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## Comments on Goonatilake :

(some notes on the dependency of 'dependency')

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This paper is hinting at a number of things of great importance. However, it is itself a victim of the 'dependency syndrome' that it attacks. The idea that intellectual isolation on a nationalist basis is desirable, or even essential for independence and progress, and that the exchange of ideas with other countries inevitably produces domination by them, owes its intellectual force and underpinning to somewhat notorious elements of 19th century European thought. There is no 'German ideology', nor is there a Ceylonese ideology. This is not to deny that developing countries, particularly small ones, need to set up both mechanisms and ways of thought that will protect them against intellectually unsuitable transfers of technology, nor that such transfers may amount to 'dominance'. But, like protection in the field of trade, such activities can take two forms: the promotion of ways of doing things better oneself (such as the development of good doctoral studies in social sciences within Sri Lanka), or the exclusion of outside ideas in the hope that this will somehow permit cultural flowering at home. I fear that the whole tone of the paper is in favour of the latter solution, and that it will not work.

There are really five separate issues, closely connected, but unfortunately run together in this paper. They are the extent to which Ceylonese thinking has been unduly influenced by Western models (and, related to this, the cultural dependency of returning Ceylonese scholars who have visited the West upon it); the operation of foreigners and members of overseas missions in the context of overseas 'reference groups' instead of Ceylonese ones, and the possible consequent damage from outsiders; the problem of 'cultural encapsulation' of Ceylonese organizations within Western rather than Ceylonese contexts, and their lack of reality; the problem of the 'brain drain'; and the role of developed-country institutions and academics *vis-à-vis* a small developing country.

The dominance of Western models (including of course Marxist models) in social science is an accident of 18th century, largely pre-colonial, French intellectual history. The use of empirical method, and the general principles of testing propositions (principles which Marx usually

observed quite rigorously, by the way), are however a **logical** issue transcending the use of any particular group of social science models. It is open to scholars in the Third World to challenge the bases of such models, and some (notably Srinivas with his concept of 'Sanskritization') have done so in certain fields. I do question whether Ceylon has been unusually the slave of 'inappropriate' Western social-science models—more so, say, than Cuba or Belgium or Italy or Yugoslavia. Ceylon's *Ten Year Plan* of 1959 was a fundamental departure in development thinking, and its emphasis upon and analysis of the need to relieve poverty and unemployment (even at the cost of 'growth') was far ahead of the Western models of its time. It is true that several overseas economists, including John Hicks and Joan Robinson, visited Colombo because the authors of that excellent Plan felt (for tactical or other reasons) that Western figures were needed to confer upon it some sort of intellectual respectability; but this is hardly relevant. Ceylon was, in planning for employment, far ahead of the 'Western social science models' that are supposed to have damaged it so greatly. Nor, incidentally, do I detect much influence of 'American political hegemony' upon Ceylonese social-scientific discussions, whether by nationals or by foreigners; writers such as Wriggins are essentially gifted modern historians, writing quite self-awarely **outside** the technological, pseudo-neutral, numerocratic mainstream of modern US political science.

I suspect the fear of Western models stems from the concern about the role of the returning academic who has been influenced by wicked institutions such as IDS. I do not see either how the relationship of Susantha and his colleagues with IDS is one of 'cultural dependency' or how it will damage Sri Lanka on their return. IDS, with its substantial representation of well-varied Marxists and structuralists at all levels, is less likely to instil cultural conformity into its (highly independent) visitors from Sri Lanka, than is the environment from which they come. Indeed, Susantha himself concedes that several of the notions which he admires (questioning of the market mechanism, emphasis on dependency and so forth) originate in Western institutions. One might add that they often stem from LDC scholars in those institutions.

