suu Kyi **before she was put under house arrest.**

I also agree with Jane Russell's observation that, "throughout this book (*Freedom from Fear*), there is the constant reiteration of (Buddhist) themes that would be as applicable to Sri Lanka as to Burma" (LG, March 1). In fact, two decades ago, the noted Cambridge anthropologist Edmund Leach had published quite an interesting paper entitled, "Buddhism in the post-colonial order in Burma and Ceylon" in the journal *Daedalus* (winter 1973, vol.102, no.1, pp.29-54). In this study, Edmund Leach had compared the political careers of Aung San and S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, both of whom fanned the flames of Buddhist activism and "both died by assassination". What is most striking for me in Suu Kyi's book is that, in her essays about her father Aung San, she makes no reference to this academic paper of a respected British scholar. One can easily guess, why Suu Kyi had left out this important contribution of a not-so-mediocre intellectual. In his study, Edmund Leach had presented a not-so-flattering portrayal of Aung San, which Suu Kyi would have found difficult to gulp. So much for her academic credentials and bravery.

I quote Edmund Leach in some detail: “Aung San was in touch with Japanese agents from around 1938 and, when threatened with arrest in 1940, he escaped to Tokyo. He returned to Burma with the invading Japanese army in 1941. Contrary to legend, the Burma Independence Army, which Aung San then organized, was originally an insignificant group to which the Japanese offered little support. It is extremely doubtful whether this ‘army’ ever engaged in any form of combat...In the spring of 1945 Aung San, who had previously been denounced by the British authorities as a dangerous traitor, was suddenly recognized by Admiral Mountbatten as ‘the leader of anti-Japanese resistance in Burma’. **Without this recognition Aung San would likely have disappeared without a trace. The subsequent build up of Aung San’s reputation as ‘Burma’s popular hero’ was very elaborately engineered...**”.

Jane Russell should have consulted this paper of Edmund Leach, before observing somewhat outlandishly that “Suu Kyi herself may be compared, with some justification, to Nehru” (LG, March 1). In my opinion, Suu Kyi’s comparison of her father Aung San to Mahatma Gandhi is far-fetched. Call it an affectionate outpouring of love, “My dear Pappa”, by a high-school girl, who had lost his father prematurely. Edmund Leach’s conclusion of the careers of S.W.R.D.Bandaranaike and Aung San also need emphasis. He had inferred, “both Bandaranaike and Aung San seem to have perished because, having ridden to power on the crest of a militant Buddhist nationalist wave, they would both have liked to reach some compromise agreement with the kind of West ‘modern’ society which, in their hearts, they both really admired.”

I wish to end this letter by saying that I respect Suu Kyi’s fight for human rights in Burma. But to elevate her as modern day Joan of Arc is somewhat premature. Let her mature during her incarceration. Her best thoughts have yet to be delivered. What had been published in her only book so far is not that great.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

58

Greetings from Japan [Lanka Guardian, June 1, 1993]

Congratulations for completing 15 years of non-stop publication of LG, in such turbulent times. The LG issue of May 1 carried quite a number of congratulatory messages from celebrities in the political, journalistic and academic disciplines. I have no doubt that most of these folks are older than me. So, will you kindly accept a message from an ordinary reader who turned to the LG in 1978 for another important reason, not mentioned by the celebrities?

In 1978, I was just a temporary assistant lecturer in Biochemistry at the University of Peradeniya, with a measly monthly salary of rupees 800. I couldn’t afford to subscribe or purchase the standard international magazines (*Time*, *Newsweek*, *Economist*, *Readers Digest* and *National Geographic*) to improve my English skills. I could afford to buy only the LG. And it carried the name of Mervyn de Silva (whose by-line I had seen in some of the international magazines), as the editor. The motto of the LG, ‘The Other News and Other Views’ also attracted me. Though I do not agree

completely with the views published in the LG, I have remained a loyal reader of the LG for the past 15 years, and I believed I was able to improve my English by reading it as well. Carry on your good work.

My only quandary about the LG is that I have not been introduced to the other personnel who assist the editor in producing the journal at fortnightly intervals. The mast-head carried one name. Aren't there any assistant editors, proof-readers, archivists, and even stamp-lickers to the LG? Is the LG, really a 'one-man show' of Mervyn de Silva? If it is so, doesn't this guy take any vacation? Or doesn't he fall sick at all? Though it is impolite to raise this question, I am also curious to know what will happen to the LG after Mervyn de Silva? Will the editor make an attempt to answer my doubts?

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

59

[Premadasa Assassination]

[*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, June 16, 1993]

I am amused by the contradiction you present in the May 26 issue. In 'Fast Action Needed: Sri Lanka's New President has a window of opportunity' [International Affairs], you describe the Tamil Tigers as the chief suspects in the murder of President Ranasinghe Premadasa. Contrary to this inflammatory opinion, Mr.D.B.Wijetunge, in his interview with you, said: 'It's too premature to say anything.' Will you clarify whether you have more trust in the Sri Lankan police and mass-media sources than in President Wijetunge?

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, Japan

60

Repartee or Ribaldry?

[*Lanka Guardian*, August 1, 1993]

I wonder whether S.W.R.D.Bandaranaike's sneer on Dr.N.M.Perera, "the obscure son of a more obscure father", is worth remembering (LG, June 15). For me, it seems like an example of ribaldry rather than repartee. By that comment, did Bandaranaike attempt to show the Ceylonese that the Samasamajist leader Nanayakkara Martin Perera did not belong to the *walawwe*-class of Mudaliyars who licked the boots of their colonial masters for patronage and petty privileges? Or could it have been the expression of an inferiority complex that Bandaranaike harboured due to his inability to match Dr.Perera's academic credentials?

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

61

President Premadasa[*Lanka Guardian*, October 1, 1993]

What a puny defense Chanaka Amaratunga makes in his eulogy to Premadasa, to show that the late President of Sri Lanka was a humanist, who believed in liberal principles? (LG, Sept.1)

Even if one accepts the answer ‘No’ on its face value, for charges such as, “depriving his opponents of their civic rights”, “manipulating the Constitution for his partisan convenience”, “meaningfully obstruct criticism”, “extending the life of Parliament by a referendum”, “pandering to racism and communalism”, and “causing members of parliament from ethnic minorities to be driven from Parliament”, one cannot exonerate Premadasa from these charges, because he was a willing participant at the powerful No.2 position for eleven years (1977-88). Amaratunga should realize that aiding and abetting a crime is also a punishable offence.

I wish to note only one example of Premadasa’s tactics in the parliament. When there was a no-confidence motion against the then leader of the Opposition, A.Amirthalingam, and verbal mud-slingers like Cyril Mathew and others were spewing venom on the TULF leader, what did Premadasa do? Did he uphold the highest traditions of the august assembly? To protect his position, Premadasa “sailed with the wave”. If memory serves me right only **Shelton Ranaraja, the then deputy minister of Justice, took a stand against the nasty remarks of his fellow party members and showed courage by voting against that ridiculous motion.** Was this the humanist politician who believed in liberal principles?

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

62

Federalism – Then and Now[*Lanka Guardian*, November 1, 1993]

I refer to your commentary entitled, “The End of Jaw-Jaw – and now?” (LG, Oct.1). There is no comparison between the 1956 federalism proposal by S.J.V.Chelvanayakam and the current federalism proposal by K.Srinivasan, the purported ‘MP for Jaffna’. Then, Chelvanayakam as the leader of the Federal Party received a majority mandate for his proposal from the Tamil speaking voters in the Northern and Eastern provinces in the 1956 general election. A couple of Muslim MPs were also elected on the federalism ticket. When did Srinivasan receive this type of comparable mandate from the Tamil speaking voters for his federalism proposal? Only gullibles can be convinced that Srinivasan is on par with Chelvanayakam.

