

TAMIL NATIONALISM AND THE SINHALESE

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In April 1917 Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam delivered a lecture on 'Our Political Needs' at the general meeting of the Ceylon Reform League, in which he illustrated statistically the contrast between the condition of the country in 1834 and that of 1915. His purpose was not to apologise for British rule but to present the case for radical administrative changes. As far back as 1833 the Colebrooke reforms had set up a Legislative Council with a majority of officials appointed by the Governor and 6 nominated unofficials, three of whom were to be Europeans and three representatives of Burghers, Sinhalese and Tamils. This Legislative Council of 1833 despite all the social and economic changes in the country mentioned by Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, remained essentially unchanged until the Mc Callum reforms of 1912. The significant feature of the latter was the provision of an 'Educated Ceylonese' seat, on an extremely restricted franchise (of less than 3,000 votes in 1912). Caste rivalry among the Sinhalese, rather than any consciousness of national belonging, resulted in the election of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan at two successive elections as Educated Ceylonese representative.

Thanks to the persistence and energy of Ramanathan's brother, Arunachalam, the Ceylon National Congress came into being in 1919, attracting wide support initially, including that of A.E. Goonesinhe and his Young Lanka League. But the bulk of the Sinhalese leadership consisted of small men with narrow vision, who, moreover, had begun to bring religion into politics, campaigning for Buddhist candidates in the elections in territorial constituencies. This was done through *Mahajana Sabhas* formed under the leadership of F.R. Senanayake. These Sinhalese leaders of the Congress repudiated an undertaking relating to support for a seat in the Legislative Council for Tamils in the Western province, which their leaders, James Peiris and E.J. Samarawickrema, had given the Jaffna Association in December 1918. Coming on top of Arunachalam's dissatisfaction with the Congress leadership's reluctance to advocate radical reforms, the breach of faith left Arunachalam with no alternative but to resign from the Congress. All Tamil members walked away with him, leaving the Ceylon National Congress as a purely Sinhalese political body—a condition from which, despite all national pretences, it was doomed never to recover.

The break-up of the Ceylon National Congress was a lethal blow to the process of solidification of a common political interest among the Sinhalese and Tamil upper-classes. Arunachalam, after his break-away, had to associate himself with Tamil interests represented by the *Tamil Mahajana Sabai*, whose focus was on the immediate needs of their community rather than any larger interest of a nascent nation. Here he found himself playing second fiddle to his elder brother, Ramanathan, with whom he had not empathized

in the recent past. But even as a wholly Sinhalese assembly, the Congress began to disintegrate. Like the Tamils, the Kandyans too had been given assurances that the Low-country Sinhalese leaders were not able to keep. They had accepted the reforms of 1824 on a Congress undertaking that no Low-country Sinhalese would contest Kandyan territorial constituencies—something beyond the capacity of the Congress to carry out. By 1925 several Kandyan leaders had come together to form a Kandyan National Assembly demanding separate representation for the Kandyans and, later, autonomy for the Kandyan Provinces within a federal set-up. It was in this period too that A.E. Goonesinhe, who had formed his own Labour Party and was well on his way to becoming a powerful trade union force, turned his back on the Congress, which had already become a mere Low-country Sinhalese group led by inept politicians who were largely preoccupied with preventing Sinhala rural masses and Indian plantation workers from being given the vote. Goonesinhe had been greatly influenced by the example of Gandhi in India and his technique of direct mass action on non-violent lines against the British administration. As early as 1913 he had formed a Servants of Lanka Society (influenced by the name of Gopal Krishna Gokhale's 'Servants of India Society', which had somewhat different aims) for conducting adult education and social service in the slums. He also formed a Gandhi Sangam for propagating the ideals of the Mahatma. In 1922 he commenced an agitation against the payment of the Poll Tax compelling those who could not or would not pay to undergo six days of heavy work on the roads in lieu of tax payment. Some of Goonesinhe's associates, like Victor Corea, went to jail rather than pay or even work on the roads. This protest action was repeated from year to year until the Poll Tax was repealed. Kumari Jayawardena states that refusal to pay or work was hailed as a successful attempt at non-violent resistance.