I pass now to the issue of 'reference groups' of both foreign and domestic advisers within Sri Lanka. Goonatilake underestimates both the diversity of these groups and the extent to which they are influenced by what they see in the countries where their members, or those referring to them, work. He cannot—though he does—complain **both** that the ideological diversity of the ILO Mission prevented it from reaching a fundamental political conclusion, **and** that it imposed a particular 'Western' reference group upon Sri Lanka. But there is a deeper point. All countries need informed outside analysis of their problems, and it is probably better for such analysis **not** to be based on the cultural preconceptions of the country analysed. John White's perceptive remarks about Sri Lanka, cited by Goonatilake, are a good illustration of this; so is the fact that much the best report on the recent weaknesses of the British economy, that of the Brookings Institution, came entirely from outsiders (so of course did the worst, that of the Hudson Institute; but I assume that we are talking about serious analysis). As for the receptivity of these international missions to what is going on in the country to which they are attached, it is relevant to consider Goonatilake's correct observation that it was the previous UNP government which asked the ILO to send a team, but the semi-socialist administration of Mrs Bandaranaike to which that team was accredited. Many of the members of the team would not have felt they could usefully help a UNP government; and much time was spent attempting to understand and absorb the value-assumptions of the SLFP-LSSP government before we started working on the details of the ILO report.<sup>1</sup>

The crucial role of the outsider must be emphasized. It was excellent that one of the most active and central members of the ILO team was a Ceylonese (a specialist in land reform); but we could not have done a decent job had we not included as members people with experience of many different developing countries with relevant similarities to and differences from, Sri Lanka. About 40 per cent of the mission members were nationals of developing countries. I remember with particular interest K. N. Raj's constant (though never belittling) comparisons of the Sri Lanka situation to that in the Indian state of Kerala, which has many ecological similarities in agriculture.

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<sup>1</sup> Some would say that too much time was spent—indeed that is elsewhere implied by Goonatilake, though it is hardly consistent with criticizing foreign missions for being too foreign!

The fundamental mistake about the role of the foreigner is contained in the sentence, "to fit this purpose the conceptual apparatus of the social sciences will have to be purely that which can stand the test of explaining local social reality". To have a different social science for each and every "local social reality" would indeed mean that foreign experience was irrelevant. But that is not the sort of animal social science is—if it were it would be quite useless. The notion of distinct national social sciences tailored to distinct local realities is uncomfortably close to the idea, once advanced by some anthropologists, that people living in Africa or New Guinea—for residential or climatic or genetic reasons—reacted in a fundamentally different way to a given set of stimuli from people of the pinko-grey races! I am quite sure that Goonatilake has no intention of saying anything of that sort. But this is where social-scientific nationalism usually leads. There is a path from "directing this book to a Third World readership" and writing with "valuations . . . clearly those of a Third World writer"<sup>2</sup>; it runs through the preparation of work which is to be read and judged only by the nationals of one particular country; and it ends up at the recent policies of President Tombalbaye of Chad. That path is both uncomfortably short and lined with the primroses of intellectual applause. Of course any Western scholar "purporting to guide towards an inevitable future" the economy of Sri Lanka or anywhere else, and resting the inevitability upon "Western development theory and the work of Western scholars" rather than on tested social-scientific generalizations, would be treading a **parallel** path. Intellectual neo-colonialism and intellectual isolationism are, to change the metaphor, opposite sides of the same, false, coin. It is really all part of the fear of generalization: not all generalizations are ethnocentric (Sanskritization again); the ILO Mission's generalizations reacted very strongly against 'Western development theory' and it is hard to see what they have to do with dependency.

The problem of cultural encapsulation discussed by Goonatilake raises different issues. It is true that universities in some Third World countries, and planning commissions in many, are isolated from their economy (in the library of the Agricultural University of Mymensingh, Bangladesh, there are few analyses of local problems, but many books on the care of the dog!). But if Goonatilake really thinks that, for instance, MARGA is turning the attention of Ceylonese away from their own real problems, he should give examples

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<sup>2</sup> Backford, *Persistent Poverty*, pp. vi-vii.

and specify alternative procedures. It is perfectly true that developing countries' researchers too often look towards publication in developed countries' learned journals, and doctorates gained in foreign universities, rather than towards the needs of their own countries. But what are developed countries and their universities supposed to do about this? Ban Third World students? Prevent the publication of articles from developing countries in their learned journals? No; positive initiatives to do things the way they want them done have to come from the institutions and scholars of the Third World itself. Such initiatives, to be fruitful, must be positive, not exclusive—Ph.D. training of quality at home, not attacks on ideas because of the nationality of their holder.