The current Tamil MPs representing the Northern and Eastern provinces resemble the aging Chinese mainlanders who were elected in 1947 to represent mainland constituencies and who continued to maintain their seats in the National Assembly of Taiwan following their retreat from mainland China in 1949. Though they were given labels such as ‘Hon.member of Manchuria’, ‘Hon.member of Fukien’ and

‘Hon.member of Hunan’, and so forth, they never set foot in mainland China after their escape in 1949. In his ‘Urgent Appeal’ (LG, Oct.1), K.Srinivasan mentions that “I have discussed in detail at home and abroad with most of the concerned people about the deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka”. Well, may I know when did Srinivasan pay last visit to his ‘Jaffna constituency’, and how many people did he hear from directly?

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

63

1948-49 Disenfranchisement [*Lanka Guardian*, November 15, 1993]

A.M.Navaratna Bandara and Sumanasiri Liyanage state in their paper, “Sri Lankan conflict: Consociational Solution” (LG, Oct.15) that the main objection to the Citizenship Act No.18 of 1948 and the Parliamentary Election Amendment Act No.48 of 1949 “came not from the Tamil representatives but from the parliamentarians of the Left parties”. This is only a partial truth, initially highlighted by Kumari Jayewardene. A clarification is warranted so that the views of the Tamil MPs who opposed the 1948-49 Disenfranchisement Acts are properly interpreted.

In my view, the phrase “main objection” should be qualified in terms of the number of MPs who were elected to the 1947 parliament. As all know, the number of MPs representing the Sinhalese constituencies were higher than that of the number of MPs representing the Tamil constituencies. 1947 election returned 15 MPs from LSSP and BLP. Three MPs represented the CP. Of these 18 MPs representing the Left parties, around 10 owed their election to the support of the Indian Tamil voters. So, one can easily comprehend why the MPs of the Left parties opposed the 1948-49 Disenfranchisement Acts. With all due respect to their principled stand on the rights of ethnic minorities in 1947, one could infer that the opposition to the 1948-49 Disenfranchisement Acts provided by the Left MPs was just a knee-jerk reaction to a “life-death” situation threatening their representation in parliament. Later events (especially the post-1960 behavior of the LSSP and CP on the issues of ethnic minorities) proved that the 1948-49 response of the Left parties was just that.

Among the two major parties which represented the Tamils in the 1947 parliament, Tamil Congress had 7 MPs. Of these seven, two (S.J.V. Chelvanayakam and C.Vanniasingham) opposed the 1948-49 Disenfranchisement Acts and split from the TC to form the Federal Party. All the 7 MPs (which included S.Thondaman) representing the Ceylon Indian Congress opposed the 1948-49 Acts, while 5 MPs of TC supported these Acts. Also, C. Suntheralingam, one of the two Tamil Cabinet ministers in the D.S. Senanayake regime resigned from the Cabinet in 1948 to express his opposition to the two Disenfranchisement Acts.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

64

Rule rather than Exception
 [*Lanka Guardian*, April 1, 1994]

The rift between V.Prabhakaran and G.Mahendrarajah (Mahathaya) of the LTTE follows a predictable pattern, any political (or for that matter, hierarchical) organization would face with time. A cursory glance at the Sri Lankan political history reveals that fallout had occurred between the leader and deputy leader of every party and this phenomenon is almost a rule rather than an exception.

The SLFP was formed by S.W.R.D.Bandaranaike in 1951, when he felt that he was not given respect at No.2 in the UNP of D.S.Senanayake, who was grooming his son Dudley Senanayake for the 'throne'. The rift between the leader Dudley Senanayake and his then nominal No.2, J.R.Jayewardene, came out in the open after the electoral defeat of UNP in 1970. In the SLFP too, after Sirimavo Bandaranaike's elevation to the No.1 position in 1960, the then senior leader of the SLFP, C.P.de Silva (after being dumped to the No.2 position), felt that he had been insulted and he left the SLFP in 1964, making Sirimavo snort the act as a 'stab in the back'. Later, the newly promoted No.2 in the SLFP, Maithiripala Senanayake, also fell out with Sirimavo Bandaranaike in the 1980s. For want of space, I omit examples from the traditional and 'neo'-Left parties, where the nominal No.2 had parted company with the leader, at the drop of a hat.

Among the Tamil political parties, S.J.V.Chelvanayakam (then No.2 to G.G.Ponnambalam) left the Tamil Congress in 1949 to form the Federal Party. G.G.Ponnambalam's son Kumar Ponnambalam also had to cross swords with Motilal Nehru (the purported No.2) in the ghost of a Tamil Congress, whose membership may not exceed hundred. Within the TULF (basically, the Federal Party, which was renamed), in the post-Chelvanayakam period, the relationship between the then leader Amirthalingam and his nominal No.2 in the ranks of seniority (C.Rajadurai and V.N.Navaratnam) were not cordial at best. As a result, Rajadurai left the TULF to join UNP, and V.N.Navaratnam retired from active politics after 1983. In the Ceylon Workers Congress, veteran leader S.Thondaman is now having a headache with his nominal No.2 M.Sellasamy. In 1960, Thondaman had to oust Azeez, who was causing trouble to him as then No.2 in the CWC.

The rift between the No.1 and No.2 of a political organization is not peculiar to Sri Lanka. Every strong leader (in the democratic USA and India as well as the 'undemocratic' Russia and China) had to face this 'wall' in his or her life time. Abraham Lincoln had two vice presidents in his short tenure of 5 year presidency period. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, in his 14 year period as the American president, had three vice presidents. In the Indian national scene, Indira Gandhi and later Morarji Desai (who was Indira's nominal No.2, before being pushed out) as well as V.P.Singh, had to constantly look over their shoulders to assure that their 'thrones' were not toppled. While Indira succeeded, Morarji Desai and V.P.Singh succumbed. China's revolutionary leader Mao Ze Dong had to tackle his No.2, Lin Piao, in a "not so comfortable manner", to assure his position.

Sachi Sri Kantha

Osaka, (Japan)

Letters 65-72: Ninth Debate on Karma Theory by Sri Kantha and his critics

Note: This was the third time I picked on the commentary made by Izeth Hussain to initiate a debate. First, it was on the ethnicity of Indian Tamils. Secondly, it was on the virtues of democracy. This time, it was on karma theory. Two other correspondents also threw their hats in the ring for my delight. Later I learnt from a letter which appeared in the *Business Week* magazine, that the Chinese also believe in the theory of karma, subscribed by the orthodox Hindus. So, Letters 78-85 cover all these views.

65

A Hindu Perspective on Bosnia

[*Lanka Guardian*, May 1, 1994]

You have published a commentary by Izeth Hussain entitled, “A Muslim perspective on Bosnia” (LG, March 15). Fine. Will you, now permit me some space to provide a Hindu perspective on Bosnia? As a Hindu, who believe in, (a) *Brahman*, the creator, preserver or transformer and reabsorber of everything; and (b) theory of *Karma*, it is my belief that the current fate of Muslims in Bosnia is related to the historical plundering of the Serb land by the Ottoman Turks (read as, Muslims), which began in 1389 at the Battle of Kosovo and continued for almost five centuries following that. In 1459, “Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II achieves complete annexation of Serbia. The Turks rule for the next 400 years, often ruthlessly. They impress Serbian youth into military service, exterminate the nobles, burden the people with heavy taxes and subject the Serbian Orthodox Church to the control of hated Greek patriarchs”, according to the historical synopsis, published in the *Newsweek* of April 19, 1993.

In the Hollywood western movies, the heroes wore white and rode in white horses. The villains had to wear the black and ride on black horses. In the current Bosnian conflict, Muslims are being portrayed by Izeth Hussain as pitiable heroes. But, history shows they also acted as villains for centuries in the same battlegrounds. So, the theory of karma holds that the current generation of Muslims are reaping what their forefathers sowed.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

66

Explanation or Justification?

[*Lanka Guardian*, May 15, 1994]

I didn't read Izeth Hussain's article on Bosnia (LG, March 15) but I read a comment on it – A Hindu Perspective on Bosnia – by Sachi Sri Kantha (LG, May 1), which motivated me to write this brief note.