The Indian Connection

In these early activities of Goonesinhe there is discernible a considerable impact of contemporary events in India on some sensitive young minds in Colombo, the same events had a wider and deeper impact on educated youth in Jaffna. The fate of the Ceylon National Congress signified the lack of radicalism and political courage that characterized the elite of Colombo, both Sinhalese and Tamil. Arunachalam's stature made up in some measure for the others' lack of it and this was recognized by Goonesinhe. But towards the bulk of moderate Congress leaders, there was hardly any concealment of Goonesinhe's contempt. James Peiris, D.B. Jayatileka and F.R. Senanayake received their full quota of venom in the pages of "Yong Lanka". "In vain", the paper said, "does one look for great selfless patriots as India or Ireland has produced".

The establishment of a plantation economy in the country, beginning with coffee, demanded the transformation of traditional relationships prevailing on the land. Acting on the Colebrooke-Cameron recommendations, former royal lands that were taken over by the British, including hill-country forest lands, were put up for sale; lands cultivated according to traditional tenure were given in perpetuity to those who cultivated them; *Rajakariya* was abolished, thus creating a mobile labour force. In this way both land and labour were released for production for the new export market. In the case of labour, however, village labour in the needed proportions was neither in physical supply nor willing to work at the wage rates offered and in prevailing estate living conditions. Such a situation had to open the flood-gates to South Indian village labour, for whom harvest time of coffee in Ceylon coincided with the slack season on their own paddy fields. Thus British rule created all the conditions for the capitalist transformation of agriculture in vast areas of Western, Central and later Southern Ceylon. Virtually side by side with this transformation came the expansion of government administration and commerce, infrastructure and modern communications. Simultaneously education cleared a path-way for the new elite, whose grievances centred, not on British rule as such, but on the inadequacy of opportunities for elective representation in the legislature and direct admission to the higher ranks of the administration.

It was at such a time, political leadership in Ceylon was concerned less with independence for the country than with opportunities for itself, that the Youth Congress movement in Jaffna proclaimed the people's first clear commitment to the goal of full freedom from foreign rule. The youth of Jaffna were well ahead of the rest of the country in their perception of the meaning of events that had begun to take place in India since the conclusion of the war in November 1918. Disillusioned by the measly reforms announced by the Montague-Chelmsford Report, enraged by the massacre of helpless people at Jallianwala Bagh and by the Rowlatt Act and the proclamation of martial law in the Punjab, the Congress under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership announced a movement of mass civil disobedience towards the end of 1919. A few months later the Khilafat Committee led by the Ali Brothers, expressing Muslim anger over the break-up of the Turkish Caliphate, announced its own decision to participate in the civil disobedience. The civil disobedience movement shook the Indian administration in all parts of the country bringing students and workers and peasants, Hindus, Muslims and others, into militant action. The Congress itself changed its proclaimed goal from "self-government" to "Swaraj" and it became clear that a new chapter of revolutionary struggle had been opened by the people of India. This was appreciated in some way by the Ceylon National Congress. But while it was under Arunachalam's leadership and remained intact, it could be hoped that the local Congress would seek to emulate even in a small way the activity of its Indian mentor. But once the Congress had split up and its Tamil component had walked out of it, little could be expected from it, especially in the North. Though Arunachalam and his followers had no visible connection with the formation of the Students Congress (later the Youth Congress) in Jaffna, it is possible to conjecture that the break-up of the Ceylon National Congress and the formation of the Students Congress in Jaffna were not completely unrelated.

Secular Nationalism

It is necessary to emphasize that the Students Congress that was inaugurated at the end of December 1924 in Jaffna was not founded as a movement limited in its concerns of activity to the peninsula of Jaffna or the North and East provinces. Its perspective was an all-island one and its goal was explicitly announced to be independence, national unity, secularism and the overcoming of all caste barriers. It constituted the first manifestation of genuine nationalism in the country. The inaugural session was attended by about 300 young people, students and teachers largely. *The Morning Star* reported that seating was "in national style" on carpets and all present went in national dress. The focus of the resolutions passed at this Conference was on national unity and the overcoming of all barriers to such unity deriving from religion, ethnic origin, caste, language etc. Particular emphasis was laid on ending caste differences and the necessity to remove the curse of untouchability. All members were urged to accept the challenge of untouchability and to seek to meet it by eating and drinking in the homes of the so-called depressed castes.

