

Soon after the skeleton of these proposals were known to the extremists who supported Mr. Bandaranaike in the hustings they lost no time in organising retaliation. Professor F.R. Jayasuriya, a fanatic Sinhala don of the university, decided to take up a fast unto death inside the parliament building against any act which went beyond making Sinhala the only official language of the country.

Premier Bandaranaike was advised by his saner friends to go ahead with the proposed comprehensive legislation. They pointed out that t that moment he enjoyed the respect and support of a vast majority of the people and that he was too "tall" to be intimidated by any "pigmy". Mr. Bandaranaike who was always labelled by left politicians as a unsteady and hesitating politician confirmed those allegation and at one of the most crucial moments in the nation's history (certainly the most crucial after independence) surrendered to the Sinhala language extremists.

One clause bill was presented to the house to make "Sinhala language the only official language of Ceylon". The preamble of the bill was longer than the bill itself. The bill had to be debated in the House with all public galleries closed to ensure undisturbed proceedings. Outside the parliament building the situation was tense. The Sinhala extremists were trying to intimidate the Sinhala parliamentarians of the Sama Samaja and Communists Parties not to vote against the bill. A "Satyagraha" organised by the Tamils at the Galle Face Green opposite the Parliament was broken up by unruly elements and many innocent men were thrown into the shallow waters of the lake by the side of the parliament building. The majestic statue opposite the Parliament of Ponnambalam Ramanathan, the Tamil statesman who was elected by the vast Sinhala majority as the member of the "Educated Ceylonese" to the Legislative Council in 1911, the man who honoured this obligation to his voters by fighting against persecution of Sinhala people by the British Raj, stood motionless and helpless while fanatic cruelty was polluting the fresh air blowing from the deep blue sea.

After debating day and night for several days the bill was passed in all its readings at 5.45 p.m. on the 5th of June 1956 barely seven weeks after the new government was sworn in.

Thus dawned the era of racial segregation. It gradually replaced the hitherto prominent class struggle structure in the political arena. Segregation was felt in every sphere of life. It was compulsory for the children to be educated only in their mother tongue. Exceptions were made only for Burghers (Eurasians), Muslims and children of mixed parentage. In prestigious Colombo public schools like Ananda and Royal that had produced some of the most talented men in all fields had to segregate their pupils keeping with the compulsory language stream. The Sinhala and Tamil children enter the kinder-garten in the school in which their fathers were proud as past pupils did not know each other nor could they communicate with each other. Learning of the English language deteriorated.

Mr Bandaranaike's government made several attempts to come to some understanding with the minority leaders. However, in 1958 one of the cabinet ministers, who ironically had finished his higher education in

Jaffna, decided to introduce a new series in registering motor vehicles. He decided to do away with hitherto used English letters in the number plates and introduce the Sinhala letter "Sri" preceded by the numeral 1 (and subsequently 2,3,etc) for all vehicles registered after a gazetted date. The Tamils in the north retaliated strongly for the first time. They started fixing the Tamil letter "Sri" in number plates of their vehicles,



Is the war over..?

Part 2

i.e. vehicles bought in the north. This was a golden opportunity for the Sinhala extremists to unleash their suppressed antagonism. They started with barrel of tar



By S Piyasena
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erasing of Tamil name boards of mercantile and public institutions (By this time most public institutions had their signs in Sinhala, Tamil and English). When the first step was taken there was no stopping. When the Colombo Tamils refused to be provoked by the defacing of the name boards the fanatics started arson, looting and even murder and rape.

Even with the emergency powers the government had enormous difficulty to curb the violence both in the south and in the north.

(for an authoritative account refer to : Vittachi, Tarzie, Emergency 58, London : Andre Deutsch, 1958)

Several Sinhala extremists leaders and Tamil leaders including Members of Parliament were kept under house arrest.

After suppressing the riots Mr Bandaranaike moved a bill named "The Tamil Language (special provisions) bill" in Parliament. The Tamil parliamentarians of the Federal Party refused the Prime Minister's offer to bring them to Parliament house under escort to participate in the debate and to be taken back with escorts to their residences where they were under house arrest. The plea made by the entire Opposition including the Left and the United National Party to withdraw the detention orders and to allow the

Tamil members to participate in the debate was not accepted by the governing party. The result was another calamity. The entire Opposition refused to discuss the bill without the presence of Tamil representatives. One junior minister and one senior MP of the government party resigned to vote against the bill which they felt was giving too much to the Tamils. Only these two members and a lady member of an extreme-

to unilaterally tear off the agreement in their presence. Thus the agitation by Buddhist monks subsided but the problem remains unsolved.

