

# Sri Lanka: Origins and growth of Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna

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**The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first JVP insurrection falls today. The 1971 rebellion was the first armed uprising against the state in modern times.**

The JVP was the brainchild of Rohana Wijeweera. Born in 1943, at Hunandeniya, in the Matara District, his father was a supporter of the Communist Party of Ceylon (CPC). However, while studying medicine in Moscow, Wijeweera became critical of the Soviet Union, and, on his return, he joined the Communist Party (CP), which was Maoist. Not long after, in 1966, Wijeweera, along with his supporters, broke ranks with the CP to form their own movement, which would later become the JVP. Wijeweera had concluded that the agricultural labourer– the rural proletariat– was the largest and most important component of Sri Lanka’s working class, not the urban or plantation worker.

The JVP was able to attract university students to its cause. It gained recruits at Vidyalankara (Kelaniya) University by winning over students who were members of the PC-supporting Lanka Jatika Sishya Sangamaya (Lanka National Students Society) led by G. I. D. ‘Castro’ Dharmasekera. In 1970, the JVP wrested control of the Samajawadi Sishya Sangamaya (the Socialist Students Society) at the Peradeniya University; while on behalf of the JVP, Mahinda Wijesekera led the Sangamaya at Vidyodaya (Sri Jayewardenepura) University.

In 1969, Wijeweera organised two Congresses, bringing together all his supporters. At the two-day conference in Madampella, Negombo, the leadership, which consisted of Wijeweera, Sanath, Karunaratne and Loku Athula, along with the District Secretaries, constituted the JVP Central Committee. Later that year, at Urubokka, in the Matara District, the movement took on its final configuration. Five-member cells formed the core structure, overseeing them would be area leaders who were in turn responsible to District Secretaries.

At the Urubokka Conference, the prospect of manufacturing weapons was taken up and the suggestion made that projectiles such as rockets would be effective against the Army’s Panagoda Cantonment, at Homagama. In early 1970, at the Dondra Conference, in addition to collecting and manufacturing weapons, the details of recruitment, training, uniforms, and collecting information on the Armed Forces, were discussed.

## The JVP’s Ideology

The JVP was critical of the mainstream left parties, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Communist Party as they had entered into an alliance with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and would be constituents of the United Front (UF) government, which came to power in May 1970. However, it was in those very areas, that had been worked on by the older left parties for three decades, that the JVP took root.

The JVP leaders, however, were from backgrounds and experiences quite different from that of the

old left parties. They did not come from Colombo's public schools, few of them had been to the British-styled residential university at Peradeniya, and none to Western universities. Many were teachers and students of small-town Central Schools and the Pirivena (Buddhist monastic) Universities. "Unlike the traditional left, the activists of the JVP were the children of the 1956 Sinhala-only struggle, with its attendant limitations and advantages," writes Michael Cooke in *Rebellion, Repression and the Struggle for Justice in Sri Lanka: The Lionel Bopage Story*.

The rank and file of the JVP consisted of militant Sinhala-educated young men and women. They were underprivileged rural youth, with meagre job opportunities, constituting a potential army of frustrated school and university leavers. Overwhelmingly Buddhist Sinhalese, they were drawn from marginalised castes. Wahumpura villages in Elpitiya gave the JVP strong support, while, in Kegalle, the Batgam were won over by the JVP. In *Sri Lanka: Third World Democracy*, James Jupp explains: "The JVP appealed to the Buddhist Karawe, Durawe, Batgam, Wahumpura ... both from the Southern Province and the Kegalle District, anti-Govigama feeling was a motive behind the mass recruitment to the JVP in certain villages."

The JVP endeavoured to recruit sympathisers in the armed forces, with Wijeweera establishing contact, as early as 1965, with Tilekaratne, a rating in the Royal Ceylon Navy. Later Uyangoda held classes for Naval personnel, made contact with Air Force personnel in Wanathamulla and Katunayake, and delivered lectures to them. They also provided classes for soldiers stationed at Diyatalawa.

