

they ask. With Sirimavo Bandaranaike as the Presidential candidate, the Opposition is likely to lose to a considerable degree the public enthusiasm generated towards the PA during the past few months. The question with her candidacy is not merely her old age or her inability to lead a successful election campaign. The real problem lies with the political conservatism that Sirimavo Bandaranaike and the SLFP old guard represent. Until Chandrika Kumaratunga re-joined the SLFP two years ago, the party did not have a leader, even at the secondary level, with any capacity for new political thinking and imagination. In fact, the old guard that surrounds Mrs. B. is, to use a Chinese metaphor, just political dead wood. Many of them have mastered the art of political incompetence and indolence during the past seventeen years out of power. The promise of Chandrika Kumaratunga is that, under her leadership, there will be space as well as direction for much needed political and economic reforms, without returning to the populist

statism and statist autocracy which Mrs. B. and her loyalists have not yet shed.

Mrs. Bandaranaike's candidacy may also pose an unsurmountable problem for the PA in terms of electoral arithmetic. No minority political party seems to be in a mood to support her at the Presidential election because of their absolute lack of trust in her commitment to a political solution to the ethnic problem. It would be a tremendous task for Chandrika Kumaratunga and Professor G. L. Pieris to convince the minority parties that a PA regime under the leadership of Sirimavo Bandaranaike would be any different from the three UNP regimes since 1977 on the ethnic question. Without the support of the minorities and with lukewarm public enthusiasm, Mrs. Bandaranaike's candidacy at the next presidential election is not likely to be quite exciting for the opposition alliance.

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## REINVENTING THE SRI LANKAN STATE

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In the agenda for socio-economic development, the Sri Lankan State has decidedly taken the path of a market-oriented reform process for the past fourteen years. However, this state-sponsored, market-oriented transition is truncated and distorted by extremist nationalism and economic mismanagement. Essentially, this reflects the static, self-limiting, semi-feudal nature of the existing state apparatus and the need for its metamorphosis towards a popular, democratic state to facilitate and accelerate the market transition.

While history is being continually rewritten, what we have here and now is the recent history of a youth insurrection, a fear psychosis and a brutal ethnic conflict. At present, political corruption, thuggery, human rights violations co-exist with the economic marginalization of a majority - the persistence of material impoverishment expounded by high levels of rural poverty, hidden unemployment, child malnutrition, and destitute refugees. These basically point towards a breakdown of the operating principles of society, a fragmentation of collective social structures. Thus, in order to progress, we need to articulate and re-orient social practices (habits, myths, laws, rituals, etc.) towards a transformation of the current hostile and turbulent social arrangement, eliminating some of its inherently oppressive elements.

In this unfolding historical tragedy, what is at issue is the role of the state: an institution, a "representative democracy", to use the obsolete adage, "created of the people, by the people, for the people." Some characterize the state as an apparatus through which universal interests can prevail, and others see an innate rationality

in civil society that will lead to collective welfare. And in Sri Lanka, in the emergent civil society, broadly a manifestation of the change from feudal to bourgeois society, the old bands of privilege through lineage, ethnicity and caste are gradually being replaced, albeit reluctantly, by atomistic individuals separated from each other and from the community by the pursuit of profit, by a market-oriented system based on contractual obligations and universal laws that are replacing traditional, customary personal ties.

In effect, a reformation (reinventing) of the modern state is dictated by the evolving characteristics of the civil society and its socio-economic context. Economic liberalization has nourished a new segment of society and the beneficiaries of the old order are gradually being displaced from privileged positions. The social and ideological displacement and fragmentation of civil society escape the control of the state, which is limited to formal, negative activities (cloaked under emergency regulations), and is rendered impotent by market forces which are the essence of economic life. This has generated a type of state politics which does not reflect this conflict between the emergent and the old, and where the state rather than actively facilitating the market transition, remains intentionally abstracted and removed from it.

However, reality is not as simple as our categories; the hegemonic Sinhalese Buddhist majority, forming the bulk of civil society, especially its established economic elite, maintains a vested interest in preserving the state. While some in privileged positions may not subjectively identify themselves with the Sinhala Buddhist State posture, their vested economic interests negate any vocal

political opposition. In reciprocity, this dominant group is fortified by the state apparatus through various legislative sanctions and economic mandates which ultimately compromise the socio-economic imperatives of a transforming state.

