

Whatever is imported eventually acquires a local flavor and takes on an individual identity that distinguishes it from others. This is what happened with the democracy that the Colonial rulers imposed on or planted in Sri Lanka. The two countries that I would like to compare and contrast with each other, i.e. the Island of Sri Lanka and the Continent of Australia have some common features. Both have been British colonies, and the island became independent and a Republic, while the continent still maintains its British connections with Her Majesty as its nominal head. Both are members of the Commonwealth. However, the British nature and the keenness to follow its traditions and conventions is more or less inherent in that good many of its citizens are of British stock. In the case of Sri Lankan

required. The son of the President is already a Member of Parliament, plus a couple of siblings of the President, and a nephew or two into the bargain. This stands in stark contrast to what we see in the democracy that is Australia.

When the son of Victorian Premier Steve Bracks was charged by the police for a traffic offence, he was so disgusted that he quit the job and eventually left parliament. A Sri Lankan counterpart of his would have got the cop to kneel before his son and apologize for his behavior, i.e. doing his job properly. The Rule of Law is something foreign to Sri Lankan democracy, it being commended and idealized but not observed in practice. Again, one has to understand what to question and criticize and what to accept as

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scars off people, in the tiny island, it is embraced by each and every party of every political faith. J.R. Jayewardene when introducing his draconian constitution in 1978, called it the constitution of the socialist democracy of Sri Lanka. In short, in the island, democracy is socialism. Most of the political dogmatists have almost disappeared, some of their members melting into the existing powerful ones, while a few are holding forth, having earned the new epithet of 'Three Wheeler parties'. One such heroic figure is a remnant of the old Trotskyite LSSP, by the name of Dr.

being fairly accurate reporters during the campaign which was not what Sri Lankan media on whole was. While a



few tried to give both sides of the picture, good many of them were barracking for one or the other side showing numeracy to the opponents. True, there was sufficient freedom to attack the government, but some became mouth-pieces for their favorite politician or party. The most obvious contrast would be in the media controlled by the state. Both Tv and radio in the two countries offered contrasting pictures of coverage of political issues. Australian media was the fairest repeaters in the country. Sri Lankan media was well and truly giving the opposite view of reporting unrivalled by anyone.

Both are democracies following the British tradition. While the Sri Lankan brand of democracy can easily be called 'imported', the democracy that operates in the continent has more or less an indigenous appearance for those who adopted and develop it were mostly descendants of the British settlers whether they came as convicts or government servants. Thus there was nothing strange in it, whereas in Sri Lanka, it came as a surprise as its people had been used to be ruled by 'men and women born for the job.' Electing individuals to rule them was a novel experience to them. However, being very clever imitators, Sri Lankans quickly adjusted themselves to face the new challenge.

Talking of elections, one has to remember that any election costs money, and that money would not flow into the coffins of Australian candidates from foreign sources. It is not so in Sri Lanka, which is somehow blessed with interested foreigners, either governments themselves or individuals who start pouring in money. It is difficult to detect this operation or individuals, but the discovery of millions of US dollar notes in a vault held by an in-law of Sarath Fonseka during the last presidential election pointed to a long lasting operation that went undetected all the while. That throws up a completely new dimension to democracy in a developing country, and how the developed world watches the poor lands learning the art of politics and democracy. Julia Gillard in Australia found it difficult to win over a couple independent M.P.s to form a government. Mahinda Rajapakse had no problem in garnering enough and more members to vote for his new amendment to the constitution. Some member s came to him offering support. No one can charge him for using undue influence or inducements. If one wants real life situations where money did play a role in persuading one to vote for or against the government, Sri Lanka can produce proof for that too. It was during the time of its first woman prime minister, Sirimavo

DEMOCRACY AT WORK

Island vs. continent

counterpart, the British have been all along foreigners occupying an independent island.

The new concept of government called democracy had to find its place among a nation that had been for centuries ruled by Kings who claimed to be born to rule, which even a country like England with kings could not comprehend. Even if they did it did not matter for they started by removing that obstacle. However, in spite of the fact that Sri Lankans appeared to have accepted the new brand of politics, the allegiance to a king or a substitute figure seemed unavoidable. Hence the new feature of Sri Lankan democracy, the rise of ruling dynasties. This was not simply a Sri Lankan feature, but more of an Asian or Eastern tradition, which produced the famous Nehru Dynasty in India and Senanayake and Bandaranaike dynasties of Sri Lanka. True, J.R. Jayewardene did not establish a dynasty of his own, but his kith and kin from his wife's side are still calling the tune on his side of politics. One reason for his nephew to be such an astute survivor, is this dynastic connection. It may even prove to be the stumbling block preventing Sajith Premadasa from getting party leadership.

While Premadasa dynasty is being conceived, there is an up and coming aspirant in the form of a Wijewardene, the clan that gave some credibility J.R. in his quest for power. It is already been rumored that Ranil is marking time till this crown prince 'comes of age' politically. One has to wait and see how Sri Lankan democracy accommodates such exceptional individuals whatever criticism is leveled against the party leadership. On the other side of politics, there is another nascent dynasty being groomed and prepared for the continuation of the dynasty now in control, that of Rajapakses. There are quite a few who can step in as and when

Gospel Truth. Once these ground rules are mastered and followed one would admire the brand of democracy that Sri Lankans have developed to suit the tropical climate they live

Wickrama Bahu Karunaratne. Then the revolutionary party launched by the Moscow-trained Wijeweera initially referred to as Che Guera followers has assumed the role of credible local Marxists. The funniest part of the spectacle is that they have



Unlike its Australian counterpart, Sri Lankan democracy also can boast of colorful elections preceded by an equally colorful campaign which would produce a number of deaths plus innumerable fights.

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Sri Lankan democracy has among its defenders a mixture of politicians with sworn allegiance to a variety of political doctrines or dogmas, ranging from the rather slippery concept of socialism to the illusive naxalites (a brand of rebels that J.R. once produced from nowhere, when he wanted to land an opponent by the name of Vijaya Kumartunga in jail.) . The country can boast of Stalinists, Trotskyites, Maoists, Che Guarites, and followers of each and every political leader in the world. Fidel Castro has been a hero to followers of both Stalin and Trotsky. MKLst interesting feature about Sri Lankan democracy is that, unlike Australia where the very word socialism

now become the most vociferous defenders of democracy in Sri Lanka. The result is that one is at a loss to get a grip of what this political ideology is.

Caution: Do not interpret Sri Lankan democracy in Australian terms. You will get nowhere. Try to understand it in Sri Lankan terms and its particular political jargon. Some people speak of Freedom of Expression and Freedom of the Press. These are attractive words for political discourses. There again one has to understand it in its proper context. In Australia as in most democratic or capitalist countries, the press is not hundred per cent impartial when it comes to politics or elections. We saw it on the eve of the Federal Election where some newspapers revealed their hand by openly sponsoring the coalition. Even then they must be given the credit for