

# Sri Lanka: The Invention of Enmity

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Lord Armstrong should have been pressured to come up with something more substantive than four-pages of musings on "Ethnicity, the English, and Northern Ireland." Rounding off the collection are contributions by Charles Townshend on the role of emergency legislation from a historical perspective, from Terence Brown on the development of culture (poems and prose) in Northern Ireland from 1965 to 1991, from Paul Arthur on the Anglo-Irish Agreement as a device for territorial management, and from Enda McDonagh on new forces for positive change in Ireland.

I have two minor reservations about this collection. First, if the editors felt bound to secure contributions from John Hume, Garret FitzGerald and an English civil servant (Lord Armstrong) largely responsible for the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, why didn't they secure a Unionist contribution? As it stands, the collection is slanted toward a constitutional nationalist perspective. A piece by Unionist academics like Arthur Aughey or Tom Wilson would have rounded of the collection nicely.

Second, if the editors went to the trouble of including substantial papers on change in the Republic of Ireland (Lee), Northern Ireland (Whyte) and Europe (Hume), why didn't they include a paper on change in Britain? A contribution which explored how change in Britain (Scottish nationalism, European integration, multiculturalism) might impact on the Northern Ireland conflict would have made the collection more comprehensive. Notwithstanding these qualms, Keogh and Haltzel should be commended for their work in putting this book together.

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Little, David. *Sri Lanka: The Invention of Enmity*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1994.

David Little has brought out some of the salient features of the Sinhala-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka and focused his mind on what he thinks went wrong with two peoples who had co-existed for over two millennia. Little's subtitle offers much promise. However, he has not elaborated on it very much. One factor might throw light on "the invention of enmity." He might have looked into whether Sinhalese and Tamils were the same people divided only by language through some quirk of history?

Little's inference that cultural revivals preceded political nationalism appears valid. The key figures in this metamorphosis, which occurred in the nineteenth century, included the Sinhala nationalist leader, Anagarika Dharmapala (who died in 1933), who was influenced by Western sympathizers. Among the

Jaffna Tamil Saivaites was Arumuka Navalar, whose base was South India. Navalar did not even know much about the territories occupied by the Sinhalese — he never set foot in Colombo. But while the Anagarika was militant and condemnatory of the Tamils and Muslims, Navalar concentrated his fire on the Christian proselytizers. The two nationalisms, therefore, were modern nineteenth-century phenomena. Hence the question arises as to whether the ancient wars were no more than predatory conflicts between marauding kingdoms, not a contest between two nationalisms.

Little's Tamil and Sinhala sources are somewhat limited. The late Robert Kearney's *Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1967) and his many articles on the rise of Tamil secessionism published in *Asian Survey* and *Pacific Affairs* would have benefitted him. His recourse to the Sri Lanka-based Tamil intellectual, Neelan Tiruchelvam (legal) and to the published works of academics such as the Harvard anthropologist, Stanley Tambiah (a Sri Lankan Tamil) and myself (a political scientist also a Sri Lankan Tamil) enabled him to obtain a limited but diversified account of the world view of the Tamils. Further reading and a few more interviews would have enriched his thesis on "the invention of enmity." The same could be said of his Sinhala sources.

Little's readers would have profited (if he had attempted it), from his interpretation of two landmark pieces of legislation: S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958; and Dudley Senanayake's Tamil Regulations of January 1966. In his opinion, could they have been sufficiently meaningful? It should be noted that both acts, though palliatives, recognized the Northern and Eastern Provinces as Tamil-speaking areas, as did the constitutions of 1972 and 1978 and the pacts between the Tamil leader S.J.V. Chelvanayakam and Prime Ministers Bandaranaike in 1957 and Senanayake in 1965. Modern day international relations would acknowledge these contemporaneous documents as valid.

An indispensable fact is that the skills of leaders in new states are tremendously beneficial for their development. Unlike India, Sri Lanka suffered from a dearth of such talent and Little makes this quite clear. The role of the "Father of the Nation" (really the Sinhala nation), the first prime minister, Don Stephen Senanayake, is critically discussed. Little's reference to Senanayake's speech in April 1939 while he was minister of agriculture (1931-47) is pregnant with meaning. Senanayake had stated "we (meaning the Sinhalese) are one blood and one nation. We are a chosen people." (p. 57) This was evidence enough of the future path that Sinhala Buddhism would take. Dudley Senanayake, three times prime minister, was hardly different. Former President J.R. Jayewardene, Little says, was alleged to have had regnant ambitions, supposedly a throwback to Sinhalese kings.

The author provides some valuable clues in regard to the consequences emanating from foreign aid. Ironically, the West, particularly Canada and the UK, was responsible for the Accelerated Mahaveli Scheme (AMS). This resulted in the traditional Tamil-speaking Northern and Eastern provinces being colonized by

state-aided Sinhala settlers. Little quotes one unconvincing source (obviously Sinhalese) as having told him that the Tamils were not willing to take their allotments. This could hardly be an explanation for an important reason for the war that the Tamils are fighting against the Sinhala state, namely the restoration of "their occupied territories."

Ironically, when the Tamils took up arms against, among other things, this trend toward state-aided Sinhala settlements in the Tamil homelands, armament dealers from among the very same states that promoted the AMS, supplied weapons to the Sinhala army to fight the Tamil insurgents! And to make it sound all too farcical, these weapons were in the end either captured by the Tamil Liberation Tigers from fallen Sinhala soldiers on the battlefield or bought outright at blackmarket prices.

Was there any need for the AMS? The argument is that this was one way of shifting (Sinhala) population from the overcrowded southwest quadrant of the island. But was it worth it, considering, on a cost-benefit analysis, the armed conflict that it gave rise to? There is questioning even on the economic side as to the worth of these grandiose ventures. Despite some state-aided Sinhala colonization, Mrs. Bandaranaike's 1960-65 government concentrated on industrialization of the predominantly Sinhala southwest as one way out, a policy which could well have paid better dividends. Her government was in the first of the four stages of industrialization through its encouragement of import substitution industries. Had the next three stages been followed, Sri Lanka with its developed infra-structure could well have become one of the newly industrialized countries in the style of Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea, thus avoiding the agony of the internecine strife.

Leadership was sorely lacking, as was vision. If any, it came from the much faulted (by UNP ideologues) Bandaranaiques. The "social democratic" Trotskyists and Communists ("social democrat" being a contradiction in terms, for professed Marxists) also claimed that they were following the policies of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, which had been put together for a Sinhala Buddhist ethos; these parties provided leaders who assisted the Bandaranaiques. Unfortunately, both husband and wife were forced by reactionary right wing elements in their governments to expel their Marxist partners. One looks in vain for a discussion or observation on these vital leadership questions.

The last chapters, "Prospects for Peace," and the "Conclusion," provide clues and insights that could lead to a way out. However, these are tantalizingly short. There are impediments to peace and these could have been spelled out. A more extended discussion as to the reasons for the strong mutual distrust and ways and means of minimizing these could be pointers toward a guided solution.

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