

Pravāda

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Pravada in contemporary Sinhalese usage has a range of meanings which includes theses, concepts and propositions.

KANDALAMA, CAPITAL AND ENVIRONMENT

The protest campaign against the building of a luxury resort hotel above the *wewa* (irrigation tank) at Kandalama, about 10 kilometers from Dambulla, reached a climax on July 12 when a Sathyagraha was held in Dambulla. The participation by the SLFP and a number of opposition parties, many NGOs, members of the Sangha, university students and the Christian clergy provided a political as well as popular character to this latest manifestation of fairly widespread discontent with the Premadasa regime.

The entry of the SLFP and of other opposition parties into the Kandalama campaign, which at the beginning was led by politically unaffiliated monks from the Dambulla Raja Maha Viharaya, gave the ruling UNP an opportunity to strike back. "A politically motivated campaign against the government"—a hackneyed formula, yet a weapon that could effectively be used by the government to mobilize its own forces to blunt the seriousness of issues that could otherwise have been somewhat meaningfully raised by environmentalist and developmentalist lobbies.

In fact, the SLFP and its racist Hela Urumaya group, the Sinhala Arakshaka Sanvidhanaya (Sinhalese Defense League) and other assorted chauvinistic groups have changed the character of the Kandalama campaign by joining it. At a meeting held in July 09 in Colombo, all these Colombo based anti-government Sinhala chauvinist forces brought the Dambulla monks within their fold, not, of course, with-

out their consent. However, this step destroyed whatever political 'innocence' the latter may have had. The Kandalama hotel issue then became another item for an opposition that had been waiting for any chance to mount an anti-Premadasa campaign, largely based on the illusion of an impending election. Hence the ferocity with which Messrs. Premadasa and Thondaman were singled out to be attacked by opposition speakers at their July 09 meeting held at the Colombo New Town Hall. For Ven. Medagoda Sumanatissa, the hotel at Kandalama was a stepping stone for the LTTE on their way to the plantations; for Nalin de Silva, the hotel was another step in the "Prabhakaran - Thondaman aggression", presumably against the Sinhala-Buddhist majority.

There was also another strand to the chauvinist argument articulated in highly emotional terms: the entry of large-scale tourism - one writer described the hotel as a 'city of white bikinis' - would erode and destroy the traditional agrarian culture of the area. A number of untested assumptions lay behind this: that a traditional agrarian culture still existed in this locality, that it was worth preserving in its entirety, that the small scale tourist hotels which were already in existence did not somehow have a role in changing cultural patterns.

Little did the opposition political parties realize that the deployment of chauvinist arguments and the concentration of attacks on Thondaman were ruining the auto-



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mous potential of a social movement that had sprung up in response to the arrogance with which metropolitan capital and state bureaucracy were intruding into their lives.

The partial success of the Iranawila campaign, led by the Catholic clergy a few months ago, provides a study in contrast. There too, the protest movement was against the proposed construction of a tourist hotel project and a VOA relay station. The Catholic clerical campaign went on for several months with no participation at all of the Colombo-based political parties. Perhaps, the priests knew only too well that partisan politicization of their movement would have been counter-productive. At the same time, their Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism would have made the opposition political parties feel that the Catholic priests and their poor fisher-folk flocks needed no this-worldly help from them. In any case, the Iranawila campaign retained its political autonomy, and it proved to be the secret of its success in getting the hotel component moved elsewhere.

Although swallowed up by the narrowly conceived anti-UNP and chauvinistic politics of the opposition, the Kandalama controversy still raises some key issues concerning current development strategies based on the penetration of metropolitan capital into the countryside.

The commercialisation of peasant agriculture is a process that has been going on for the past four centuries. The subsequent entry of merchant capital has transformed its nature. Besides, the integration of Kandalama into the Mahaweli project has made it a part of a massive and centralised irrigation scheme, further altering its character. Nevertheless, there are still certain areas, particularly where temples and devalas are large landlords, in which archaic and feudal economic and social relations persist. The entry of capital and of capitalist relations into such areas will certainly contribute to the break-up of traditional relations, a desirable effect in a number of ways.

There are, however, some necessary measures before large scale development projects are established. First of all, both the entrepreneurs and the state should have to consult, as a matter of legal obligation, the people in the area. People can no longer be considered as passive recipients of the gains as well as losses of modern development. They do have a stake in what will happen to their means of livelihood, to the surroundings to which they have been used to for generations, and to the changes that modernization will bring in their social and cultural relations. That communities have a stake in 'development' was dramatically illustrated only the other day when entire neighborhoods in Colombo went under floods as a direct consequence of ill-planned and haphazard urban development.

Secondly, the environmentalist argument, although its has been formulated in extremely populist and imprecise terms, has a point when it comes to the arrogant claim made by

the tourist industry that it should have 'free' access to the environment in order to sell it. As Pradeep Jeganathan's essay in our last issue pointed out, the commodification of culture and the picturesque enters tourism in a variety of ways. For the tourist industry, the 'beauty' of the landscape is both capital and a commodity. If Kandalama has maintained a 'beauty'; a unique 'picturesqueness', which the urban gazers in Sri Lanka as well the West are willing to pay to enjoy, the largely peasant population in the area must have a claim to a share of profits which the investors will rake in. It is the peasants who have lived for generations under the feudal stranglehold of ecclesiastical property relations in Dambulla who have created and maintained the 'beauty' of Kandalama, the symbolic capital that the share-holders of the Aitken-Spence in Colombo are ready to transform into money value and profits.. Therefore, they should have a legitimate right to a significant share of the profits to be earned by the hotel.

This leads on to broader questions of the relationship between investor capital and the community. Gone are the days when capital could invade any spatial or social location, totally disregarding community responses and resistance. If the protest campaign makes any point at all, it concerns the apprehension of local communities with regard to the intrusion of urban-led development. Capitalist projects, in industry as well as in tourism, have a general tendency to exploit natural resources of localities and siphon off profits to the metropolis, with little or no regard for community development in locations where enterprises are established. The local communities gain only marginally, often as unwelcome outsiders, or as suppliers of 'unauthorized' services in the case of tourism. The time has come when local communities should demand as a condition of 'development' that big enterprises re-invest a decent share of profits in community development.