

might come to an end - will find a fascinating chapter of South Asian history leading first to regional separatism and then away from it towards a populistic, person-centred two-party system, absorbing the radical messages and ruling an Indian state in rather opportunistic but non-violent terms.

Rösel's language is clear and convincing. It is to be appreciated that the text is comprehensible without previous knowledge of South Asia. The arguments are represented in a particular manner indicated on the front cover: The emblem of the publisher is an eagle with open wings holding a page in its claws, on which 'Vincit Veritas' is written. Indeed, the author has followed this principle, has referred to the available professional literature, has included Indian and Sri Lankan newspapers and political journals and in 1991 he interviewed more than two dozen persons (politicians, journalists, academics etc.) in Madras.

Unfortunately we do not hear about their dividedness or disagreements over their recent history. Moreover, Rösel refers to various social scientists and occasionally provides lengthy quotes from them, but shows little interest in discussing their theses. Obviously, it is not his aim to confront us with contradictory views and divergent opinions. Maybe it is the strength of this book that we find the presentation of a major theme from a specific point of view, the perspective of a well-informed and carefully analysing political scientist.

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JAKOB RÖSEL, *Die Gestalt und Entstehung des Singhalesischen Nationalismus*. (Ordo Politicus, 29). Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1996. XII, 378 pages, 2 maps, DM 128,-. ISBN 3-428-08726-7

This is a detailed study of Singhalese nationalism, its history and the various forms in which it expresses itself (*Gestalt*). The book opens with a sketch of the island's history, a very readable survey of two and a half thousand years in 70 pages. It is composed like a drama: beginning with "ethnic plurality" in pre-British times, leading to "ethnic opposition" during the British colonial period, rising to "ethnic conflict" after independence, and ending in the climax of "ethnic civil war" since 1978. After a short chapter "Theory of Nationalism" based mainly on Eli Kedourie's works of 1961 and 1970, there follow five chapters on the *Gestalt* of Singhalese nationalism: its programme (recreating the "Golden Age of Singhalese Civilisation" by huge irrigation and land development projects in the Mahaveli area, and by "reawakening the villages"); its festivals (e.g. the Tooth Procession); its daily life and routine (rise of a lay Buddhism); reconstruction of old Buddhist monuments, erection of Buddha statues, new sites of national commemoration; and the self-image of the "Lion's people". Chapters eight to eleven explore the roots and history of Singhalese nationalism. As with the other nationalisms in Asia, European research into the country's past is at the base of the awakening of a historical consciousness among the indigenous elite. Language plays a major role, Singhalese being found to belong to the Indo-European family of languages; the identification of language and "race" via the term "Aryan"; the re-interpretation of Buddhism vis-à-vis the challenges of Christian missionaries. The Theosophical Society gives a

strong boost to Buddhism, now newly interpreted and organised on the lines of Protestant missionary propaganda. In the person of Anagarika Dharmapala, Buddhism and Sinhalese nationalism find a dynamic, not to say explosive blend. The last chapter shows us the origin of the Sinhalese flag. In his conclusion the author speculates about various possible explanations for the catastrophe of the civil war between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. 1. Ancient, pre-modern ethnic identities get a new virulence through the new means and media of the secular, centralised and bureaucratic territorial state. 2. Ethnic interests and ethnic identities are the result of colonial rule. Colonial borderlines both split ethnic groups as well as press formerly isolated ethnic groups into one unequal colonial power structure. 3. Ethnic conflicts are the result of political and economic change (Marxism and Modernisation Theory). 4. Ethnic "Virtuosi", ethnic ideologues, ethnic entrepreneurs create and foster the conflicts by instigating the masses and exploiting their feelings and aspirations, in order to seize or stay in power. The author seems to favour explanation no. 4. Indeed, the main protagonists of the story, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, J.R. Jayewardene et al. are treated in this book with scorn and sarcasm. The miraculous mutation of Don David Hewavitane into Anagarika Dharmapala and his later career read like a satire. But the overall impression of the 300 odd pages is that there is one main culprit: nationalism. Poor and stupid Sinhalese people have allowed themselves to be infected by that ideological disease and thereby provoked the conflict with the Tamils. How peaceful and harmonious were the old days of colonial rule, when a small elite of Sinhalese and Tamils could meet in the British clubs and talk in English about the weather. Unfortunately, in 1931 the British made a mistake: they introduced universal suffrage. Now the elite had to woo the masses to get their votes. But the masses didn't understand English, so they had to be approached in the "vernaculars" with promises like school education and land that had to be fulfilled. To be fair to the author, he never draws such a conclusion explicitly, but it is implicit in his argumentation. He fails to appreciate the ambivalence of that universal historical force named nationalism, he sees only its destructive potential in the form of national conflicts. It is like judging religion by the Inquisition or the religious wars. True, the policy of "Sinhala only" is one of the main roots of the conflict, but it has also led to almost full literacy among the Sinhalese, a unique achievement in the whole of South and Southeast Asia. As to Dharmapala whom the author portrays as a manipulator and demagogue: Have we not to allow a great tradition like Buddhism to adapt to new circumstances? If it had not, it would be accused of "stagnation", as was indeed the case before Dharmapala. As to the terror of the conflict: Was it not the Maoist JVP that introduced that savage and relentless terror into Sri Lankan politics? And was it not the Tamil Tigers who took it over and even increased it? But in order to understand the Tamil side of the story, one has to read two other books by the author of together about 700 pages. If they are as vividly written as this one and so full of interesting details, I recommend reading them as well.

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