

## TIGERISM...

to the North and East. The issue now is not whether there should be regional autonomy for the Tamils, but how much. Thus, the peace accord, followed by the defeat of the JVP, created added political space for the Sri Lankan state to reach a negotiated settlement to the ethnic conflict, and has transformed the terrain of Sinhala politics.

Undoubtedly, Sinhala nationalism is still a major impediment to the achievement of a political settlement, but it is different from the Sinhala ultra-nationalism of the early 1980s. And more importantly, although Sinhala nationalism may continue to be a part of the state ideology, it is no longer the dominant part. Thus, the trite claims made by Tamil nationalists about Sinhala nationalism, as

monolithic, permanent and unchanging, do not ring true in the face of the drastic developments of the past few years.

The second important change is the gradual political isolation of the Tamils from the international community, corresponding directly with the increasing dominance of the Tigers over Tamil nationalism. As long as Tamil interests are seen as Tiger interests, the struggle of the Tamil people to redress their grievances will only receive tepid support, at best, both in the South and internationally. The Tigers have posed as the saviour-leaders of the Tamils by shrewdly linking genuine Tamil interests to their narrow political project. Unless the aspirations of the Tamil people are politically and ideologically delinked from those of the Tigers, the Tamil struggle will not

progress.

Finally, the instinctively defensive reaction of some Tamils towards any criticism of the Tigers and Tamil ultra-nationalism was understandable in the past, though based on morally shaky grounds. Today, such a defence of the Tigers is morally and politically reprehensible, given the crimes committed by the Tigers against the Muslims and Sinhalese of the Northeast, and the Tiger denial of political freedom to the Tamil people. Moreover, it is precisely through a critical analysis of Tamil nationalism, in general, and the Tigers, in particular, that a new political programme for the Tamil people can be articulated - a new programme that may enable Tamils to attain peace with dignity. ■

# REFLECTIONS ON FEAR

by Gameela Samarasinghe

*Fear!*

*Fear and the child are born together*

*Fear is our faithful companion, our twin*

*Brother, our shadow*

*It will never let go its hold*

*Until, remorselessly, it sees us into our grave*

Frederick Leboyer

*Loving Hands*, Collins,  
1977

**L**eboyer's words raise fundamental questions. Fear indeed manifests itself throughout life. Fear is perhaps one of the most complex emotions because there are such wide individual variations in fearfulness.

There are chronic fears and acute fears, normal fears and pathological fears, fears which are considered natural or ordinary

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like the fear of death, fears that are innate, like the fear of heights, and fears that are learnt, like the fear of snakes.

Fear can also be a stimulating emotion for some, when for example, it engages a person to correct his/her behaviour, but more often, fear paralyses. The type and degree of fear and the context within which fear appears influence the manner in which one reacts to fearful situations.

In the recent past, Sri Lankans have been exposed to a particular type of fear, a fear

provoked by sudden, novel and intense stimuli. This fear did exist earlier but did not manifest itself as frequently. Though it possesses some features of the fears listed above, it also has particular characteristics.

The fear is caused by exposure to traumatic stimulations. The traumatic stimulations we recall are recent: the 1983 July riots, the JVP insurrection, the North-East conflict. The images that confront us are of the killing, the burn-

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ing, the looting, the massacres, the ambushes, the abductions and finally, and irrevocably, the disappearances.

The fear was intense; acute soon after the traumatic experience and subsequently decreased because it had been provoked by tangible stimuli or situations.

If the Conditioning Theory of Fear - developed in the 1960's over a period of a few years by Wolpe, Eysenck and Rachman - can be proved, we could expect a decrease in the magnitude of our fears and a progressive change in our reactions and behaviour.

The Conditioning Theory of Fear supports that repeated exposure to fear-evoking situations may:

*at times sensitize us;*

increase the fear when we anticipate trouble.

*at times habituate us;*

decrease the fear when the situation often re-occurs or prolongs itself. The reaction will diminish in magnitude.

The young child learns very fast that if a balloon is about to burst, soon it will make a terrifying sound.

After having heard a balloon burst a number of times, the child learns to fear the sound less. The sound is no longer unfamiliar.

Similarly, we have been conditioned to expect and fear violent reactions from human beings during political tension.

We, too, grew 'accustomed' or 'resigned' to many fearful situations. It became 'natural' for us to be ordered to stay indoors by the JVP, even stocked goods in 'anticipation' of the curfews. Today, the fighting in the North and East is no longer 'extraordinary'; not having safe

and easy access to a large part of the country is no longer 'unusual'.

Not such a long time ago, the killing of thirteen soldiers generated very violent behaviour. Again, at present, a political alternative to the ethnic war feared by some, the nationalist spirit widely criticised and feared by others, are fundamental issues which provoke extreme and long repressed reactions.

We have learnt to live and continue to live with this 'acquired' fear. We must, however, not be indifferent to it. We must not let it become an 'ordinary' fear, like the fear of death; a fear that, we are taught to believe, does not need to be justified. ■

# GENDER AGENDA

## STATE CO-OPTION OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

by Khema de Rosairo

Women, we have been told, are half the sky. But politicians, in Sri Lanka as elsewhere, have been always acutely conscious that they are half the electorate. This consciousness becomes sharper when, as in Sri Lanka today, women's labour accounts for the largest share of our foreign exchange - earnings from tea, garment exports and work as housemaids abroad. It is therefore not surprising that the state in Sri Lanka has recently "discovered" the woman question and has not only created a National Women's Day (to coincide with the day the Buddhist missionary Sanghamitta came to Sri Lanka), but has also co-opted March 8th - Inter-

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national Women's Day (originated in 1910 by the German Communist, Clara Zetkin).

Up to the late 1970's, March 8th was celebrated with meetings, demonstrations, exhibitions and cultural activities involving women of all communities. The main organisers were women party activists and trade unionists and women Socialists from a range of autonomous feminist groups. The association of the women's movement with the Left necessarily brought within its ambit certain anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist slogans on democratic and trade union rights, economic policies and foreign relations. During this period, International Women's Day was celebrated without either interference from the state or feminist-bashing in the media.

### VIOLENCE ON WOMEN'S DAY

A major shift was seen after the change to an executive presidency in 1978, when attacks on dissident movements including trade unions and student organisations became a regular manifestation of the state's obsession with political stability. Women's Day became an occasion for state violence against women, as well as an opportunity for demonising feminists in the media.

In 1982, women demonstrating on March 8th in Colombo were tear-gassed and March 8th 1983 became a cause celebre; women of the SLFP, CP and LSSP had organised a picket outside the US Embassy against US army bases in the Indian Ocean. Returning afterwards, the

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