The emphasis on caste discrimination derived in some measure from the identification of the Youth Congress leaders with the Indian freedom movement under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership. The Youth Congress enthusiasts accepted the principal Gandhian teachings of Swaraj for the country, the Spinning Wheel for the removal of grinding poverty in the villages, the Removal of Untouchability (of Harjans) and non-violence. It was not surprising, therefore, that the formation of the Youth Congress was followed in early 1927 by the visit of Mahatma Gandhi himself to Ceylon, initially at the invitation personally extended to him by the Youth Congress' principal motivator and Secretary, Handy Perimbanayagam. This had the inevitable impact of further reinforcing the basic Gandhian attitudes in the members of the Youth Congress.

But on the issue of caste discrimination itself the inspiration of the Youth Congress cannot be said to have been purely external. The emergence of the new economy, with its modernization of social and political attitudes, did not banish the caste system from Sinhalese society in the South of the country. The material supports of the caste system in Sinhalese society were greatly weakened, especially by the changes introduced by the British in traditional relationships on the land. Even so the social groups that benefitted from the new opportunities in administration, commerce and the professions were the upper castes that already possessed land or other wealth and were able to utilize the institutions providing education through the English language. The race for the accumulation of wealth and the new western culture became a competition between the Goigama and the coastal castes of Karawe, Durawe and Salagama. The other castes, especially the more depressed castes, were virtually shut out of the process of self-improvement. The old forms of social oppression overlapped the new modes of exploitation in the new society that was emerging.

Caste Oppression

If this process was prominent enough in Sinhalese society, in Jaffna, where the new economic changes were much less influential, caste oppression had a greatly accentuated role. The virtual stagnation of the economy in the peninsula created few compulsions for liberating land or labour from the bonds of traditional village relationships. K. Sivathamby explains the role of customary law, like the Thesavalamai, in the conservation of the Vellala dominated caste system in Jaffna. Until the eruption of the ethnic struggle and its development into civil war, it appeared that nothing could challenge the total domination of society by one single caste, especially because it constituted the overwhelming majority. Educational institutions were legally open to every body. But so successfully were the depressed castes kept out of the English schools that even Christian school managements had to recognize the caste system. It took until 1956 and the institution of free education to break the caste barrier in Jaffna schools. The depressed castes were an object of exploitation and extraction of unpaid labour on the part of the dominant caste. Caste discrimination in that sense was also class oppression.

The perception of the Jaffna Youth Congress leaders that caste discrimination and untouchability were one of the principal impediments to the development of the freedom struggle in Jaffna can be readily understood. But they sought to bring about this change by propaganda, education and the force of their own personal example. Thus on the occasion of their conferences and in their personal lives, they insisted on common seating arrangements for all and on commensality. This was fiercely resisted by the supporters of the caste system and on several occasions led to the use of violence, such as organized stone-throwing, to deter such unorthodox practices. Orator Subramaniam states: "The Youth Congress had to hold its annual sessions in Pandals especially erected for the purpose as untouchables had to be admitted and they had to sit with the others for meals; but these Pandals were set on fire". Perimbanayagam used all his influence to see that this was not done later. It may be said today, with the benefit of hindsight, that there never was any real chance of changing the conventions of a caste-dominated society by limited political action. But that was also the reason why the Youth Congress did not seek to confine its programme within the boundaries of Jaffna. They were constantly exerting themselves to promote new centres of activity in other parts of the country and to emerge as a country-wide freedom movement.

National Culture

K. M. de Silva has mentioned that, in the period in which the middle classes of Colombo were agitated about representation in the Legislative Council, it was generally accepted that there were two "majority communities", the Sinhalese and the Tamils. This would indicate the degree to which a cosmopolitan outlook was generated by preceding westernisation. The native intelligentsia had such extensive common interests that it was not necessary to bother about any question of hegemony as between its constituents. This condition prevailed until the break-up of the Ceylon National Congress and the withdrawal of Arunachalam from leadership of

the native intelligentsia. The resulting shift in emphasis in political activity from common interests to particular interests, and from articulation in English alone to Sinhalese and Tamil besides English, found prominent expression in the Youth Congress movement in Jaffna. The use of Tamil and the revival of interest in literature received the highest emphasis in the deliberations and activities of the Youth Congress from the very beginning. The prominence given to national dress and traditional modes of discourse and discussion was also an expression of this new reverence for Tamil culture. In that sense Youth Congress movement did not merely imply greater boldness and militancy in politics, but also represented an attempt to rescue the national culture from too much dalliance with the allurements of westernisation.