According to the Karma theory of Sri Kantha, “the current generation of (Bosnian) Muslims are reaping what their forefathers sowed. I wonder whether Sri

Kantha tries to justify the sufferings of Bosnians or to explain the causes of sufferings. If it is a justification, then it reveals the cruelty of the intellectual mind. If it is an explanation then it is not an explanation of a scientist but of a layman.

Everyone who reads history and has a common sense knows that the historical forefathers of any race had committed some kind of 'sin' to the 'other'. However, a rational intellectual can't relate the contemporary political turmoils and sufferings of a later generation to the sin of their forefathers. Can Sri Kantha justify or explain the tremendous sufferings of Sri Lankan Tamils using his theory of Karma? It will be mere absurdity. Even some orthodox or fanatic Muslims may justify the Bosnian sufferings as it is the punishment of Allah because they didn't practice Islam in their day to day life. Rational intellectuals can't entertain these type of irrational religious ideology in contemporary political discourse.

M.A.Nuhman
University of Peradeniya

67

Bosnian Muslims – An Explanation

[*Lanka Guardian*, June 1, 1994]

I appreciate M.A.Nuhman's criticism (LG, May 15) on my previous comment, about the plight of Bosnian Muslims, which was published in the LG of May 1. Rather than trying to "justify the sufferings of Bosnians or to explain the causes of the sufferings" as Nuhman had wondered, I wrote that brief note as a parody on Izeth Hussain's article.

It is not so meaningful (in my opinion) to interpret events in current Bosnia from a "Muslim perspective". Suffering should be viewed in a broader humanistic angle first, rather than ogling through the "myopic goggle" as "Muslim perspective". My comment entitled, "a Hindu perspective" was directed to that cacophonous cant of Izeth Hussain and not at all to the sufferings of Muslims in Bosnia. Cannot Nuhman distinguish a parody from profanity?

While I was in Sri Lanka, I had enjoyed Nuhman's poetry in Tamil .But I wish that he better read the source of my criticism first before casting his stone on me.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

68

Muslim Perspective on Bosnia

[*Lanka Guardian*, June 15, 1994]

Re: Sri Kantha's latest (LG of June 1). He cannot really expect anyone to believe that his earlier letter in the LG of May 1 commenting on my article on Bosnia in the LG of March 15 was meant to be a parody. Nuhman did not read it as such (LG of May 15), nor did I, nor can anyone else who is not mentally deranged.

It merits serious analysis as an extraordinary interesting exhibit. He provides a Hindu perspective on Bosnia according to which, in term of the theory of kharma, the current fate of the Bosnians is related to what was done against the Serbs in the past by the Ottoman Turks. He adds parenthetically about the Turks, “read as Muslims”. It seems a curious notion of kharma according to which one people, the Bosnians, have to pay for what was done in the past by another people, the Turks.

But, no, what SK evidently has in mind, evident from the parenthetical addition quoted above, is that both those peoples share an identity because both are Muslims. Therefore the Bosnian Muslims of today get a whacking, in terms of the Sri Kanthian theory of kharma, because of what the Turkish Muslims did in the past.

The implications of that argument should be very interesting for Sri Lankans. It can be used to justify the whacking of the Sri Lankan Muslims by the LTTE. I refer to the massacres of Muslims in the Eastern Province mosques and their expulsion from Jaffna. Muslims elsewhere have committed outrages, therefore Muslims here deserve a whacking, which the LTTE has proceeded to award in fulfillment of the Sachi Sri Kanthian version of kharma.

Is SK man enough to admit that his real position is this: All Muslims all over the world deserve a whacking, all the time? Smacks to me of mad rage against Muslims. I wonder how many Hindus subscribe to the SK version of kharma.

Nuhman asks whether SK was explaining the fate of the Bosnians or justifying it. Undoubtedly the latter, as can be seen from SK’s remark that I have portrayed the Bosnians as “pitiable heroes” whether they acted as villains, by which they evidently means that they are not entitled to any sympathy or support. It is clear enough that SK has invoked kharma to provide a religious justification for the Bosnian fate.

SK has made a big mistake in pretending that his letter was meant as a parody, which none but the mentally deranged can believe. Had he claimed that it was meant as nonsense, everyone would have believed him. I have in the past generously acknowledged that he has genius, a genius for writing nonsense literature, a genre to which the letter analysed above is an outstanding contribution.

His latest letter is yet another outstanding contribution to nonsense literature. In it he objects, using the most insulting terms, to my having written from a Muslim perspective on Bosnia because “suffering should be viewed in a broader humanistic angle first”. Is the man really unaware that a vast amount has been written on Bosnia from a broadly humanistic angle, and that there certainly is a place for an article from a Muslim perspective? I must add that the *LG* editor requested such an article and I provided it. SK has yet again demonstrated his genius for writing nonsense. Of him it can be said that while others to some faint meaning might make pretence he, Sachi Sri Kantha like Dryden’s Shadwell, never deviates into sense.

I believe that the background to his cowardly disavowal of his original letter can be reconstructed with reasonable accuracy. After having written it in a fit of mad murderous rage against Muslims he must have realized, perhaps following on rebukes from outraged fellow-Hindus, that its brutish nastiness would nauseate all sane human beings who read it. At that point he must have feared that a right royal whacking was on its way, administered as in the past by Izeth Hussain. He then panicked and bolted for cover, squealing for help.

The bolting for cover took the form of a disavowal of his own letter by pretending that it was a parody, hoping that it would not be attacked for what it really

and indubitably is, an explosion of anti-Muslim hatred. The bolting took the form also of a gratuitous compliment on Nuhman's poetry, meant to show that SK is not rabidly anti-Muslim as such. And the squealing for help can be clearly heard in the same compliment, meant partly to get someone else on his side.

I am however uncertain on one point, about which I hope SK himself will provide a clarification. While believing that as a matter of principle all Muslims always deserve a whacking, he may be humane enough to make some exceptions, for instance for a Muslim writing in Tamil. His rage at its most mad and murderous is reserved, I strongly suspect, for Westernized Muslims who dare to hold forth in English on matters requiring high levels of intellectual sophistication for their treatment, something which in terms of Sri Kanthian cosmology should be left to their betters.

Over to you Sachi, for another outstanding contribution.

Izeth Hussain
[Colombo]

[*Note:* In this letter abbreviated SK refers to Sri Kantha.]

69

Theory of Karma

[*Lanka Guardian*, June 15, 1994]

I was surprised and shocked to read Dr.Sachi Sri Kantha's "A Hindu Perspective on Bosnia" (LG, May 1st 1994).

I always admired and agreed on what Sachi Sri Kantha wrote on the ethnic (Tamil) problem of Sri Lanka. But on Bosnia Muslims he is 100% wrong and the theory of karma does not hold good in modern context. Imaginative theories of karma and rebirth were expounded/created to instill fear so that people do not commit sins and crimes.

Why blame the current generation of Bosnian Muslims for what their forefathers did several hundreds of years ago. The Bosnian Muslims are fighting for self preservation and to safeguard the boundaries of their traditional homelands. They should have the right to live in peace.

If the theory of karma is to be believed, are we Hindu/Tamils should also believe that the current generation of Sri Lankan Tamils are suffering in many ways because of some unknown or imaginary sins committed by our forefathers?

Minorities are minorities wherever they are or whether they are Bosnian Muslims or Tutsis or East Timorians or Sri Lankan Tamils. We all have similar problems and we the minorities deserve to live in peace in our own countries.

V.T.Saravanapavan
Canada

70

Parody and Profanity
[*Lanka Guardian*, June 15, 1994]

My thanks to Sachi Sri Kantha for his clarification (LG June 1). I criticized only his text but not his intention. It may be true that his intention was to ridicule Izeth Hussain but I couldn't smell it in his text. To me it is still plain, even after reading Hussain's article. I hope I am not so insensitive to parody but unfortunately the text is hard to interpret as parody without the author's endorsement. Further a parody on a sensitive issue may also be profanity. Sachi's is an example. I regret if I hurt Sachi.