The Party evolved its own Marxist ideology which was a hybrid. It drew on Trotsky's criticism of Stalinism and the 'popular front.' From Mao it asserted the primacy of the peasantry as the backbone of the revolution. And from Castro it learnt armed insurrection. The JVP training for its cadres emphasised neo-colonialism, attacked parliamentarianism and rejected the mainstream left parties.

In its economic teaching, the JVP differed little from the LSSP or CP. However, they did not only point out the neo-colonial dependence of Sri Lanka's economy, but identified the UF as part of this neo-colonial system. They called for a halt to the expansion of the tea plantations while advocating the intense cultivation of food crops and the collectivisation of land to overcome landlessness. The JVP in its propaganda organ *Vimukthi* claimed that "the socialist revolution would succeed in Ceylon only when the oppressed peasantry became politicised ... they are the moving force of the Ceylonese revolution."

## **Political Growth**

The JVP recruited cadres who would attend political training, delivered through five lectures. These covered the economic crisis, neo-colonialism, Indian expansionism, the left movement and the Sri Lanka revolution. Those who completed all five lectures and volunteered for combat, around 9,000, had military training.

It was in tactics, however, that the JVP differed radically from the rest of the left, which had been concerned with trade unions, strikes, rallies and elections. With the passage of time, the JVP evolved a tactic, where they functioned openly as an agitational group, whilst, at the same time recruiting combatants into a clandestine military organisation. They held that the socialist revolution in Sri Lanka would have to be a sudden armed insurrection, launched simultaneously across the country. This is the most advanced and complex form of revolutionary combat.

Their '24-Hour Revolution' was premised on the assumption that the police and the armed forces had insufficient ammunition to survive a simultaneous uprising throughout the country. However

they also wrestled with a critical tactical dilemma: "How to attack the government, moving carefully enough not to outpace the disillusion of the masses, yet fast enough to hit before the government struck at it." (Fred Halliday *The Ceylonese Insurrection in Explosion in a Sub Continent* edited by Robin Blackburn)

The JVP came into the open, in 1969, through public meetings, the first of which was held at Vidyodaya University. This public profile brought a large number of new recruits whom the leadership claim reached about 23,000 committed members. But it also resulted in the police responding with widespread arrests amounting to about a thousand JVP activists. Fearing all out repression, they established protected villages in remote rural areas, as logistical bases. "The movement took no root in the towns, nor in the industrial coastal areas around Colombo, nor in the Tamil areas," wrote the Belgian Catholic priest and sociologist Francois Houtart in *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*.

Shortly before the May 1970 general election, Dharmasekera allegedly informed the Minister of State J. R. Jayewardene, through an intermediaries, of the JVP threat. This triggered heightened interest in the media which gave them the appellation 'Che Guevarists,' and the establishment of a special CID Unit, which began arresting JVP members. Wijeweera himself was arrested at Hambantota on 12<sup>th</sup> May. When he was released in July, Wijeweera launched a series of public meetings across the country, going as far north as Anuradhapura. There was a pause after October and then came a massive meeting in Colombo at Hyde Park on 27 February 1971.

### **The Prelude to the Uprising**

The JVP's highest decision-making body was its 12-person Political Bureau (PB) which, at its Ambalangoda meeting, in September 1970 decided to begin collecting arms, with Loku Athula placed in charge of the armed section and directed to collect 100,000 bombs. At the next PB meeting, held at year-end, Loku Athula reported that 3,000 bombs were ready.

The hand bomb was the JVPs main weapon. But guns and ammunition were also being purchased and stolen and stored by the JVP, in one instance at the Talagalle Temple at Homagama, which was raided by the Police. Uniforms for JVP combatants were being produced secretly, mainly at Vidyodaya Campus; a blue shirt and trouser with pockets, a cartridge belt, boots and helmet. In addition, Viraj Fernando, an engineer who was sympathetic to the JVP, had at Wijeweera's request went overseas in November 1970 to make contact with foreign rebel groups to procure weapons.