One consequence of this may be said to have been a certain weakening of the Ceylonese identity that had been growing among the middle classes along with English education. In an important sense English provided the links, the ideational apparatus and the vision that brought a Ceylonese consciousness into being. But there was still a long way to go before anybody could conceive of displacing English from the pedestal it was occupying in education, administration and even the ordinary transactions of the expanding modern sector of the economy. Consciousness of being Ceylonese had to remain an important if not predominant component of the outlook of society. To that extent genuine nationalism in the sense of articulation of the needs of a popular movement for freeing the country from foreign rule, could not but be bound up with the consciousness of being Ceylonese. It was such nationalism that appeared to be breaking up in Colombo with the spread of partial identities of caste, religion and language among its middle classes. This is why in the terminology of the 1920s and 1930s such partial outlooks were labelled as "communalism".

But with the Youth Congress movement in Jaffna the emphasis on being Tamil and resuscitating Tamil culture, far from being a regression to communalism, was the necessary corrective to submergence in exotic culture that was the essence of cosmopolitanism. Unfortunately the national movement that began in Jaffna in the middle 1920s could not spread beyond the peninsula. It was isolated in the country with the appearance of regressive political tendencies such as those of Sinhalese nationalism within the broken shell of the Ceylon National Congress. Both Sinhalese nationalists like D.S. Senanayake and D.B. Jayatileke and Tamil nationalists like Ponnambalam Ramanathan were engaged in a desperate endeavor, not so much to secure an independent future for the country as rapidly as possible, as to forestall the probability of universal suffrage being conceded to the people of Ceylon with the appointment of the Donoughmore Commission in 1927. To the Senanayakes and Jayatilekes universal suffrage raised the spectre of hundreds of thousands of Indian plantation labourers flooding the electorates of future legislatures.

To Tamil nationalists like Ponnambalam Ramanathan giving lower castes the right to vote was as inconceivable as the introduction of common seating and commensality in Jaffna schools.

Neither the Sinhalese nor the Tamil nationalists had cause for serious dissatisfaction with the Donoughmore Constitution--except, of course, in relation to their distrust of universal franchise. Only the Jaffna Youth Congress leaders had such strong objections to the Constitution itself as to make it imperative that they resist it. They could not oppose universal franchise, which was the necessary basis for any experimentation with the principles of democracy. But they also could not subscribe to a constitution that, behind a facade of parliamentary institutions, perpetuated the country's subordination to foreign rule. Both British colonialists and Sinhala and Tamil nationalists leaders went out to misrepresent the motives of the Youth Congress. It was put out that the boycott of the 1931 election was in fact a Tamil protest against the hopeless outnumbering of Tamil legislators by Sinhalese in a body that would be elected on the principle of universal franchise.

This was, of course, a deliberate falsehood. Orator Subramaniam quotes Handy Perimbanayagam on this subject as follows: "Many Sinhalese leaders have persistently read a communal significance into this decision (of boycott). I had to put the late S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike right when, at a conference where Subramaniam and I were present, he suggested that the boycott was inspired by communal motives. Nobody who had watched our lives and noted the price we have paid for our consistent devotion to the ideal of a united and free Lanka, can accept this view. The boycott was launched because the Donoughmore reforms fell far short of complete independence". The boycott of the inaugural election of the Donoughmore Constitution was the most powerful demonstration that could be organized in support of the popular demand for complete freedom from British rule. The boycott was a complete success.

Boycott Campaign

The boycott had a considerable impact on youthful opinion in other parts of the country. There were many declarations of support from the Youth Leagues that had begun to be active in Colombo and messages of solidarity from the more radical politicians among the Sinhalese. Most noteworthy was a letter that appeared in the "Searchlight" of May 27th, 1931 from a young man by the name of Philip Gunawardene, who was at that time a student in London. The letter welcomed the Jaffna boycott in ecstatic terms, declaring; "Jaffna has given lead. They have forced their leaders to sound the bugle call for the great struggle for freedom, for immediate and complete independence from imperialist Britain... Will the Sinhalese who always display supreme courage understand and fall in line?" Philip Gunawardene was one of a small group of Ceylonese students in London, most of whom were then about to complete their studies and make their way homeward. Three of them, N.M. Perera, Colvin R. de Silva and Leslie Goonewardene, were to join Philip in launching a new revolutionary party called the Lanka Sama Samaja Party at the end of 1935. This party was to inaugurate a new phase in the political struggle for the independence of the country.