M.A.Nuhman
University of Peradeniya

71

Parody and Profanity
[*Lanka Guardian*, July 15, 1994]

Thank you for publishing three letters (from Izeth Hussain, V.T.Saravanapavan and M.A.Nuhman) in the LG of June 15, which dealt with my previously published short note on Bosnian Muslims. I appreciate the comments made by your correspondents.

First, I thank Nuhman for a courteous reply and Hussain for a rude rebuttal. The style in which I have been critiqued reveals the character of these correspondents. What a contrast! Nuhman is correct in stating that "a parody on a sensitive issue may also mean profanity". If I'm given equal space as Hussain has been given to muse on the Muslim perspective on Bosnia, I can explain my point of view on this sensitive issue.

Secondly, Saravanapavan is also entitled to his opinion that the theory of karma "does not hold good in modern context". But he should also not forget that millions of Hindus will disagree with him. I also hold the view that many Hindus in Sri Lanka still believe that the fates of S.W.R.Bandaranaike, Amirthalingam, Premadasa, Athulathmudali, Sri Sabaratnam, Uma Maheswaran, Padmanabha, Kiddu and Mahathaya can be explained by the theory of karma. The Tamil proverb, '*One who sows millet reaps millet; one who sows misery reaps misery*' reflect the theory of karm lucidly.

Thirdly, I was overwhelmed by Prof.Izeth Hussain's hidden expertise on psychoanalysis. He extrapolates on what I have commented about his cant to conclude I "justify the whacking of the Sri Lankan Muslims by the LTTE". I ask why bring LTTE into this debate. Did I utter anything on Sri Lankan Muslims or the LTTE? Hussain delights in setting up phoney targets and crowing about what an expert psychoanalyst he has become. If Hussain is entitled to claim that he wrote the 'Muslim perspective on commission from the editor of the *LG*, don't I have an equal privilege to comment on what I read in the pages of the *LG*?

Lastly, I will try to improve my skills in writing parody and in the future will heed Nuhman's suggestion that parody on a sensitive issue may also mean profanity.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

72

Arden* on Nehru

[*Lanka Guardian*, May 15, 1994]

Thank you for bringing to a grand finale, the long-running series, 'The J.R. Years' by one 'Arden' (LG, March 1). According to your content's page inscription, the last piece was the 21st installment. I could not believe it, that I have read such a truthful post-mortem of J.R. Jayewardene in any other journal recently. I applaud Arden for being so informative in compiling juicy factoids. But, I have been wondering whether the author is a single person or not. It appears to me, that more than one hand (or should I say, brain) had compiled this lengthy analysis. There seems to be a distinct difference in the text and style of the first half of the critique (with a lot of legal jargon and quotes) from that of concluding postscript, filled with half-baked quotes from sources as dubious as Richard Nixon and M.O. Mathai, Nehru's one-time secretary-cum-house keeper.

I also noticed a streak of anti-Hindu drivel in the 'postscript'. What else can I infer from comments such as, "Muslim fundamentalism, if it appears harsh and cruel to a modern mind, is still equitable – it is after all, none other than the Old Testament ethic. Islam is totally egalitarian. Hindu casteism, on the other hand, is appalling pyramidal social structure built on bizarre superstitions and barbarities unmatched in any other part of the world...". Come on Sir, I do not need to provide a laundry list of 'virtues' which embellish Muslim fundamentalism. Just two would suffice, which is as repulsive as self-immolation and bride-burnings. First, the *Time* magazine of March 21st provide a feature relating to the cruel practice of female circumcision, which should be better termed as mutilation. This ritual of women is practiced in Muslim countries of Africa and Middle East. I ask Arden, whether this is also an Old Testament ethic? Secondly, how should one classify the death penalty imposed on a Muslim author named Salman Rushdie by Iran's mullahs? Is it a civilized act?

India's first prime minister Nehru comes under fire from Arden, based on the material provided in a lousy book from one of Nehru's secretary-cum-housekeeper named M.O. Mathai. I too read that particular book, but was not impressed one bit. We should note that both Mathai and K.M. Panikkar were Keralites and this similar cultural background could have generated the animosity between both of them. Panikkar could have been a 'slob who wore soiled clothes'. But so was Socrates and other intellectuals in history. But Mathai was not an intellectual. He had an 'infatuation' on Indira Gandhi and just to sell his book, he left one or two blank chapters with suggestive captions like 'She', with a foot-note stating that the publishers prevented him from printing what he wrote under 'She'. Later search revealed that he did not even write a sentence under those 'provocative' captions. Arden relies too much on Mathai's testimony to reveal what he terms as 'Nehru's crypto-racism'. If Arden wanted evidence for Nehru's racism, he/she should have culled it from Nehru's own works, such as *Glimpses of World History*, *Discovery of India*, and *An Autobiography*. Has Arden read any of these classics? I doubt it.

Again, the sources mentioned by Arden relating to Nehru's belief on astrology are too far-fetched. Arden notes, "Durga Das ('India from Curzon to Nehru and After') has related that Nehru used to consult astrologers (quoted by Mervyn Jones in the *New Statesman* of 24 October 1969)". What can one make out from this bit of factoid? Did Nehru reveal why he consulted astrologers to Durga Das? Has it been proved that Nehru acted according to his astrologer's suggestions? If so, by whom? I wonder, whether Nehru being a shrewd politician, was just lending his ears to the astrologer's circle to charm the voters who believe in astrology.

Arden also presents only one-side's version of the China-India border war of 1962. He recites Nehru's deeds of Bhutan Treaty (1949) and Annexation of Goa (1961). Nothing is mentioned about the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1959, and the resulting flight of Buddhist leader Dalai Lama and his followers from Dharam Sala to Delhi. The origins of 1962 war between China and India is not as simple as Arden had formulated in his diatribe on Nehru. The entry on India in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (15th ed, Macropedia, vol.21) notes that, "in 1959 and 1960, China concluded agreements with Pakistan and Burma, respectively to settle the petty disputes that had prevailed since the British period over certain sectors of their frontiers. India was incensed because the agreement with Pakistan covered sections of the former Kashmir boundary occupied by Pakistan in 1947 but still claimed as de jure Indian territory". Thus, the border dispute originated from China's annexation of Tibet in 1959, since the then 'understood border' between India and China was based on the 1914 Simla Conference between British and Tibetan officials.

Lastly, for folks like Arden, John Kotelawala's 'tart reply' to Nehru at the 1955 Bandung Conference may be thrilling. But it is similar to the thrill of boxing great Muhammad Ali losing a bout with Leon Spinks on points. If Nehru is Muhammad Ali, Kotelawala is just Leon Spinks. In the annals of twentieth century history, if Nehru merits a paragraph, Kotelawala would not even be credited with a foot-note. So let us not brag too much about Kotelawala's 'tart reply' to Nehru.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

*a pseudonym.

73

Language Usage

[*Lanka Guardian*, June 1, 1994]

As one who is living in Japan (and also married to a Japanese), I wish to bring to your attention that the caption "More **Jap** aid for TV" (LG, May 1) is not in good taste. The word '**Jap**' (an American derogatory slur for Japanese) is now detested by Japanese as American arrogance of World War II vintage. Even American businessmen who carry begging bowl to Tokyo these days would not dare to use it in public. The irony is that, your news brief mentions a beneficial act of the Japanese to Sri Lankans and you use a derogatory slur to highlight your patron!

In the same vein, I also have noticed your regular (but irritating) use of the Tamil word – **thottam**, when referring to Minister S.Thondaman’s activities. I remember one caption which went like, “Trouble in Thonda’s Thottam”. If you have fancy for that beautiful Tamil word (which literally means, ‘garden’), I appreciate your taste for alliteration. But, you should also note that among Tamils, the word ‘thottam’ had been used in the past (such as **thotta-kaataan**) in a derisive sense to refer to plantation workers. I suggest, why not stick to the standard English word ‘plantation’, when referring to Thondaman’s activities?

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, (Japan)

Editorial Note:

Mr.S.Thondaman, a long-standing friend of the L.G. loves the phrase ‘Thonda’s Thottam’. Other Tamil readers have never raised any objections though we note that some Tamils in Tokyo may find it jarring as ‘Jap’ to Japanese ears. Yes, ‘Jap’ should not appear in the pages of the L.G.