Wijeweera also gave instructions to Piyasiri to build under-ground storage facilities to hide their stock of weapons and explosives, but on 9 March an explosion at one of these hideouts, in Nelundeniya, killed five. This drew attention, nationally to the fact that the JVP was arming itself.

Then on the 16 came an explosion at Marrs Hall at the Peradeniya Campus, in a room occupied by Hewavitharne. When the Police arrived and searched the halls of residence, they also found a stock of detonators at Hilda Obeysekera Hall.

A faction, within the JVP, led by Castro Dharmasekera, wanted the movement to remain secret and prepare for guerrilla warfare. But the majority disagreed and Dharmasekera and his supporters were expelled. In response, on 6<sup>th</sup> March, calling themselves the Maoist Youth Front, they held a demonstration outside the US Embassy in Colombo during which a police officer was killed. Although the JVP denounced Dharmasekera, Wijeweera and hundreds of his supporters were arrested during March, the JVP claimed that 4,000 cadre were now behind bars.

Dharmasekera's provocation and the bomb explosions led on March 16<sup>th</sup> to the government declaring

a State of Emergency, dusk to dawn curfew and their warning of a JVP plot to take state power. In response, the Army deployed two platoons of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Ceylon Light Infantry (1CLI) to the Kegalle District, which would soon become the centre of fierce fighting. This was followed by a further two platoons being sent to Kandy.

## **The JVP's Military Battle for Power**

The JVP evolved in the late 1960s under Rohana Wijeweera as a radical rural youth group. It believed that a socialist change in Sri Lanka could only be effected through a sudden armed insurrection launched simultaneously across the country. Recruits to the JVP underwent a series of political classes as well as military training, while the organisation clandestinely armed itself. The United Front Government responded in March 1971 with a State of Emergency, the arrest of JVP cadre and the deploying of the Army to the provinces.

In March 1971 events rapidly escalated. The JVP believed that the government was planning to use the Army to launch an all out offensive against them. And on 2<sup>nd</sup> April nine JVP leaders, six members of the Political Bureau and three District Secretaries, met at the Vidyodaya Sangaramaya at a meeting presided over by S.V.A Piyatilake. They took the decision to launch their attack at 2330 hours on 5<sup>th</sup> April. "The decision taken was to attack on a specific date at a specific time. This decision is completely in line with the evidence that the Fifth Class of the JVP...advocated that in the circumstances of our country, the best method would be to launch simultaneous attacks everywhere," concluded the Judgement of the Criminal Justice Commission Inquiry No 1 1976.

The date of attack was relayed by pre-arranged code in the contents of a paid radio obituary notice by an unsuspecting state-owned Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation. The JVP cadres at Wellawaya however misinterpreted the instruction and launched their attack on the Wellawaya Police Station 24 hours earlier on the night of 4<sup>th</sup> April.

The initial targets were rural police stations both in order to further arm themselves and because the JVP viewed the police as the only representative of the state in the countryside. Moreover, they believed that the police and the armed forces were low on ammunition and they discounted the government's ability to counter attack once the JVP had gained control of the countryside. Besides, the attacks on remote police stations across much of the country's rural south, a large group also travelled north in order to rescue Wijeweera who was held in Jaffna.

Attacking with home-made weapons in groups of 25 to 30 in order to seize better arms from the police stations, the JVP believed that controlling these rural police stations would provide them with areas of military and political control, thereby denying the government access to such areas which would provide secure rear-bases for subsequent attacks by the JVP on towns and cities. Ten out of the island's 22 Administrative Districts were battlegrounds. "Ninety two Police Stations had been attacked, damaging fifty and causing around fifty to be abandoned," wrote Major General Anton Muttukumaru in The Military History of Ceylon.

Piyatilake was responsible for operations in Colombo. He detailed Raja Nimal an Advanced Level student to storm the Rosmead Place residence of Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike on the night of the 5<sup>th</sup> along with 50 student cadre, to capture the Prime Minister and transport her to a place where she would be held. However the expected vehicle and Piyatilake failed to arrive at the prearranged rendezvous in Borella and the attack did not materialise. Meanwhile unaware of the impending danger, the Prime Minister's security advisers prevailed upon her to move to her official residence at Temple Trees, where she would be more secure.