With its boycott campaign, the Youth Congress had reached the zenith of its career. It was able to sustain the determination of the Jaffna people to persist in their opposition to the Donoughmore

Constitution for some time. But it soon became obvious that it could not succeed in keeping up this determination for long. Aspiring politicians began to look for fresh opportunities of finding entry to the new State Council and could find none outside the holding of fresh elections to the vacant seats. Petitions began to find their way to the British Governor to hold such elections and, though the latter was in no hurry to oblige them, a decision was eventually taken to hold elections to the vacant Jaffna seats by 1934. With the holding of these elections, the Youth Congress had to admit defeat in the struggle they had launched three years earlier. "Purna Swaraj", that was so prominently emblazoned on the Youth Congress banner from the time of its inauguration, was now pushed into the background. The high ideals of anti-untouchability, equality between castes and religions, secularism and non-violence, now began to be replaced by the opportunism of individual politicians and the displacement of Ceylonese nationalism by self-centred caste-contained communalism. According to Sivathamby; "Time and again it has been proved that it is the dominant Vellala caste (having for itself certain class characteristics) that has expressed its own needs and demands as the demands of the Tamils".

The LSSP

In the light of these changes, the foundation of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) in December 1935 appeared to be a timely event and one that was well placed to take over the struggle for ideals and objectives that had been waged by the Jaffna Youth Congress with so much determination and success during the preceding ten years. The objectives of complete independence, the ending of caste and class discrimination, the use of national languages and the provision of free education for all were firmly incorporated in the new party's programme. In fact it appeared as if the struggle of the Jaffna Youth Congress was breaking out of its isolation in one part of the country and finding new forms and foundations in the capital city so that it could percolate into other parts of the country. The Youth Congress tradition of close identification with the freedom struggle in India, led by the Indian National Congress, was also maintained by the new party. Shortly after its formation Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, a prominent Congress Socialist leader, arrived in Ceylon for a wide-ranging propaganda campaign in Colombo, Jaffna and the plantation areas on behalf of the party. Her meetings in Jaffna were enthusiastically supported by the Youth Congress and Handy Perimbanayagam figured prominently in this campaign.

If, however, anybody expected that the politics of Jaffna would be transformed by the impact of new trends developing in Colombo, that was not to be. The conservatism of Vellala society in Jaffna was much too firmly rooted in the soil of Jaffna to be uprooted or otherwise displaced in this way. Both the LSSP and the Communist party found themselves pushed to the periphery of Jaffna society where today tappers, cigar workers and the untouchable out-castes could provide a congenial atmosphere for them. The Communist party was able to have one of its members, P. Kandiah returned to Parliament in 1956. But he was the first as well as last of Left-wing representatives to secure election from the Northern province. Later N. Shanmugathasan was able to lead the untouchables in militant

attempts to break through the barricades that denied them admission to both religion and society. Though a member of the scheduled castes, N.C. Subramaniam, was also able to make his way to Parliament in 1970. This was as one of the six appointed members nominated by the United Front Government. More recent events have shattered the barriers between castes by way of the armed uprising that still continues. But it is too early to state that caste oppression and exploitation have finally perished, along with other institutions, in the catastrophe that has overcome the North.

Senanayake and the Sinhala Caucus

Although the LSSP did not find it possible to take the place of the Youth Congress in Jaffna as a popular force, it was able to mature rapidly into a serious challenge to the caucus of politicians representing landed and commercial interests in Colombo. Led by D. B. Jayatileke and D. S. Senanayake, this caucus was able to concentrate in its hands the powers and functions devolved on the various Executive Committees of the State Council. By deft placing of individual members of the Council in these committees, they succeeded in capturing the chairmanship of all these committees and establishing what they boasted was a "homogeneous Board of Ministers". All that it meant, of course, was that the Sinhalese caucus had shut out the minorities from ministerial posts in 1936. In this manner D. S. Senanayake projected himself as the chief leader of the Sinhala community, a position which he consolidated by 1942, when D.B. Jayatileke announced his retirement from politics and proceeded to New Delhi as the Ceylon Government's representative in India. But the Sinhalese "homogeneity" of the government was slightly modified through the appointment of A. Mahadeva, son of the late Ponnambalam Arunachalam, as Minister of Home Affairs.