The cruel assassination of Mr Bandaranaike in September 1959 brought about a period of national mourning during which time the entire nation forgot, for the time being, all crucial socio-economic issues, including the burning issue of the official language.

The general election that was held in March 1960, barely six months after the assassination, ended in a confusion. In the Sinhala majority areas the UNP and the SLFP shared most of the seats in an election which was fought on all issue but in effect with no significant issue. However in the Northern Province the Federal Party maintained their 1956 strength. The UNP which captured 50 seats (3% of the total number of members) with a thin edge over the SLFP (46 seats) formed a minority government which was defeated at the first throne speech debate itself. The SLFP, the Federal Party and the Left parties joined in voting the government out.

Mr Dudley Senanayake dissolved the parliament and called for fresh election.

In the subsequent election in July 1960 also the language issue hardly played any role. In the Sinhala majority areas the SLFP led by Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike, which had an electoral understanding with the Marxist parties, riding on an unprecedented wave of sympathy, captured 75 out of the 151 seats together with a couple of independents who were supported by the party.

This result belied the hopes of both the Marxists parties as well as the Federal Party which were confident of bargaining with Mrs Bandaranaike if she was confronted with the task of forming a government without an absolute majority.

In the north the Federal party's target was limited to the political liquidation of their main political rival Mr G G Ponnambalam and his All Ceylon Tamil Congress. In this they succeeded even though their candidate was not able to capture the vital Jaffna seat. The people of Jaffna City elected an up and coming young politician Mr Alfred Duraiyappah, who stood firmly to the principle of national integration until a terrorist bullet silenced him 15 years later. He contested as an independent candidate defeating Mr G G Ponnambalam and pushing the Federal Party candidate into the third place.

Mrs bandaranaike's government ignored the language issue as long as possible while bringing in a new issue of socio-religious significance by taking over the denominational schools under the state control. Her government was shaky from the inception owing to group rivalries among some of its ministers. As a remedy she solicited the support of Marxist parties which led to the formation of coalition government in mid 1964. However "the remedy became worse than the disease" When an attempt was made to nationalize the Press the ultra right wing members of the SLFP who resented the coalition idea from the beginning, made this an issue to resign from the

government party at a crucial moment in December 1964 to defeat the government at the debate of the throne speech by a solitary vote. The UNP, the Federal Party and the dissident in the SLFP as well as a few Marxists who did not join the coalition voted against the vote of thanks on the throne speech.

Mr S Thondaman, who was a nominated member of the house to represent the interest of the plantation labourers of Indian origin was present in the house but abstained from the voting. If he had voted with the government resulting in a tie the speaker would have been compelled to vote with the government keeping in with the tradition. If that happened the government would have continued for a few more months with the help of three members who were absent at the time of voting due to unavoidable reasons.

Contd from Horizon 1

who is supposedly destroying the values of traditional Indian and Sri Lankan dance. In fact, I believe my commitment to teaching my students a dance form correctly, by beginning at the very basic level in order to build a solid foundation for their future dancing endeavours, is proof of my capability and high standard of teaching.

The concerts presented by Vishver Rangayathanaya are an opportunity for my students to exhibit what they have learned thus far, and provides motivation for them to continue expanding their dancing ability and knowledge.

Ms. Vanaja Srinivasan, if you have any qualms about my dancing and ability as a teacher, please do not hesitate to contact myself personally. I warmly invite you to come and attend one of my classes so you are able to witness first hand how I teach my students and if you so wish, I am more than happy to show you my qualifications in this dance style.

Furthermore, so far I have failed in my many attempts to locate a person under the name 'Vanaja Srinivasan,' and also could not find anyone who knew of 'Nruthya Bharati Dance Academy.' If you would contact myself personally on 0423 584 440 it would be greatly appreciated as finding you, or any means to contact you, is proving a very hard task.

As I have already mentioned, countless people who viewed my concert have commented on how impressed they were by the high quality of my dance performances, and I wish to express my deep appreciation for this support. For seven years I have been teaching Melbourne students pure traditional Sri Lankan dancing, Sri Lankan traditional drumming, and now Bharathanatyam; and I will proudly continue to do so with full confidence in myself.

I hope you will witness my skill and talent through the performances of my students in the near future. It is my loving students who show everything I stand for as a dancing teacher, as I always take a step back to let my students shine. As a dancing teacher, my students and their progression come first, and nothing brings me more happiness.

Rashika Kulasinghe
Vishver Rangayathanaya Dance