74

‘Truth’

[*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, Jan.6, 1995]

In my opinion your sermon ‘In the War against Terrorists, Truth is the Best Weapon’ belongs to the world of fairies and angels [‘Keeping the Lid On’, Editorial, Nov.30]. I live in a real world where the truth is always hidden or restrained from revealing its naked beauty.

Truth is massaged and masked by the media in many countries. Truth is also decorated by almost every practising politician on this globe according to his or her fancy. It is an open secret that the intelligence services of many countries manufacture or clone truths according to their whims. So you have the alphabet soup of CIA, (formerly the) KGB, MI6, Mossad, RAW and ISI working overtime to manipulate the political, ethnic and religious frictions prevailing in many countries. I find it perplexing that in your sermon, you have not bothered to mention these creators of ‘cloned truths’.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Osaka, Japan

75

Cyril Ponnampereuma: Scientist extraordinary*

[*Lanka Guardian*, July 15, 1995]

Six months have passed since the death of the most illustrious Sri Lanka-born scientist of our times, Prof.Cyril Ponnampereuma. As one belonging to

Prof. Ponnampereuma's chosen profession, permit me to say a few words about his contribution to science.

I believe that among the Sri Lankan born scientists, he has been one of the most prolific contributors to the science literature. He published over 300 research papers in the field of chemistry and chemical evolution, edited 16 books and authored a couple of books (vide, *The International Who's Who 1994-95*, Europa Publications) in his professional career which spanned almost 35 years. I believe that among the Sri Lankan scientists, only P.E.P. Deraniyagala, the former Director of the National Museums of Ceylon, could match this prolific record. According to a count published in the *Spolia Zeylanica* (1960, vol.29), Deraniyagala had published 323 papers between 1923 and 1960. But it should be noted that Deraniyagala edited *Spolia Zeylanica* and majority of his publications appeared in this journal and probably without peer review. Ponnampereuma did not have this luxury.

It is true that Ponnampereuma was lucky to be at the right place at the right time and he was blessed in having two mentors (Prof. J.D. Bernal and Nobelist Prof. Melvin Calvin) who were internationally acclaimed for their pioneering contributions to science. So Ponnampereuma was able to climb the ladders of scientific success with confidence. But this 'lucky break' should not take away credit from Ponnampereuma's diligence. Other Oriental scientists who made their careers in the USA also had reputable mentors. For instance, Chen Ning Yang had Enrico Fermi and Susumu Tonegawa had Renato Dulbecco.

To the question what did Ponnampereuma do to gain international recognition, I could sum up by stating that he searched for the answers related to the meaning of life, especially the origins of life. In one of his last contributions to the science literature, published in the June 1994 issue of the *Chemistry in Britain*, Ponnampereuma wrote, "We have studied this problem [origins of life] through both analytical and synthetic approaches. In the analytical method, we go back in time and examine the record of organic matter in ancient rocks and sediments on the earth and extraterrestrial bodies such as the moon, Mars and meteorites. From the synthetic enquiry we have chosen three examples; the formation of small molecules by various forms of energy under plausible primitive earth conditions; interaction of small molecules with inorganic matrices; and the association between amino acids and nucleotides as a possible basis for the origin of the genetic code".

Ponnampereuma was lucky in that he worked for the NASA during its golden days (the 1960s decade) when the space exploration received favorable coverage. It was a glory time for scientists who projected the 'frontier spirit' in space research to the American public, who became disillusioned by the antics of politicians in the Vietnam War. After the landing of humans in the moon in 1969, the NASA became a bureaucratic jungle and Ponnampereuma made a wise move to switch to the academic world by joining the University of Maryland in 1971.

I had only one chance to meet Prof. Ponnampereuma in person. It was in May 1983 at Detroit during the annual sessions of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. At that meeting he delivered an invited popular lecture which was well received. When I met him following that lecture, I was able to sense his child-like enthusiasm to understand the mysteries of science and his ebullient energy to spread what he had learnt by painstaking research. At that time, he also served as the Presidential advisor in science to J.R. Jayewardene. When I mentioned to him that I was

studying the nutritional aspects of winged bean (*dambala*) for my doctoral dissertation at the University of Illinois, he inquired about the progress in that area and told his interest in popularizing its merits to the American audience. This he did in the interview he granted to the *Omni* science magazine. Twenty of the best interviews published by the *Omni* was collected into a book in 1984, and Ponnampereuma got the first billing in that collection among the illustrious names of contemporary science such as Francis Crick, Ernst Mayr, Jonas Salk, Roger Sperry, B.F. Skinner, E.O. Wilson, Hans Bethe, Brian Josephson, Ilya Prigogine and Freeman Dyson.

I was disappointed when I read recently the second volume of the J.R. Jayewardene biography, authored by K.M.de Silva, that not even once Ponnampereuma was mentioned in its 730 pages, though he served Jayewardene as a special presidential advisor in science. How could K.M.de Silva, an academic known for meticulous research into details, miss Ponnampereuma? Or was it that Jayewardene did not take Ponnampereuma and science seriously?

Sachi Sri Kantha
Fukuroi City, (Japan)
Japan

*Cyril Ponnampereuma died on Dec.20, 1994, at the age of 71 following a cardiac arrest.

76

Ravana Legend

[*Lanka Guardian*, September 15, 1995]

I read with interest Sasanka Perera's two part essay on the legend of Ravana (LG, Aug.1 and Aug.15). I'm not well informed on the treatment of Ravana in the Sinhala literature. But I wish to note that Perera's analysis on the 'metamorphosis of Ravana in Tamil society' leaves much to be desired. His inference that "Ravana who had no real ethnic value (for Tamils) 20 years ago is suddenly vested with both ethnic and political value" is a half-baked analysis. I published a hypothesis 19 years ago on the probable existence of more than one Ravana in the Indo-Sri Lankan history. This appeared in the *Sudar* magazine (a sister journal of *Sutantiran*, owned by S.J.V.Chelvanayakam) of April 1976. My theory was that due to the passage of time, the identities of many Ravana's have become a montage.

I wish to explain my hypothesis that there would have been many Ravana's with the following analogy. Consider how five centuries from now, future historians of Sri Lanka will find it difficult to separate the writings of more than one de Silva who are contemporaries and who have prolifically contributed to the 20th century politics in Sri Lanka. Colvin R. de Silva, Chandra R.de Silva, Kingsley M de Silva and Mervyn de Silva are four names which cause this confusion. Even whether these four individuals are Sri Lankans or Portuguese will be debated.

The Ravana, celebrated by the Tamils, is not necessarily the villain of Valmiki's Ramayana. Many Indian scholars have questioned the identity of Sri Lanka as the kingdom of Valmiki's chief protagonist. Sasanka Perera should look at the multi-

volume *Bibliography of Ceylon* by H.A.I.Goonetilleke for literature on this crucial matter. In Tamil literature, the king Ravana who ruled Ceylon is symbolized as a learned scholar, who had the musical instrument Veena in his flag. He was also an expert in indigenous medicine. One of the earliest references to this Ravana in the Tamil religious literature appears in the devotional hymn of Saint Gnanasampanthar of Sirkali, Tamil Nadu, who lived in the 7th century AD.

The popularization of Ravana, the chief protagonist of Valmiki, in the Tamil literature was first made by the DMK leaders in the 1940s. Annadurai specifically published a couple of influential tracts like *Kamba Rasam* (The Taste of Kambar, the 12th century Tamil poet who wrote the Ramayana in Tamil) and *Ariya Mayai* (The Ariya Illusion), in which Ravana's status was elevated as a righteous Tamil king. So, the inference of Sasanka Perera that "predominantly English-educated middle class elements of the Tamil diaspora" made Ravana as their symbol of Eelam Tamil ancestor is inappropriate. In the late 1950s, one Tamil movie named Samburna Ramayanam was well received by the Tamil audience. In particular, one song praising the intellectual stature of Ravana, sung by Chidambaram S.Jeyaraman (an uncle* of Karunanidhi and a popular stage performer of Dravidian movement, who died early this year) became a popular hit. This song began with the lines, "The king who carried Veena in his flag".