This modification of communal contexture was part of Senanayake's preparation for the post-war future. As leader of the House he had a parliamentary caucus which he could parade as a ruling party. The Congress to which he nominally belonged was of little real political value to him. By 1943 he would announce his withdrawal from it, gladly leaving its carcass to his recruit from a parallel clan, J.R. Jayawardene, who had decided to become its pallbearer with the assistance of the Marxist group led by Dr. S.A. Wickremasinghe which had been expelled from the LSSP in 1940. D.S. Senanayake's strategy was based on the simple assumption that there was nothing to be gained from a confrontation with the British Governor and his officials that could not be secured by whole-hearted collaboration with them, especially in the pursuit of the latter's war. By March 1943 he had succeeded in evoking a pledge from the British Colonial Office of "full responsibility for government under the Crown in all matters of civil administration" for Sri Lanka at the end of the war.

What was expected from him by the British was reasonable. As yet, Senanayake had no political party to back him in the country. The British brand of democracy was based on a freely elected parliament, for which a system of political parties was necessary. The only party that existed in the country during the pre-war period was a Marxist party and this had been able to mobilize popular support and

engage in organized mass activity. It was widely expected that this party would make substantial gains at the State Council elections scheduled for 1940-41. The outbreak of the World War had put off these elections. Even so it had become necessary to ban the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and arrest its leaders to prevent interference with the war effort. It was now D.S. Senanayake's task to build a party that could command the support of a majority of people so that it could take charge of "full responsibility for government under the Crown" homogeneous or merely Sinhalese party. It had to be capable of speaking for all types of people in Ceylon. It was a mandate given from Britain that D.S. Senanayake should seek to build a united national party. The mandate specifically asked that the Ceylonese Ministers should draw up "detailed proposals" for a constitution which a subsequent commission from Britain could consider. To this end the Ministers engaged the services of Sir Ivor Jennings, then head of the Ceylon University College. Jennings was well aware of what was expected of him in both Colombo and London.

Representation

The Soulbury Commission that subsequently came out to examine his draft, formulated the problem in their report as "essentially the problem of reconciling the demands of the minorities for an adequate voice in the conduct of affairs.... with the obvious fact that the constitution must preserve for the majority that proportionate share in all spheres of Government activity to which their numbers and influence entitle them". Jennings' solution to this problem was described by him as "a system of weightage for sparsely populated Provinces" that enabled the minorities to obtain higher representation than they could have obtained had all constituencies been of equal size.

The actual proposal was that constituencies should be demarcated for every 75,000 of population and every 1,000 square miles of territory. By this means greater representation would be accorded for Tamils and Muslims in the Northern and Eastern Provinces and for Sinhalese in the more backward Kandyan regions. Significantly the India population in the plantations were left out of this calculation. Their right to vote was determined by other criteria. At the time of the introduction of universal suffrage, Indians in Ceylon were required to have a minimum of five years residence in the country to be eligible to vote. Senanayake and his caucus strove hard to impose further restrictions on Indian voting. But the values of bourgeois democracy, even in imperialist Britain, had a more civilized aspect than the primitive fears and hatreds of feudal-minded native politicians. According to the Jackson Report on immigration of 1938, there were probably at the end of 1936 about 400,000 Indian estate workers "who had become part of the permanent population of the island". But by 1943 only 168,000 had been registered as voters by the test of domicile. Even so they were able to return 7 members to parliament and influence the result in about 20 constituencies.

The general election of 1947 took place before the formal transfer of power to an Independent Ceylon. Jennings' draft constitution, with minor changes, provided the basis for the settlement that was

effected between the major interests that were involved and the British Government. Though the Tamil Congress, which had become the main voice of Tamil interests in the north, continued to press for balanced representation between Sinhalese and non-Sinhalese, the formula adopted was that of electoral weightage. At the same time, minorities were safeguarded from discrimination by Section 29 (2) of the new constitution, underlining the principle of the secular state standing above ethnic and other sectarian differences. All religions were to receive equal treatment from the government and English would be replaced as the official language by Sinhalese and Tamil. For a moment it seemed that Senanayake had succeeded in bringing all language, religious and caste groups together within the frame of the United National Party to launch the united endeavor to build a single nation in the country. There were Sinhalese, Tamils and Burghers, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Muslims in the ranks. But the whole operation had been conducted so rapidly, adroitly and even complacently, that there had to be doubts about the new party's viability. Was this a real political party or an assemblage of prominent persons of different origins and backgrounds who, even if they held together, could easily lose their individual representative character? There were prominent Indians also in the fold, but most of them were Pettah businessmen and had little to do with the plantations.

