

Tamils) were scarcely mentioned as if the tears they shed had no meaning?

The resort to divine or demonic help in order to achieve mundane political objectives has now become an accepted part of political mobilisation. The opposition parties resorted to it in the *pada yatra* (long march) to Kataragama and, as indicated above, in the prayers at the *Kali kovil*. The state too resorts to such ceremonies all the time; the President's 68th birthday was celebrated with *bodhi pujas* as well as *deva pujas* and no official occasion is complete

without some religious or quasi-religious ritual. What is significant now is that such invocations are public and acknowledged; they are no longer kept secret. The dark underworld in which demons and sorcerers earlier lived has burst its way into the light.

Rationalist and enlightenment traditions of politics constituted for many decades the bases of democratic political conduct in Sri Lanka. When demons enter, can democracy survive?

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VOODOO IN POLITICS

What, with apologies to Graham Greene, has sixty years of universal franchise produced in Sri Lanka's political culture? Sorcery.

Sorcery has now emerged as a respectable mode of political communication and practice in this island while parliamentary democracy still refuses to vanish into oblivion. Both the ruling party and the opposition have of late begun to resort to witchcraft, cursing and sorcery in the race for political wish-fulfillment. During the impeachment crisis, there were many stories being circulated regarding politicians summoning to their service a variety of super-natural characters—deities, demons and all. Some news reports even mentioned that certain MPs went to the House on the day of the impeachment debate armed with charmed oils to counter-act other charms set out by their law-maker opponents!

In a land where mass culture accommodates a whole variety of cosmologies and where rationalism co-exists with demons and goblins, it is still too early to expect politicians to say 'no' to extra-rational modes of political conduct. Nonetheless, what we are concerned with here is not just the superstitious practices resorted to by individual politicians for lengthening their political careers, but with an apparently new phenomenon of substituting sorcery for democratic forms of political mobilization and conduct.

A whole plethora of such practices, which treat the people as subjects to be governed by forces that are extra-terrestrially located, has sprung up recently as means of political mobilization.

Its precursor was the *bodhi pujas*. Worshipping a particular species of a tree, re-planting it in a terrain sacred, is

essentially a religio-cultural thing. Yet, political *bodhi pujas* are more than that; at one level they constitute an appalling measure of political sycophancy. At another level—and this is what we are really concerned with here—they represent a specific enterprise organized by politicians to exploit and manipulate the religious emotions of the people. Its most pernicious aspect is the summoning of mass crowds, using coercive organs of state power as well, to pseudo-religious congregations to invoke blessings on individual politicians who anyway are already protected by numerous armed agencies of the state.

In politics, as in day to day life, there is now only a very thin line between entreating divine intervention and mustering demonic forces for both good and bad. As we report in this issue of *Pravada*, the opposition campaign for human rights too has entered the arena of cursing rituals.

The emergence of sorcery as a political weapon is indeed symptomatic of the sheer decadence of democratic political culture in this island where a long tradition of

open political competition, debate, discussion and electoral mobilization has existed. Cursing and sorcery, *bodhi pujas* and charms—they defy all traditions of political enlightenment. They are in fact sinister substitutes for open and competitive politics conventionally conducted by means of democratic organs of civil society—political parties, trade unions, electoral organizations, professional bodies etc.

'Decay of political institutions' is a phrase once used by Mick Moore, a long-time Sri Lanka watcher, to describe some aspects of political change in the post-1977 period. Moore was specifically referring to the weakening of the

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electoral process, the party system and legislative politics. A still larger issue is involved in this decaying trajectory of modern Sri Lankan politics; the submergence of democratic political culture by authoritarian practices and values. The sudden spread of political sorcery obviously indicates the degree to which authoritarianism of all forms—state, counter-state and so on—has debilitated secularist foundations of political conduct.

While the context of authoritarianism helps us to locate the decay of democratic political culture, it does and should not exonerate the politicians who wilfully resort to obscurantist practices for political mobilization. Understandably, anti-UNP mass mobilization is an immediate item in the Opposition's agenda. Yet, because of its collective inability to present a principled and sustained critique of the Premadasa regime and to develop a clear and programmatic alternative, the entire energy of the opposition is

wasted on denouncing the regime and its individuals on the basis of personalized animosity. Even the attempt to impeach Premadasa and thereby oust him from office, despite much talk of democracy, smacked of individualized hatred towards a man whose counter-image was projected to be the supreme epitome of evil.

Sorcery in a ritualistic sense is always directed at individuals and it is no accident that it is being deployed by politicians either for self-protection or for the destruction of the adversarial individual. This constitutes a symptom of excessive personalization of politics that has occurred in Sri Lanka during the past few years. What is fundamentally wrong about such personalist reductionism in politics is that it leaves counter-democratic structures and processes unidentified and uncriticized.

Jayadeva Uyangoda

BOYS WILL BE BOYS:

GENDER AND NATIONAL AGENCY IN FANON AND THE LTTE¹

Qadri Ismail

If...[women are critical of patriarchal practices and attitudes] a gendered tension will develop within the national community. This could produce a radically new definition of 'the nation.'

Cynthia Enloe

In the beginning they were called 'the boys.' Mostly by upper class and upper caste Tamils, in all parts of north eastern Sri Lanka. Our boys, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam; our children, our protectors. An affectionate, but paternalistic term; an uncannily accurate one. From the beginning, the Tigers were male in constitution and gendered in ideology. In time they came to symbolize Tamil resistance, these boys coolly brandishing their AK-47's. And they came to dominate the resistance, too, having greater popular support and superior organization, but crucially by murdering many of their opponents.

A full length study of the rise of the LTTE, and its brand of 'fundamentalist' Tamil nationalism, has yet to be written; such a work would need to compare it to similar nationalisms currently rampant in post-colonial South Asia; it would also have to be situated within the logic of transnational capitalism, of uneven development or, to use Gayatri Spivak's more apt phrase, uneven decolonization. This paper, however, has a limited objective: in it, a relationship is posited between gender, (revolutionary/militaristic) violence and nationalism in the LTTE by way

of a reading of Frantz Fanon. Why Fanon? Because to this day a better understanding of third world nationalism, of its necessity and its dangers, does not exist; not in the work, in other respects important, of the more classically Marxist Amilcar Cabral and Che Guevara, and certainly not in texts like Benedict Anderson's currently cool *Imagined Communities* which discuss third world nationalisms without once mentioning colonialism (Or the work of Fanon).² To say this is not to dismiss Fanon as a mere nationalist, or to deny the enabling aspects of his work: he was a deeply committed internationalist, a Martinican fighting in Algeria; he warned of the pitfalls of excessive nationalism; and he was a (dissident) Marxist, aware among other things of how metropolitan capital could destroy nationalist/socialist experiments in the periphery. Nevertheless, he speaks most effectively, most eloquently, when articulating the case for (anti-colonial) nationalism. Therefore, while it is not my intention to erase or even downplay important differences between his account of national liberation and the LTTE's representation of the Tamil struggle, a strong basis exists for comparing the two — in their narratives of nationalism: both hold that the nationalist project can only be fulfilled through (revolutionary) violence; and both forge a nationalist subject/agent that is singularly male. Consequently, the possibilities for women, for feminist projects within a nationalism