Sachi Sri Kantha
Fukuroi City, (Japan)

*A factual error. In reality, Jayaraman was a brother in law of Karunanidhi.

77

Sri Lanka Guerrillas

[*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, October 13, 1995]

It was news to me that 'A decade ago, more than 30 Tamil guerrilla groups were fighting for a separate state' [The Nations, Aug.25]. According to my count, half a dozen groups began the quest to liberate Eelam. The main difference between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and other groups is that only the LTTE kept its independence from RAW, the Indian Intelligence Agency. The others were manipulated by RAW and as a result they lost credibility among Tamils.

Your statement that 'Some of the former rebels have won parliamentary seats' needs amplification. In the general election held last year, one party of these former rebels returned nine members to parliament, after receiving only 2% of the Tamil vote in the Northern Province. These nine provide valuable support to President Kumaratunga, who has a razor-thin majority.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Fukuroi City, Japan

Editorial Comment:

In 1984, there were 32 Tamil guerrilla groups, according to the records of Sri Lankan military intelligence. They later coalesced and now the dominant politico-military groups are: the LTTE; People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE); Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO); Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF); Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS).

All except the LTTE accepted the terms of the Indo-Lanka accord of 1987 and disavowed a separate state. They were granted recognition as political parties. Two have significant local power and all have MPs. Jaffna district is a special case. There the nine MPs who received 2% of the vote belong to a small group called the EPDP, which functions in areas held by the Sri Lankan Army. As the LTTE has a strong grip on Jaffna, no other party operates there.

78

Political Satire

[*Lanka Guardian*, November 1, 1995]

I commend Kamalika Pieris for throwing some light on the political and social satire contributed by the Sri Lankan journalists (LG, Oct.1). In the USA, those who have mastered such a literary genre, like Art Buchwald and Andy Rooney, have a high profile among the reading public and their syndicated columns are well received. Considering the low tolerance, politicians in countries like Sri Lanka have for such literary writing, we should tip our hats to the creators of such works.

I would like to add, that Kamalika Pieris should have included the name of Regie Michael in her list of journalists who wrote political satire. The pungent editorials Regie Michael wrote for the *Ceylon Daily Mirror* in the 1960s were a class of its own. In addition, he also contributed political satire columns for the short-lived *The Independent Weekly* in the mid-1970s, under the pseudonym 'Ravi'. In these columns, Michael commented on the ethnic politics and issues such as standardization.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Fukuroi City, (Japan)

79

Prabhakaran Compared

[*Lanka Guardian*, November 15, 1995]

As a Prabhakaran-watcher, I thank H.L.D.Mahindapala for bringing to my attention, the *New York Times* feature (May 28, 1995) of John Burns on Prabhakaran (LG, Oct.15). In it, Prabhakaran's blood-thirstiness in dealing with opponents has been stated as comparable to that of "some of the cruelest figures in recent Asian history, including Pol Pot". Even if one takes this opinion on its face value, one wonders who are the other cruelest figures in recent Asian history, whom John Burns had in mind. If one takes a body count of innocent victims (not military opponents), Mao Ze Dong, Indira Gandhi, Suharto, and Ranasinghe Premadasa should enter this cruel leaders Hall of Fame without any difficulty. Isn't Prabhakaran, then in good company?

Unlike Mahindapala, I do not consider the *New York Times* as the oracle of the twentieth century. I provide a few examples where this venerable newspaper had to eat crow. These are culled from the book, *The Experts Speak; The Definitive Compendium of Authoritative Misinformation*, by Chris Cerf and Victor Navasky (1984).

A *New York Times* editorial ridiculed in 1921 the attempts on rocket propelling by space science engineer Robert Goddard as one who “seems to lack the knowledge ladled out daily in high schools”. In November 5, 1932, the same “unimpeachable source” of Mahindapala, predicted the re-election of the then President Herbert Hoover over Franklin Delano Roosevelt. On July 14, 1972, the same *New York Times* commented that Senator Thomas Eagleton as a ‘casting director’s ideal for a running mate’. Few weeks later it was revealed that he had undergone psychiatric shock therapy and was dropped by the Democratic Presidential candidate George McGovern. If the *New York Times* could not predict developments correctly about the events within the USA, how reliable is its assessment on events in Sri Lanka?

As to verbal abuse from opponents, Prabhakaran is not the first rebel leader to be sneered at by his contemporaries. Almost 200 years ago, the father of America, George Washington was roasted by *Philadelphia Aurora* as follows: “If ever a nation was debauched by a man, the American nation has been debauched by Washington. If ever a nation was deceived by a man, the American nation has been deceived by Washington. Let it serve to be a warning that no man may be an idol.” Does Mahindapala know that quite a large segment of American citizens who were loyal to the British Crown were chased by Washington’s patriotic gang to Canada and West Indies? One who cites New York Times for support should also bother to learn the revolutionary history of America.

I applaud you for providing a proper balance by publishing Mahindapala’s critique to Bramagnani and the Galle ethnic violence committee report in the same issue. Mahindapala’s legitimate question, “Who are the oppressors of Tamils?” has been eloquently answered in the report you have published on the Galle ethnic violence. Those who suffered at Galle had no links to Prabhakaran’s dictum. They suffered because they had the misfortune to have an ethnic identity as Tamils.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Fukuroi City, (Japan)

80

Battle for Jaffna

[*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, December 8, 1995]

In ‘Bombs in Colombo’ [Nov.24] you say ‘the fighting has claimed the lives of about 1,400 rebels and more than 320 government troops’. How did your reporters verify and confirm the death toll for the Tamil rebels? Did they visit Jaffna? I have read that censorship was imposed on foreign and local journalists covering the offensive. Whenever I see a casualty figure in the proportions of 4:1 in favor of the Sri Lankan armed forces, I’m inclined to believe that it is a spurious statistic emanating from their propaganda desk.

Your statement that ‘As Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and his lieutenants fled Jaffna, they also forced tens of thousands of civilians to leave with them’ implies that the LTTE had lost the fight. Far from it. One should interpret it as a tactical retreat in the guerrilla tradition patented by Mao Zedong. Prabhakaran is an ardent student of Mao’s tactics.

In the Tamil language there is a proverb, ‘The tiger lies low, not for fear but for aim’. If you have some doubt about the aim of the LTTE rebels, you can check with the Indian Peace Keeping Force.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Fukuroi City, Japan

Editorial Comment:

The government continues to deny journalists access to the Jaffna Peninsula.

81

Prabhakaran’s Retreat

[*Lanka Guardian*, December 15, 1995]

I do not want to spoil the party line you have presented that LTTE received a drubbing in the recent military offensive in Jaffna (LG, Nov.15). Since one of the mission statements of the LG is to present the ‘other view’, allow me to be the devil’s advocate. Why is it that when the Army hits Jaffna with missiles and bombs, the suffering of commoners is cast aside as ‘collateral damage’ in the international press release, but when the LTTE retaliates in the East or in Colombo, the attack is called a ‘terror campaign’, and Prabhakaran is projected as a ‘blood thirsty’ Dracula? (vide, your co-authored report with Tony Clifton in *Newsweek*, Nov.13). Is it because the definition of terror is different for those who hold nominal power and those who challenge the status quo?

The party line that the “LTTE and its senior commanders fled [Jaffna] city” may definitely give a morale boost to the battered and accident-prone image of the Army. It will also probably “strengthen President Kumaratunga’s case” in the political stage. But as the old adage says, “Don’t count your chicken before the eggs are hatched.”

Like how “the Army has been able to pursue its own strategy on its own terms”, as you have stated, Prabhakaran also is using the war on his own terms. He was not foolish to sacrifice resources in a frontal combat, though the spin of the defence pundits that LTTE fled Jaffna city has the Madison Avenue trademark. Prabhakaran gave his cadre a few weeks of “field experience” and then tactically retreated, by borrowing a page from Mao’s book on the *Long March*, to choose his next strategy. The Generals who celebrated their success over Mao’s retreating forces later lived to lick their wounds.