It was too good to be true, however, that all this concord that attended the birth of the UNP would last any great length of time. The obsession of Senanayake and his caucus of being swamped by 'hordes' of Indian workers in the hill country was not easy to overcome. What made it more difficult was that these hordes were Tamils. And their numbers amounted to virtually 50 per cent of the entire Tamil population of the country. It did not take more than a few months after formal inauguration of independence in February 1948, for D.S. Senanayake to set out once more on his anti-Indian trail. In one fell blow he took away the citizenship of Indian plantation workers who constituted about 10 per cent of the total population of Ceylon.

Nothing better could, perhaps, have been expected from communal-minded Sinhalese political leaders. What was surprising, however, as stated in *The Broken Palmyrah*, published by teachers of the Jaffna University, "was that almost all of the Tamil elite representing the Ceylon Tamils through both Mr. Senanayake's United National Party and the Tamil Congress, either voted for the bills or were not serious about opposing them. Mr. G.G. Ponnambalam, the leader of the Tamil Congress, opposed the first bill and voted for the second, having become a member of the cabinet. This somersault was on the unprincipled calculation that, on the goodwill of the UNP depended their personal power and vested interests. The Sinhalese elite discovered very early that they could easily call the bluff of the Tamil elite, especially the Colombo Tamil." Only Mr. S.J.V. Chelvanayagam dissociated himself clearly from these bills and, joined by others like Dr. E.M.V. Naganathan and Mr. C. Vanniasingham, walked out of the Tamil Congress and soon formed the Federal Party.

Tamil Nationalism

It would seem that Tamil nationalism in the immediate post-war period had revived its former illusions of working under Sinhalese nationalist hegemony to establish a united Ceylonese nation. What, nevertheless, needs to be explained is what kind of Tamil consciousness it was that felt greater identity with the Sinhalese ruling-class than with the Tamil plantation workers who were being oppressed by them. At least until the disenfranchisement of Indian in 1948/49 there was no consciousness among the Tamils of the North and East that there were Tamils also in other parts of the country, especially in the hill-country. Such people appeared to them as Indians rather than fellow-Tamils. In other words, there was no national consciousness of being Tamil, rather than anything more inclusive or exclusive. A more inclusive consciousness of nationality had to be a Ceylonese national consciousness. But that was, as we have noted, in its least substantive of stages. A more exclusive consciousness of Tamil nationality had to be discriminatory in respect of some or many who were Tamils themselves. The discrimination arose from the consciousness of caste. Sivathamby mentions that among the immigrant groups from Tamilnad that make up the plantation labour population in Ceylon, more than half belong to adi-Dravida castes, like Pallans and Paraiyans. Adi-Dravida is the Tamil appellation for Scheduled castes or Harijans. They are untouchable. As such Vellala society in Jaffna is not likely to have felt identity with them. Small wonder that the Tamil Congress and its representatives in Parliament felt only remotely obliged, at best, to defend the civic rights of Indians in this country.

But if half of the Indian immigrant population in Ceylon was Adi-Dravida, the other half was not. They are said to belong to a variety of Sudra castes, like Vellalans, Kallans etc. These do not socialize with the untouchable castes. Indeed they do not engage in the same kind of labour as the latter. In the case of the higher castes in this group, like Vellalans, Kallans and Konars, they engage in supervisory and clerical work on the estates. Thus caste functions as a divisive factor within the estate community, making the problem of solidarity among Tamils even more complicated. Sivathamby points out that, until the formation of the Federal Party in 1949, there was no political movement among the Northern Tamils that sought to bring the Indian Tamils within their sphere of action. Similarly the Indian Tamils played no part whatever in the struggle of the Northern Tamils over the constitutional status of the Tamil language in 1956 and afterwards. For whatever reason, the attempt to secure the use of Tamil even in a secondary regional capacity was confined to the Northern and Eastern Provinces, leaving out the hill-country.