Incidentally, positive academic initiatives have of course been made in many Third World countries. The state of Indian economic analysis, empirical and theoretical, of that country's problems seems to me far better than in most developed countries, Western or Communist (the failure of that analysis to get through to 'the policymakers is another problem).

The brain drain is really a separate issue. I do not know why Goonatilake imagines that LDC people in international organizations or foreign universities occupy only the 'lower rung,' 'lower echelons', etc. From Ceylon alone, one could draw attention to people like Gamani Corea (hardly in a low echelon in UNCTAD), Lal Jaywardena, and several others. From the larger countries of South Asia, there are of course very many more such people, both in universities and in international organizations, at very high levels indeed. It is of course possible that such people are selected because they are thought likely, by some insidious international conspiracy, to go home and form a 'comprador intelligentsia'; but, thinking of some of the people concerned, I find it is an unlikely general proposition, though it may well be true in some cases. Incidentally, a more self-confident version of Goonatilake's attitude is that of Dandekar, who argues that those few scholars who want to 'drain' **permanently** from Indian universities are probably a good riddance to them. Certainly, the more that such people 'drain', the **smaller** is the risk of the cultural encapsulation that Goonatilake fears.

What, then, is the role of an institution, or group of academics, in a developed country towards a less developed country? It is quite true that embassies act to further the interests of their

countries; fortunately, many academic institutions take their responsibility to scholarship (not 'Western social science') more seriously, and most people at this institute and others will have long experience of rejecting applicants whose motivation for a visit to a developed country appears to be the desire to be the victims of intellectual and cultural rape! Certainly Goonatilake's penultimate paragraph should cause him to question many of his basic presuppositions: the dependency of past centuries, especially in **small** poor countries, has indeed frozen many of their academic institutions in the backward state that he describes, and it is this very fact that, **dialectically**, enables the intelligentsia of the Third World to free themselves from their colonial past, by visits to 'advanced' institutions in the former metropolis. Of course this is a very dangerous process and has to be entered with one's eyes open. But if, because of European and American social science 50 years ago, Third World scholars cannot learn about the inadequacies of the market mechanism in the subservient institutions of their own countries (and there is some truth in this charge), is it not highly desirable for them to go to the more 'radical' institutions of developed countries for this sort of insight? And would it not therefore be quite counter-productive to adopt the sort of intellectual nationalism implied by most of Goonatilake's paper?

Finally, a small country has inevitably a limited number of top-rate intellectuals. The **great** majority of scholars and practitioners of social science, in government as well as universities, are indeed an intellectual proletariat, testing out **and** marginally developing the ideas of their **great** predecessors. A Marx or a Keynes is a rare event, while, at a slightly lower level, first-rate innovative social scientists are pretty unusual. A large country like India or the USA might expect, at any time, to have six or eight if it were lucky. Sri Lanka or Ghana or Belgium will be lucky if it has one or two. Many of the problems of Sri Lanka which Goonatilake attributes to dependency and underdevelopment are in fact the results of smallness.<sup>3</sup> **No** small country can expect to have many local scholars who "raise fundamental issues of a political nature beyond the empiricist level", and indeed not many external missions will do this, though the ILO Mission did try; this has much less to do with dominance-and-dependence than with the in-

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<sup>3</sup> The creation of numerous and dispersed university institutions within Sri Lanka, followed by the dilution of standards in the name of a backward-looking linguistic communalism, would in these circumstances be a lethal sacrifice of intellectual independence to political convenience.

tellectual limitations of human beings. "Critical and bold questioning of and about the social reality in Sri Lanka" or anywhere else, if it is to be useful, demands rare qualities of intellectual independence, imagination and analysis. A small country is unlikely to 'often produce social scientists with these qualities. Therefore a Ceylon, a Sweden, a New Zealand, had better make sure that plentiful intellectual exchanges, with an

ideologically diversified range of other countries, remain possible. It will have to take steps to avoid cultural encapsulation or undue influence, and the best way to do this is to develop its own high professional standards. 'Professional' means logical, rigorous, and subject to empirical falsification; it emphatically need not mean 'Western', liberal, capitalist or mono-disciplinary.