Since you have mentioned Muhammad Ali in your commentary, I would add that Prabhakaran also has proved on numerous occasions his adherence to Ali’s *manthra* in the boxing ring: ‘Float like a butterfly and sting like a bee’. This explains

the commando-style attack on Kolonnawa oil depots, which exposed the soft underbelly of the national security forces.

Now a comment about the much-touted “army’s resources”. Can you be more specific about these resources in terms of cash? I hardly find any real figures mentioned about the defense expenditure related to military offensives in the pages of LG. Does the Army generate its own resources? Someone (not the 67% of the survey sample who favor a military solution, but the international donors) is paying for the army’s resources and everyone knows that Sri Lanka is not blessed with gold mines and oil fields. If you put a moderate guess, such as one million dollars per day as operational expenses in Jaffna, then one can easily guess that the Army’s resources are not unlimited. There lies Prabhakaran’s strategy.

You may be correct in stating, “Just as it administered Jaffna successfully enough to believe that it had established a government, the LTTE felt it could take on an army frontally”. Now flip this point to arrive at an answer to the question you have posed in the cover, “When Jaffna falls what next?”. Just as they have taken the LTTE frontally, can the Army and the President feel comfortable that they can establish a government in Jaffna? This will be akin to the mental peace of a guy who pretends to sleep in the tiger’s den.

Sachi Sri Kantha
Fukuroi City, (Japan)

Letters 82-84: Tenth debate on Castes among Sinhalese and Tamils
(by Sachi Sri Kantha, H.L.D.Mahindapala and Manik Sandrasagra)

82

Caste, Buddhism and Japan [*Lanka Guardian*, February 1, 1996]

Due to some delay in delivery, I received the Nov.1, 1995 issue of LG only on Jan.5th of this year. Permit me to comment briefly on H.L.D.Mahindapala’s diatribe on the Tamils, which appeared in this particular issue.

I’m in agreement with Mahindapala that there existed a caste called turumbas among the Tamils, who were placed at the lowest rank of the caste hierarchy. But I’m surprised that he has not provided proper perspective by stating that this type of discrimination was not exclusive to Tamils. The caste group known as rodiyas among the Sinhalese shared the same hierarchical order similar to turumbas of Tamils. *The Area Handbook for Ceylon* (1971) published by the U.S. State Department states,

“In modern Kandyan society more than half the population are Goyigama. Next in order of size are the Vahumpura, Navandanna, Hena and Berava castes. Many of the remaining castes are represented by small groups; for example, the Rodiya, the lowest caste, probably number no more than several thousand.”

About the depressing social status of the rodiyas in the traditional Sinhalese society, the same reference book mentions further:

“Among the most isolated groups are the Rodiya, who traditionally are not permitted to live in villages with the higher castes. They are generally found in fairly

isolated enclaves and have traditionally been institutionalized beggars. Their living conditions are generally inferior to those of the general population. Probably fewer than half are literate, and many suffer from unemployment.”

Also, I wonder if caste system is not strictly adhered among the Sinhalese, similar to Tamils, why there are three major *nikayas* (sects) among the bhikkus? Why the Siam Nikaya is limited to Goyigama caste only? Why the Amapura Nikaya, consisting approximately 20 percent of the sangha was established by a monk of the Salagama caste in the 19th century? Isn't it an anachronism that such a caste hierarchy should exist among the priests who follow the precepts of the Enlightened One?

Mahindapala can take relief to hear that caste system is not restricted to Sri Lankan Buddhists. Here in Japan, traditionally a Buddhist country, there exist a caste named *Eta* (labeled as ‘Japanese pariahs’ by Basil Hall Chamberlain) whose rank is no less different to that of turumbas of Tamils and rodiyas of Sinhalese. Chie Nakane, one of the leading anthropologists of Japan, also stated in her book, *Japanese Society* (1970),

“There have been numerous studies of hierarchy in village politics by rural sociologists in Japan; indeed, the villagers’ sharp awareness of it compares with the caste-consciousness in a Hindu village.”

Let us not forget the cradle of contemporary democracy, the United States of America. Few decades ago, the social status of the blacks (derisively called ‘niggers’ in the not-so distant past, even by the liberal U.S. Presidents like Harry Truman) were no less different to that of turumbas of Tamils or rodiyas of Sinhalese. Autobiographies of liberal-minded movie stars like Katharine Hepburn and Shirley Maclaine describe poignantly about the humiliation faced by the blacks as untouchables in the so-called democratic America. Shirley Maclaine had written that her educated father even did not grant permission for her to invite her co-star Sidney Poitier for a meal at their home. This was a true life experience to Sidney Poitier who portrayed a similar situation in the classic movie, ‘*Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*’, which he co-starred with Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy. Every founding father of American democracy owned black slaves. Also, almost all democratic countries, do have an intelligence agency like the CIA, MI5, MI6, Mossad and RAW. The functions of these intelligence agencies work against the basic principles of democracy. Thus, Mahindapala’s hypothesis that “democracy and fascism cannot co-exist” is also not true.

Sachi Sri Kantha
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83

Meaning of the Tamil ‘Liberation Struggle’

[*Lanka Guardian*, March 15, 1996]

Mr.Sachi Sri Kantha (February 1, 1996) deserves a reply not because his comments need refuting (In fact, I ignored his earlier comment where he was tilting at the solid windmills of the *New York Times*) but because he, like most other Tamils in the diaspora, refuse to face their brutal history which records the inhuman oppression of Tamils by Tamils from the time of Sankili (1519).

But before I go further let me hasten to add that my two articles (Oct.15, 1995 and Nov.1, 1995) which, undoubtedly, have pricked Mr.Sri Kantha's guilty conscience, were definitely meant to be attacks on the Tamils who treated their fellow-Tamils as subhuman slaves. I was focusing on the 75 percent of the upper castes in Jaffna who never lifted a finger to liberate the oppressed Tamils for over five centuries. I even pinpointed that the loud-mouthed champions of Tamils today despised and segregated the low-caste Tamils like the *turumbas* who were never allowed to walk in daylight. One of the points stressed by me was that no other community in Sri Lanka – Muslims, Indian Tamils, Burghers or Sinhalese – ever treated the members of their own community in this degrading manner. Even a writer like H.W.Tambiah, who is generally inclined to argue that the sun that shines over Sri Lanka comes out of the Tamils' ears (see *Laws and Customs of the Sinhalese*), has stated categorically that the Tamil low-castes were treated as 'abject slaves' by the upper castes. On this evidence I wrote that this must be the darkest chapter in Sri Lankan history.

Unable to answer this point Mr.Sri Kantha says that "the caste group known as *rodiyas* among the Sinhalese shared the same hierarchical order similar to *turumbas* of the Tamils." So what? Wheren't all Asian societies, whether Buddhist or Hindu, hierarchical? For that matter, aren't all societies and institutions hierarchical? The issue is not about the hierarchical social structure but how the hierarchy at the top treated the subcastes at the base of the social pyramid. On this score, the upper caste Tamils of Jaffna have set a unique record of being the most heartless and cruel oppressors of their own people. It is an oppression which will remain as an indelible stigma on their social conscience. As an excuse, Mr.Sri Kantha attempts to equate *rodiyas* with the *turumbas*. If Mr.Sri Kantha knows anything about Sri Lanka he should know that the *rodiyas*, being nomadic outcastes, were never the slaves of any caste. Nor were they forbidden to walk in daytime. They were the Sri Lankan gypsies who roamed freely all over the country, day and night...

H.L.D.Mahindapala

84

Enlightening Mahindapala [*Lanka Guardian*, June 1, 1996]

Since trees have to be cut to make the paper to print the drivel that he writes, H.L.D.Mahindapala in his exile will be doing this country a favour if he shuts up for a while. Having filled the columns of the *Sunday Observer* with his periodical rants under Premadasa, he now pollutes the *Lanka Guardian* with his ignorance.

