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

BETWEEN TWO FANTASIES

News from Sri Lanka's military and political fronts indicate that the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE are both making quick preparations for the 'final battle.'

Most political leaders echo President Wijetunga's statement that this is only a terrorist problem that has to be solved on the battle field. The Prime Minister indicates a period of two to three years to achieve this. Colombo's military topbrass, at least as shown in their statements to the press, appear brimming with confidence; they can deliver a decisive blow to the LTTE and pressed for a time-schedule, the good generals say there will be no terrorist problem after 1994. New rounds of recruitment and procurement were thus earnestly under way, suggesting that Jaffna's killing fields will be activated anew, sooner or later. Posters displayed in Colombo appealed to the youth to join the armed forces in order to 'collectively fight the LTTE menace.'

The LTTE meanwhile, is reported to have come to the conclusion that the Wijetunga administration is not interested in a negotiated settlement with them. Both Prabhakaran and Balasingham have made this clear with statements that there is no alternative to winning Eelam on the battle field. Therefore, they too are preparing for a major confrontation. LTTE posters, according to reports, have appeared in Jaffna calling on the Tamil people for general war mobili-

zation. Thus in the peninsula too, a frenzied recruitment drive has begun, to strengthen the LTTE's guerilla brigades.

So, the two war machines in Sri Lanka—one in the South and the other in the North—are being oiled. They are likely to be activated, on any pretext.

What is amazing, in the North as well as the South, is that the men who have been conducting this destructive war for the past ten years, have not yet realized the utter futility of it.

This is partly due to the persistence of a pattern in the re-production of Sri Lanka's ethnic war in which there has been a series of 'new beginnings' so that the war is always presented to the people as 'just and winnable.' When the so-called second Eelam war was initiated by the LTTE in 1990, it had enjoyed one year of 'truce' with the Sri Lankan army and therefore, the second phase was a 'new beginning' for the LTTE as well as for the Sri Lankan army. Each nursed the illusion that a crushing blow could be dealt on the other.

Following the death of Mr. Premadasa, the attitude of some sections of the Sri Lankan political and military leadership and of the war lobby indicated a sense of a 'new beginning.' In these quarters, the inability of the army to crush the LTTE during Premadasa's term of office was read as a direct result of the then President's obstructionist

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interference with military decisions. He was also seen as clinging to the idea of a political solution and therefore half-hearted in the pursuit of the war. They thought that a major military breakthrough sans Premadasa was just a matter of time, particularly because a new kind of ideological consensus was seen emerging with Wijetunga's presidency.

Hence another new 'beginning' in operation 'Yaldevi', or as some journalists have described it, the "Kilali debacle."

So, what is evident now is the beginning of yet another false beginning, of a new phase of the war which the two sides have already begun to justify in the rhetorical projections of their own fantasies.

While this editorial was being written, the news of the Pooneryn disas-

ter agitated Sinhalese society. At Pooneryn, the Sri Lankan army suffered its worst military defeat in the entire decade of the ethnic war with the heaviest losses of personnel and equipment. The Southern responses to this defeat once again illustrate the point we made at the beginning of this editorial; namely, Sri Lanka's ethnic war has generated its own reproductive dialectic. In the post-Pooneryn debate, despite the tragic loss of life of so many Southern youth in battle, the cry among a section of Southern intelligentsia is: 'avenge the defeat.' They have created a mind set where all setbacks are temporary and the ultimate objective of a Sinhala Buddhist hegemonic state in Sri Lanka is historically justified.

From a sociological point of view, the intelligentsia is the stratum of society which produces and disseminates knowledge. And the war-lobbying intelligentsia has been producing and disseminating a particular kind of knowledge that can be easily characterized as war-mongering. What they are attempting is to turn the Sinhalese majority community into a nation without a conscience. And indeed, the excessive ethnicization of politics in Sri Lanka has already divested the individual as well as the collective conscience of many of its citizens—whether Sinhalese, Tamil or Muslim—of ethnic neutrality. Once its conscience is sectarianized or ethnicized, a community's moral decline becomes hard to check.

The war has created a panorama of illusions among political actors of all ethnic groups. Unfortunately, there is no way of finding out with a reasonable degree of accuracy what the masses of the people feel and think about the war. A survey of opinion among Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim masses is unlikely, in our reading, to establish firm popular clamour for continuing this war. An honourable and workable peace settlement would be eminently acceptable to them.

However, on all sides of the ethnic divide, militarism appears to have

gained a new lease of life, particularly because only those who articulate martial sentiments have privileged access to the media both in the North and the South. The public realm is thus turned into a battle-field of martial fantasies.

Can Sri Lankan society ever free itself from the shackles of these fantasies and from the mutual ruination which is their inevitable result? It can, only if society—rather societies that are divided along ethnic identities—begin to tell all parties to the conflict to stop the war and begin negotiations for a settlement.

Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict is intractable only in the sense that the parties involved are caught up in the vicious dilemma of not being able to give up the war unilaterally. A move towards settlement by one party would be interpreted as capitulation before the dreaded enemy, a weakness, a betrayal of the cause for which thousands of 'heros' have sacrificed their lives. Then, should the Sinhala and Tamil societies continue to wait in despair, as mere passive observers of a conflict which has brought so much death and destruction?

The example of El Salvador provides a valuable lesson for Sri Lanka. In that poverty-stricken country, a civil war between the oligarchic state and the radical Faribundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN) went on for years, bringing unaccountable suffering to the people who had nothing to do with the conflict. Then, there came a point when people—trade unions, peasant organizations, student groups, left parties, women's groups, intellectuals and religious groups—began telling the government and the FMLN to stop the war and begin negotiations for a peaceful settlement. It was largely because of this social pressure on the parties to the conflict, that a mediation was ultimately made possible. The end result was a comprehensive peace settlement.

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