
Reproduced below is a statement issued by a group of 61 academics and human rights activists in November 1993, at the height of the controversy on Professor S. J. Tambiah's most recent book on Sri Lanka.

A PLEA FOR TOLERANCE

We are concerned about the nature of the controversy that has arisen over Professor S. J. Tambiah's book *Buddhism Betrayed? - Religion, Politics, and Violence in Sri Lanka*.

We are not primarily concerned with the content of the book. Everyone has the right to agree or disagree with its interpretations and conclusions, and to express his or her views. What is dismaying is that approaches to the book appear predetermined by misleading and incorrect ideas about the author. His ethnicity, religion, and alleged political affiliations appear to colour all readings of the book, and in some cases, even to pre-empt the necessity of reading the book before launching into invective.

Prof. Tambiah is a well known anthropologist and scholar of religion and polity in the Theravada Buddhist countries of South and South East Asia. Anyone wishing to assess his scholarship should read his *World Conqueror and World Renouncer* on the relationship between Buddhism and the Thai polity.

Prof. Tambiah has been labelled a separatist and a supporter of, and propagandist, for the LTTE. These allegations are totally unsubstantiated by those who make them, yet are used to smear him with terrorist links, a dangerous accusation in today's political climate. In fact, in his earlier book *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, which has come under attack from Tamil political groups, he has argued against the concept of separatism and has opposed terrorist tactics.

No less dangerous is the charge of 'guilty by association' involved in denouncing a Sinhalese, Dr. Lal Jayawardena, for "betraying the nation" in writing a foreword to a book by a Tamil scholar. What brings Sri Lanka into international disrepute is intemperate and defamatory name calling, and not the academic analysis of a controversial subject in which Sinhalese and Tamil scholars co-operate.

We are also concerned with what appears to be an underlying assumption behind some of these criticisms, that Buddhism and its associated institutions are above critical analysis or comment. We strongly repudiate this assumption, and assert that writers have the freedom to be critical of every tradition, including religion.

Signatories:

Prof. Gananath Obeyesekere, Prof. Ashley Halpe, Prof. Carlo Fonseka, Prof. Sudharshan Seneviratne, Prof. S. Pathmanathan, Prof. W. D. Lakshman, Prof. Osmund Jayaratne, Prof. H. Sriyananda, Prof. Bertram Bastiampillai, Dr. Sarath Amunugama, Tissa Abeysekera, Somalatha Subasinghe, Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam, Regi Siriwardena, Jehan Perera, Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Dr. Sepali Kottegoda, Charles Abeysekera, Dr. Sasanka Perera, Jayatilaka Kammalaweera, Dr. Arjuna Parakrama, Hector Abhayavardhana, Dr. Lalith J. Mendis, Dr. A. M. Navaratna Bandara, Tilak Jayaratna, Eva Ranaweera, Rohan Edirisinghe, Dr. Neloufer de Mel, Pradeep Jeganathan, Dr. Kumari Jayawardena, Dr. R. A. Ariyaratne, Nirmal Ranjith Devasiri, Dr. Deepika Udagama, Dr. Nira Wickremasinghe, Sumanasiri Liyanage, Suriya Wickremasinghe, Manouri Muttetuwegama, Ramani Muttetuwegama, M. Sinnethamby, Bernadeen Silva, I. V. Edirisinghe, Mala de Alwis, Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, Dr. Sunil Wijesiriwardena, Mario Gomes, Dr. Janaka de Silva, Swineetha Gunasekera, Darini Rajasingham, Dr. Gamini Samaranayake, Kumudini Samuel, Dr. Ramani Jayatilake, Gameela Samarasinghe, Jani de Silva, Dr. J. Uyangoda, Maitri Wickremasinghe, Sunil Bastian, Jagath Senaratne, Chandra Gupta Thenuwara, Manabandu Vidyapathi, D. G. N. Rambukwella, Jagath Weerasinghe.