

LETTER

NOT SIC BUT SICK

Glancing through the pages of the most recent number of *Ethnic Studies Report*, I was startled to come across the following sentences, concluding a paper by Professor K.N.O. Dharmadasa:

In fact, as I have shown, the emperor has no clothes. Through their essays, his "courtiers", Spencer, Jeganathan, Ismail, Scott, Regi [sic] Siriwardena *et. al.* are engaged in a desperate attempt to look for underclothes to cover his nakedness.

The 'sic' is Professor Dharmadasa's. The paper is one in which he continues his controversy with Professor R.A.L.H. Gunawardana on the history of Sinhala identity. The 'emperor' is Professor Gunawardana, and 'their essays', in the context, refers to the essays in a book published by the Social Scientists Association — *Unmaking the Nation*, edited by Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail. Anybody reading the quoted sentences would, therefore, conclude that I had contributed to this volume an essay supporting Professor Gunawardana's position in his controversy with Professor Dharmadasa.

But I have no essay in the SSA volume. Further, I haven't written there, or anywhere else, anything on the Gunawardana-Dharmadasa controversy. For that matter, to the best of my recollection, I haven't even met Professor Gunawardana, and I certainly wouldn't know him if I passed him in the street. How then did I come to be transformed into a 'courtier' of his?

What has given rise to this delusion apparently is a footnote in Professor David Scott's essay in the SSA volume. Professor Scott says:

Its [the essay's] principal debt however is to two people: Regi Siriwardena who sounded the original disquiet that got it going, and, of course, R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, whose brilliant essay is the occasion for its reflections.

What Professor Scott was referring to was the fact that in an informal and private discussion (at which Professor Dharmadasa wasn't present), I made some remarks disagreeing with both protagonists in the controversy, in relation not to the arguments on texts (of which I know nothing) but to the theoretical terrain on which the battle was being fought. This is the 'disquiet' to which Professor Scott alluded. My remarks, according to him, provided part of the provocation for his essay; this didn't mean that his views coincided with mine.

Professor Dharmadasa is quite wrong in implicitly comparing himself to the child in the Hans Andersen story. That child saw something that was really there, which other people were too dishonest to acknowledge. But Professor Dharmadasa, his head full of conspiracy theories (as his paper abundantly shows) sees something that isn't there: he rushes to the conclusion that if Professor Scott refers to some 'disquiet' I had expressed on the controversy, then that disquiet must be directed against him, and that therefore I must be a courtier of the enemy. He has been just as rash in this respect as when he inserted a gratuitous 'sic' after my first name. I have been using this spelling of it for several years, and others have used it in referring to me. Surely a man may spell his own name in any way he pleases without being subject to the cavils of purists.

REGI SIRIWARDENA

Forthcoming SSA Publications

The Story of Selestina Dias

Buddhist Women's Philanthropy and Female Education

by
Manel Tampoe

The launching of Jonathan Walters' book the "History of Kelaniya"

The launching of Jonathan Walters' book History of Kelaniya was held at the SSA premises on the 7th of March. Organised by the SSA, it attracted a wide group of local scholars for a stimulating evening.

Dr. Walters', on this occasion gave a lecture on the politics of buried treasure in the North Central province of Sri Lanka. This insightful lecture, which related treasure-hunting to colonial archaeology, the ethnic crisis and the repression of the JVP, was accompanied by a colourful slide presentation.

Dr. Sasanka Perera, of the Sociology Department at the University of Colombo, made a keynote address on the "History of Kelaniya". He reflected on the continuing relevance of progressive research methods, and the increasing need for more ethnographical research on Sri Lanka.