His recent article, 'Meaning of the Tamil Liberation Struggle' illustrates his ignorance on several matters.

- 1) He does not know the difference between the *Rodiyas* and the *Aikuntakayas* (gypsies). He calls the former gypsies "who roamed freely all over the country day and night."
- 2) He seems to be unaware that the *Siyam Nikaya* is barred to non-Goyigamas.
- 3) His writing displays a major deficiency. He has strong likes and dislikes. Like Premadasa, he is also a moralist. He also dislikes caste. Obviously his education does not include Dumont, Coomaraswamy, Ryan, Roberts or Pfaffenberger on the subject.

Manik Sandrasagra
Nawala

85

The good and the bad [*Lanka Guardian*, March 15, 1996]

In the LG of Feb.1, there appeared a letter with a pseudonym 'A Patriotic Muslim' with the title "Canards: Arabs Abused". This writer had criticized the LTTE leader Prabhakaran for ill-treating the Muslims. Before I sat down to comment on this controversial theme, you made a pre-emptive strike by publishing in the Feb.15 issue, Kalinga Seneviratne's commentary on the suffering of Sri Lankan women in the Middle East Muslim countries. The figures presented in it were revealing indeed. 11 deaths in March 1995 alone; average of 400 complaints a month on physical and verbal abuse; 300 Sri Lankans in the United Arab Emirates prisons.

I wonder what that 'Patriotic Muslim' has as an answer to Kalinga Seneviratne's commentary? If the wealthy Muslims in the Middle East are different from Prabhakaran, why folks like the young Sri Lankan maid Sithi Unisa had to face a firing squad?

Also I wish to note that in the Feb.15 issue, you are overplaying the card of Chandrika Kumaratunga as the 'peace maker'. Here is a lady who could not make peace with her own brother Anura Bandaranaike. So, how can Tamils like me expect her to make peace with Prabhakaran? First let her prove her sincerity by making peace with Anura.

Sachi Sri Kantha
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86

Secret Network [*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, Aug.16, 1996]

Within the limits of not antagonizing the political and military-intelligence establishments in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, Anthony Davis has done a good profile of Tamil guerrilla leader Velupillai Prabhakaran [The Cover, July 26]. Prabhakaran is not an angel. But he is not a devil either, as projected by the Sri Lankan political establishment for the past 13 years. Davis insults the intelligence of the majority of the Tamil diaspora with the claim that Prabhakaran can extort money from them at whim. He remains their hope against the duplicity of the Indian Intelligence Service (RAW), who used the Sri Lankan Tamil issue to advance Indian expansionism.

Those who have read the history of the liberation struggles in the U.S., China, Israel and Palestine can grasp that Prabhakaran's profile as presented doesn't differ much from those of George Washington, Mao Zedong, Menachem Begin and Yassir Arafat. And don't forget that designated 'terrorists' like Begin, Nelson Mandela and Arafat could metamorphose into 'statesmen' and even receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

Davis's source, Rohan Gunaratna, has figured out that the Tigers may be harvesting revenues worth nearly \$24 million per annum. But this figure is 1/25 of the current Sri Lankan annual defense expenditure of nearly \$600 million. Prabhakaran may be deficient in university education, but he surely has heeded one of Albert Einstein's maxims: 'Organized power can be opposed only by organized power'. If you count the number of Sri Lankan service chiefs who have tried to outsmart Prabhakaran since 1983, one can only marvel at his skill.

As to whether Prabhakaran was involved in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, isn't it fair to wait till the Indian court delivers its verdict? It is interesting to note here that recently, Sessions Judge P.Lakshmana Reddy of the Visakhapatnam court in India ruled that the Indian navy and coast guard had unlawfully intercepted and boarded [Tiger vessel] M.V.*Ahat* three years ago. An Indian magazine said this ruling was a 'slap in the face of the team probing Rajiv Gandhi's assassination'. In my opinion, Prabhakaran was framed by RAW because he stood on his own rather than become India's puppet.

Lastly, if *Asiaweek* thinks that Suharto's horrendous record on democratic ideals is irrelevant in ranking him as a great leader of Aisa, why has Prabhakaran to be judged by a different yardstick in his quest to achieve his dream?

Sachi Sri Kantha
Fukuroi City, Japan

87

Prabhakaran Cont'd

[*Asiaweek*, Hongkong, Sept.13, 1996]

Sachi Sri Kantha's observations [Letters, Aug.16] amused me a great deal. That Anthony Davis did 'a good profile' of Prabhakaran hinges on what was intended. Reading between the lines, the aims and goals of transnational 'Tiger Inc.' are violence, murder and sudden death. I do not think the article would have earned the ire of the Sri Lankan government in particular. They would have welcomed it.

Mr.Sri Kantha latches on to the statement, 'Prabhakaran's acumen is as much that of a CEO as of a military commander'. One is reminded of a GI's comment about General 'Blood and Guts' Patton: 'His guts and our blood'. Mr. Sri Kantha must have a very fertile imagination to claim that the profile of Prabhakaran differs but little from those of George Washington, Mao, Begin and Arafat. As far as Begin is concerned, the

parallel seems correct. It would be an insult to the others and to Nelson Mandela to associate them with Prabhakaran.

Mr. Sri Kantha has failed to mention the true Asian revolutionary, Ho Chi Minh, whose thesis was to 'work the socialist revolution through the nationalist aspirations' of the people. And in Ho's lexicon, nationalism was not the racist dogma that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has in its lessons of indoctrination to very young students or in the oath of hate taken at the commencement of daily parades.

How can he compare the military spending of the LTTE with that of the Sri Lankan government? The government of Sri Lanka is a legitimately elected government, whereas the LTTE's is, de facto, a rogue or outlaw organization. If, as Mr. Sri Kantha maintains, the LTTE embodies the genuine aspirations of the Sri Lanka Tamils, why is it then that they have dungeons in which those thought to be opponents, and those who have refused to contribute in kind or in money under coercion, are incarcerated and tortured? Amnesty International has documented evidence of this as have the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna).

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88

A Priest's Ex-communication
[Asiaweek, Hongkong, Feb.7, 1997]

I hesitate to step on a person when he is down. But in my opinion, the defense of Sri Lankan priest Tissa Balasuriya on why his opinions stray from orthodox Roman Catholic teaching does not hold water. According to your brief report, 'his pluralist views are a response to teaching in a country of multiple faiths.' Nonsense. How come Mother Teresa accepts the orthodox Roman Catholic views while providing service to the needy of multiple faiths in India and all over the world? Are Mother Teresa and priests who serve the Church less intelligent than Balasuriya?

I have come to think of Fr. Balasuriya as more of a politician in a cassock than a priest. Being a Sri Lankan I know something about him, as 27 years ago I was a student at the Aquinas University College, Colombo, when he served as its rector.

Sachi Sri Kantha
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89

War and Peace in Sri Lanka
[Asiaweek, Hongkong, Oct.17, 1997]

I challenge your statements that President Kumaratunga has ‘curtailed state repression and engineered something of an economic turnaround’. In September, it was announced that Sri Lanka is seeking a \$500 million loan to revive its unpopular move to increase the price of bread – another election pledge up in smoke. I wish that you had asked more penetrating questions of the President. For example, from where does she allocate money for Sri Lanka’s spiraling defence budget which stood at \$836 million in 1996?

If the Sri Lankan army is ‘winning’ the war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), why are there over 20,000 deserters, despite repeated amnesty offers? Aren’t these deserters better Buddhists who (by following the preaching of the Enlightened One) teach something to the Sri Lankan commander-in-chief, who gloats that ‘the military and the political solutions go hand in hand’? What happened to her pre-election pledge of abolishing the executive presidency?

Sachi Sri Kantha

90

Comeback Commandos
[Time International edition, July 3, 2000]

What Sri Lankan rebel leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and his Tamil Tiger guerrillas are carrying out is nothing new [May 29]. The fight to the death for an independent homeland was patented by George Washington and his gang 225 years ago. And why the fuss over Prabhakaran’s penchant for guns, when the Second Amendment provides the same security to all Americans?

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