It is difficult to speak about a Tamil nationalism that does not think in terms of Tamils as one people belonging to the country as a whole. It would otherwise have to be conceded that there are several Tamil nationalisms because there are several Tamil peoples. What would then be the basis on which each of these Tamil peoples can lay claim to their specific separateness—caste, race, religion, physical features, anything else? Not only will all Tamils be held to ransom by such fickleness, but all others in the country, and the country itself. At the same time, it would be overly optimistic to

expect that in spite of the numerous and deep divisions that exist between in various parts of the country, a single political party of the Tamils can be brought into being to function as the sole defender of Tamil rights, and the sole promoter of tamil interests throughout the country, Until 1976, when the Tamil United Liberation Front was formed, the idea did not appear to be feasible. The Tamil middle class was very largely dependent on Government and mercantile jobs and on professional occupations outside the Northern and Eastern Provinces. As for the plantation Tamils their principal preoccupation was with the need to secure citizenship rights. It was only when the nationalization of the plantations that commenced in 1973 drove large number of Indian Tamils out of their homes and estates into unrelieved destitution, that the reality of common problems could dawn on them.

It is also necessary to remember that Senanayake's formation of the UNP was an attempt to carry the minorities with him both as a recognition of his own necessities, and under pressure from the British colonial office. S. Arasaratnam mentions that the Senanayake Board of Ministers, in the face of G.G. Ponnambalam's demand for Fifty-Fifty representation, offered to concede a relationship of 57 per cent to 43 per cent as between Sinhalese and others in the future legislature. The offer was turned down by the Tamil leadership because they had greater confidence in the ruling group of westernized elites to which they belonged in common with the Sinhalese and others. They placed their confidence in terms of the settlement approved by the Soulbury Commission, whereby a territorial scheme was devised giving the Sinhalese 67 per cent of seats in the legislature in the general election of 1947. D.S. Senanayake may not have planned it so cold-bloodily, but the disenfranchisement of almost 9 lakhs of Ceylon Indians some few months after Independence resulted in the Sinhalese receiving 73 per cent of the seats in Parliament at the 1952 elections. This increased to 78 per cent with the 1959 delimitation and subsequently to 80 per cent which the Sinhalese still hold.

Conclusion

If it is accepted that recent world developments have demonstrated the importance of democratic approaches to

the solution of social problems, the stark meaning of Sinhalese control of 80 per cent of parliamentary constituencies cannot be misread. The Tamil people cannot confine their political involvement to events taking place in what they consider their homeland provinces of the North and East. the laws that disenfranchised 9 lakhs of plantation population were aimed as much at the generality of Tamil people in Ceylon and the mass of all working people irrespective of ethnic belonging as at the Indian Tamils in the country. If the Tamil leaders had realized at the time of constitutional negotiations with the Senanayake caucus, that it was vital in their own interests to secure constitutional protection for the rights of Indian immigrants in Ceylon, the battle for the rights of all Tamils could have been fought in 1945 and in far more congenial circumstances. Similarly it was impermissible political blindness not to have resisted the citizenship laws of 1948 and 1949, even to the point of resorting to direct mass action.

Resistance was possible following the massive mandate won by the TULF at the 1977 general election. With the rout of the SLFP and the total annihilation of the Left, the TULF became the main opposition in Parliament with its leader, Amirthalingam, as leader of the Opposition. Unfortunately, in place of using its opportunities to mobilize country-wide support against the injustices and malpractices of the Government, the TULF refused to make Tamil grievances and deprivations the subject of national political action and continued to regard them as an object of bargaining with the UNP. For a while the TULF joined the SLFP and the Left parties in a joint campaign that might have forestalled the fraudulent referendum that President Jayawardena was preparing for the purpose of postponing a parliamentary general election. But even that was hastily given up on a mere indication that the Government was willing to talk to the TULF leaders. It was that the TULF was committed to the attainment of Eelam. But there was no indication that it knew of any path to that goal as a result the political initiative went along with the accumulation of military potential and that was entirely in the hands of the LTTE. ■

A Veteran left intellectual, Hector Abhayavardhana belongs to the second generation of the Lanka Samasamaja Party (LSSP) leadership.

The Mountain-Moving Day

The mountain-moving day is coming
 I say so, yet others doubt.
 Only a while the mountain sleeps
 In the past
 All mountains moved in fire,
 Yet you may not believe it.
 Oh man, this alone believe,
 All sleeping women now awake and move.

Yosano Akiko (1878-1942)