But the state also has an ethical function as it tries to educate public opinion and influence the economic sphere. It is here that the legitimacy of the modern state must be adequately interpreted and contested. The Sri Lankan State, if its long term interest is to be based on social justice and sustainable socio-economic development, has to adopt an ethical concept of the role of the state: an ethical framework that presents the state as the embodiment of society's general interests, and standing above any particular interest. Therefore, it has to present itself as capable of dissolving the division between civil society and the state, of facilitating the internal logic of civil society rather than dictating terms to it.

While economic structures are being gradually changed to be competitive in a world market, the internal logic of civil society and social practices are also transformed to accommodate the material conditions of production. Creation of a vibrant domestic market, increasing local effective demand, facilitating local value-added activity, and consumerism all effect and transform social consciousness and compel the dominant ideology to integrate these real material changes. In effect, the emergence of a consumerist capitalist culture, the stock market, "Majestic City," and Miss Tourism contests, continue to negate the authenticity of traditional, static, semi-feudal notions of a Sinhala Buddhist State.

Briefly stated, individualism, the pure ideology of the market, is the emergent ideology of civil society. Collectivism, the right-wing form, complements the market expressing all non-market social institutions, values and interests necessary to make the market work. In the present context of Sri Lanka, this constraining collectivist position has rationalized itself as an appeal to nationalism, patriotism and militarism. It is an extreme illustration of Buddhist Sinhala nationalism, which has become parasitic upon the articulation of a genuine popular national interest. However, at another extreme, it has been progressive in actively re-organizing civil society for universal social and moral action. Thus, the legitimacy of the modern state must be redescribed and contested to facilitate the transition to a secular, ethical, collectivist mode.

A transformational concept of popular national interest and a democratic state must, first and foremost, initiate a negotiated settlement to the ethnic crisis to end this brutal inhuman atrocity. It must manifest itself as a collective effort on the part of the state as well as of civil society. Second, popular nationalism must reestablish and rehabilitate democratic institutions to articulate and implement a realistic, sustainable socio-economic development program.

But the remnants of the old, the forces opposed to such a progressive articulation of social practices are reproducing limiting structures of state paternalism, especially in the realm of cultural practices. In a search for authenticity and legitimation, this dominant ideology has threatened the resilience of democratic institutions; by default, it has justified and reproduced a stifling, semi-feudal state.

A multi-ethnic cultural self-determination demands a shift from reproducing static, idealistic assumptions concerning society to a realistic, dynamic, practical analysis (and a vision) of a society in transition. A fundamental criteria for arriving at the latter must take into consideration the contemporary political economy, the production (to alleviate poverty) and reproduction of (socially and ecologically sustainable) material conditions of existence.

With socio-economic progress as a basis, Buddhist Sinhala nationalism should detach itself from state paternalism and promote a resurgence of genuine popular participation in the democratic processes. Political parties must also recognize the historical necessity of positioning themselves to transform coercive, constraining pre-capitalist structures towards transparent rules of governance. In everyday politics and electoral campaigns, chronic immediate social reforms combined with struggles within power hierarchies, may overshadow the long-term aims of the collective social benefits to be obtained by transforming the state. However, the inability of established party politics to accommodate popular participation, especially among the youth and ethnic minorities, in the democratic process will lead to further devastating consequences and a turbulent future.

Recognizing sources of injustice in social reality, and the means necessary for changing or remedying them involves much more than redescription, even if it is a necessary component. A national redescription must move beyond a romantic self-creation grounded on ignorance of physically determining laws (such as the economic integration with a world capitalist system) to a self-overcoming - a self-overcoming that reconciles concrete material changes, induced by 14 years of economic liberalization, with a new, creative, collective moral identity. It is a transformation, a reinventing of the state, and not a utopian replacement, that recognizes that the past has to be overcome, simultaneously dissolving and disconnecting social relations of injustice among groups of individuals (men and women, people of different castes and ethnicities, urban and rural, etc). Social debate must engage itself in finding and disentangling the webs of constraining structures and in critically explaining those social practices which sustain them. Rather than just redescription a moral upliftment, we need to explain change and to articulate a realistic, collective self-emancipation toward (re)creating a productive, humane, democratic nation.