

F-21. Selective constructions of Sri Lankan ethnicity in the foreign social science journal literature

Susantha Goonatilake

(Centre for Studies of Social Change, New School for Social Research, N Y 10003, USA. Local address: 20/1, Joseph Frazer Rd. Colombo 5)

A content analysis was done on the “international” social science journal literature from 1980 to 1991 using the abstracts in the *Social Science Citation Index*. The contributions were categorized as (a) studies on the “general dynamics” underlying the conflicts (there were 18 authors), (b) studies on Sinhalese -21 authors, (c) studies on non ‘estate’ Tamilies, - 4 authors, (d) studies on ‘estate’ Tamils - 2 authors, (e) studies on Muslims -0 authors.

The “general dynamics” described the colonial heritage, post independence reactions and counter reactions. This broad analysis is followed by foreigners, expatriate Sinhalese and Muslim authors but there is no local Sri Lankan or expatriate Tamil analysis of this type. The empirical studies are heavy on Sinhala Buddhist, none on Christians and hardly any on Tamils. There are no known external actors.

Specially on the *reasons* for resorting to organized violence, there is no coverage of the Sri Lanka state, the Indian state, the various Tamil militant groups, specially the LTTE, the JVP, and the various external non-Sri Lankan actors. Many of the studies on Sinhalese are largely by foreigners, or by members of ethnic groups favoured by the colonials who were displaced from their elite positions by Sinhala nationalism in the 1950s.

Further, content analysis indicates that this literature is selective in its coverage, biased and heavily questionable as to the interpretative apparatus used. They generally tend to echo the coloniser’s world view held by early anthropologists and missionaries.