Elsewhere in the Colombo District a major attack occurred at Hanwella, where the A4 High Level and Low Level Roads converge. Early on the morning of the 6<sup>th</sup> about 100 JVP combatants using hand bombs, Molotov Cocktails and firearms attacked the Police Station compelling its personnel to abandon their positions and flee into the surrounding jungle. The JVP captured the station's armoury of weapons, hoisted a red flag and froze transport into Colombo. They held the town until armed police from Homagama supported by troops from Panagoda overpowered them.

### **The Battle for Kegalle**

Athula Nimalasiri Jayasinghe, known within the Movement as Loku Athula, was in charge of the Kegalle and Kurunegala Districts. Once the decision to attack was made he moved into the area on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, meeting Area Leaders at Weliveriya and coordinating operations with detachments in Veyangoda and Mirigama. About 600 JVP combatants were deployed across the Kegalle District concentrated at Warakapola and Rambukkana.

Under Patrick Fernando, the Pindeniya detachment attacked both the local Police Station and the Bogala Graphite Mines, capturing a lorry load of explosives from the mines. On the 8<sup>th</sup> the Warakapola Police Station was successfully attacked, its weapons including two sub machine guns seized and the building set ablaze. In addition, Police Stations at Bulathkohupitiya, Aranayaka, Mawanella, Rambukkana and Dedigama were also attacked and the station at Aranayake burned down. Only Kegalle Police Station and the area surrounding it remained under Government control.

The Army could only access the interior regions of the District on the 10<sup>th</sup> and initially had to focus on removing road blocks and repairing culverts and bridges to gain mobility. When they penetrated the countryside they were frequently ambushed as in Aranayake and both sides sustained casualties. In *The JVP 1969-1989* Justice A.C. Alles concludes that "the insurgents had met with considerable success in the Kegalle District."

On the 12<sup>th</sup> at Utuwankande the Army was ambushed by the JVP using rifles and submachine guns. But the battle was turning in favour of the Army which brought to bear superior arms to put pressure on the rebels and gradually reopen the abandoned police stations in the district.

Finally on the 29<sup>th</sup> led by Loku Athula the JVP forces began their withdrawal from the District, from Balapattawa via Alawwa and then north. As they retreated in the direction of the Wilpattu Park they came under attack from the Army and from the air by Air Force helicopters. The Army finally ambushed them near Galgamuwa, killing some and capturing Loku Athula on 7<sup>th</sup> June.

The experience of the Kegalle District was replicated by the JVP in the Galle, Matara and Hambantota Districts. With the exception of Dickwella all Police Stations in the Matara District were abandoned. While in the Ambalangoda Police Area all stations, Elpitiya, Uragaha, Pitigala and Meetiyagoda fell to the JVP.

Widespread JVP attacks were also launched across the North Central Province where only the Anuradhapura Police Station was spared. As in the Kegalle District the outlying stations had to be abandoned and personnel withdrawn to Anuradhapura. However the Kekirawa Station, though attacked several times, held out. The Army was only able to move into the outlying areas of the Anuradhapura District on the 30<sup>th</sup>. Further north the Vavuniya Police Station in the Northern Province was also attacked. Less intense activity was reported in the Kandy, Badulla and Moneragala Districts.

N.Sanmugathan in *A Marxist Looks at the History of Ceylon* remarked that "The rank and file (of the JVP) seems to have been honestly revolutionary, with a sense of dedication that must be

admired, and a willingness to sacrifice their lives – unheard of before in Ceylon.” The first Ceylonese Army Commander General Muttukumaru wrote “Their (JVP) courage was also evident in the display of their military skills which enabled them to control many regions in the country and give battle to the armed forces in fierce guerrilla fighting.”

