

Pravāda

Vol. 5 No. 6

Rs. 25.00

ISSN 1391-104X

Contents

NOTES AND COMMENTS	03
SRI LANKA'S CRISIS AND IT'S COMPLEXITIES	05
<i>Jayadeva Uyangoda</i>	
SPECIAL SECTION: PLANTATIONS IN CRISIS	
TEA PLANTATIONS: A LONG-TERM STRATEGY	10
<i>P.P. Manikam</i>	
FUTURE OF TEA ESTATES	13
<i>David Dunham</i>	
TEA TALK	16
<i>Valentine Daniel</i>	
WAGE INCREASE FOR PLANTATION WORKERS	26
VIJAYA KUMARATUNGA ASSASSINATION REPORT	28
<i>Kishali Pinto Jayawardana</i>	
FREE EDUCATION Vs. REFORM	32
<i>Adrian Wijemanne</i>	

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

AFTER THE JUBILEE

Sri Lanka celebrated 50 years of independence on the 4th of February, completing 50 years of existence as an independent nation-state. In 1948, the country became a dominion of the British commonwealth and in 1972, a republic within the commonwealth. This year's anniversary has been called the *Swarna Jayanthi*, the Golden Jubilee and was celebrated with a great deal of pomp, with Prince Charles as the chief guest.

A realistic appraisal of the somber situation in the country will show that there is very little to celebrate. The concept of a nation, at least as a collectivity that willingly accepted citizenship in the new state, is not valid any longer. That collectivity has fragmented itself on ethnic lines, with the Tamil ethnic group totally alienated from the processes of the state. And within the major ethnic groups, caste loyalties are reemerging as a significant factor of social and political mobilization, indicating a deeper process of segmentation and atomization within Sri Lankan society.

The state itself is under serious threat of fragmentation. The separatist war waged by the LTTE has forced the state to attempt two seemingly contradictory projects: one, to put down by force the separatist guerrillas and second, to attempt the task of restructuring itself so as to reintegrate all citizens within its fold. Both these projects have their difficulties; the attempt to crush the insurgency has been going on for over a decade with no sign of success; the second, the attempt to restructure the state so that the Tamil people will have a due share of political power, is now being debated in the political arena with no assurance of success.

The majority community does not yet appear ready to share power with other ethnic groups.

The state has in a sense ignored these realities in arranging the fiftieth anniversary celebrations. They were to be held in Kandy at the *Maha Maluva*, the compound of the Temple of the Tooth. Remembering that control of the Tooth Relic of the Buddha housed there has in the past been regarded as a symbol of the legitimacy of power, the planned celebrations could then be construed as signifying the continued Sinhala Buddhist nature of the Sri Lankan polity. That the celebrations would be so seen by the Tamil minority was inevitable; the statement that this independence and its attendant celebrations were not theirs and that their independence was still to be won was made with great force by the lorry bomb that was exploded by the LTTE at the gates of the Temple on the 25th of January, doing serious damage to the 18th century building. After a few days of defiance, the celebrations were shifted to Colombo.

The manner in which this explosive statement was made was deplorable in that it caused damage to a monument of great cultural significance and killed and maimed a large number of Buddhist devotees. Yet, its timing, location and devastating effect do reflect the destructive course of this separatist war. The dynamics of this war, the ferocious way in which it is being waged and its near intractability are analyzed in an article in this issue by one of the editors; a reading of that article will enable the reader to see this bomb as a logical, though tragic, step in the development of this conflict.

Pravāda

Vol. 5 No. 6, 1998

Editors

**Charles Abeysekera
Jayadeva Uyangoda**

Pravada is published monthly by:

**Pravada Publications
425/15, Thimbirigasyaya Road
Colombo 5
Sri Lanka.**

Telephone. 501339

Fax. 595563

Annual subscriptions:

Sri Lanka	Rs. 300
By Air mail:	
South Asia/Middle East	U.S. \$ 28
S. E. Asia/Far East	U.S. \$ 28
Europe/Africa	U.S. \$ 30
Americas/Pacific countries	U.S. \$ 40

Violence, a state of mind that emanates from the ethnic conflict and the demonstration of its efficacy, is now pervasive in Sri Lankan society. Social conflicts, family feuds, political rivalries - all are now normally settled by the use of violence. Such normalization of political and individual violence is obviously not the best tribute to independence and its achievements. This somber view of the ills that now beset Sri Lankan society will no doubt be a familiar litany to regular readers of *Pravada*.

So, we have really been celebrating a legal fiction devoid of reality or meaning to substantial numbers of people - Tamil and other minorities, caste groups still subject to various forms of oppression, women who still remain subordinate. We are celebrating 50 years of the nation state at a moment when it is threatened with disintegration.

A noticeable aspect of this Golden Jubilee event was the public apathy for the official celebrations. The shock bomb explosion in Kandy may no doubt have dampened any

public enthusiasm about the grand events of celebrations, hurriedly organised in Colombo. At the same time, there was also the public questioning of the whole meaning of independence when the state couldn't guarantee the elementary security of citizens against totally unexpected guerilla attacks. To add to the ironies of the Golden Jubilee celebrations, the extremely tight security cordon imposed on Colombo, several days before the big event of February 04, restricted the free movement of the people to such an extent that many infuriated members of the public were heard lamenting over the absence of free movement at a time when the country was supposed to complete fifty years of freedom!

The one silver lining in the celebrations was the accurate perception of this reality displayed in the President's address to the nation. Seeing it as an occasion for retrospection, she said:

We have failed in the essential task of nation-building...In 1948, when our forefathers first set out along the path to freedom, they envisioned a truly free and united Sri Lanka... We have failed to realise the dreams of our freedom fighters to build a strong and united nation. The silent majority watched in horror, whilst a great nation with an ancient civilization, steeped in one of the finest cultural and architectural heritages of the world, nurtured in the traditions of the noble Buddhist philosophy of peace, tolerance and love veered off into a terrifying era of ethnic, political and social violence.

History offers but a few opportunities to an individual or a nation to reach up to the stars. We have missed many chances. We cannot, we must not, miss this one last moment, rich with opportunity.

However, the opportunities that the President had in her mind are not created in the air or in a vacuum; nor are they missed by chance. Opportunities are created by political conditions and declined by political forces. If the present historical opportunity to resolve Sri Lanka's ethnic problem is to be utilized fully and constructively, the major political forces that shape Sri Lanka's future path must seize it and work towards achieving that goal. As Sri Lanka's ethnic problem, particularly past moments of missed opportunities, clearly demonstrate, a solution cannot be worked out

by either a single political party or the ruling party alone.

And not by political parties alone either. The people at large, the citizens of this state must collaborate in this task. Whether Sri Lanka moves into the next millennium as a single state is the historical challenge faced by the entire Sri Lankan society. The present reality in Sri Lanka is that no unequivocal answer appears to have been emanating from the political and social forces who shape Sri Lanka's future. Even those forces that are determined to keep Sri Lanka together do not seem to realize that keeping the state together is conditional to making a pluralistic nation through political means. For fifty years, we have un-made a nation. The task ahead is re-making the state and forging a new nation for Sri Lanka.

The essence of the President's independence day message is that politics of re-making the nation should take precedence over the state-making to which we have for fifty years given priority. But, these days in Sri Lanka, who will take even a President's message seriously? The parliamentary opposition? The LTTE? The Buddhist Sangha? The newspaper columnists? The voter? At the time of writing this note, no one has taken up the President's challenge, no one has responded to it. That indeed is the tragedy of our politics.

Yet, we are "celebrating" 50 years as a nation-state. If all segments of society do not enter into process of re-forging the nation, if the Sinhala community does not work towards a politics of democratic tolerance, if the Tamil community is not convincing assured of a share in the decision-making processes, then we might be commemorating in the millennium the demise of a state.

P