### **The military background**

In November 1947 on the eve of independence, Ceylon signed a Defence Agreement with the United Kingdom. The military’s threat perception was determined by “the Government’s concern, (which) was invasion by India. The military’s focus was to have a defence force capable of meeting any external threat until assistance arrived from Britain.” In the words of Air Vice-Marshal P.H. ‘Paddy’ Mendis, who was Air Force Commander in 1971, the objective that determined the capabilities of the armed forces therefore was to “hold up an invading force of the enemy until assistance arrived from a bigger country with which we have an alliance.” (Brian Blodgett in Sri Lanka’s Military: The Search for a Mission 1949-2004)

The only military threat perceived was external; there was no anticipation of an internal military threat. Furthermore, in the wake of the 1962 abortive coup against the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) Government, and the alleged 1966 coup against the United National Party Government, both parties that had been in power were wary of the Army which in 1970 had an authorised strength of 329 officers and 6,291 other ranks, and an annual budget of Rs 52 million (US\$10mn), just 1.2% of total government expenditure.

Despite these inherent structural limitations, the Government and the Army responded swiftly, appointing regional Co-ordinating Officers in the worst affected districts. They were Colonels E.T. de Z. Abeysekera in Anuradhapura, S. D. Ratwatte in Badulla, Douglas Ramanayake in Galle and Derek Nugawella in Hambantota, Lieutenant Colonels R.R Rodrigo in Jaffna, Cyril Ranatunga in Kegalle, D.J.de S Wickremasinghe in Matara, Tissa Weeratunga in Moneragala and Dennis Hapugalle in Vavuniya.

The Ceylon Volunteer Force was immediately mobilised, and the first military casualty was Staff Sergeant Jothipala of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Volunteer Battalion, Sinha Regiment [2(V)SR], who was killed at Thulhiriya in the Kurunegala District on the first day of the insurrection. While Sandhurst-trained Major Noel Weerakoon of the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Ceylon Artillery was the first officer to be killed whilst leading an ammunition convoy from Vavuniya to the besieged town of Anuradhapura; he was wounded when his convoy was ambushed and later succumbed to his injuries.

### **The battle rages**

In 1971 the Royal Ceylon Air Force (RCyAF) consisted of three squadrons: No. 1 Flying Training Squadron with nine Chipmunk trainers based at China Bay, No. 2 Transport Sq. equipped with five Doves, 4 Herons and three Pioneer fixed wing aircraft and four helicopters and No. 3 Reconnaissance Sq. with Cessna aircraft. In the 1960s Britain had gifted five Hunting Jet Provost T51s jet trainers which had gone out of service by 1971.

Beginning at 0900 hours on 5<sup>th</sup> April the Jet Provost, which were in storage at China Bay, began operating out of this airbase. Armed with Browning machine guns and rockets, they carried out air to ground attacks using 60 lb rockets. The three Bell 206A Jet Ranger helicopters protected by Bren Guns airlifted 36,500 lb of ammunition during April to critical police stations. In addition the Doves carried out supply missions and during the course of April, 900 soldiers and 100,000 lb of equipment were transported by the RCyAF.

The JVP seized parts of the Colombo-Kandy A1 Trunk Route at Warakapola and Kegalle, cutting off the main artery between Colombo and the tea growing highlands. In response the Jet Provost had to mount aerial attacks on the key bridge at Alawwa which led to the downing of a Jet Provost and the death of her pilot.

If not for the premature attack in Wellawaya which resulted in the Police and Military around the country being placed on high alert "the situation would have been very grave for not only would several Police Stations have been captured, but the JVP would have been able to arm itself with modern weapons," wrote Justice Alles.

Desperate for arms and ammunition in the first days of the rebellion, the Government aware that a Chinese cargo vessel bound for Tanzania with an arms shipment was currently in Colombo Harbour, unsuccessfully appealed to both Beijing and Dar-es-Salaam to make these arms available to Sri Lanka.

### **International support**

As rural police stations fell, the government abandoned others, regrouping its limited forces and anxious to protect the towns and cities. This tactic paid off. The JVP only had equipment captured from police stations. They did not go on to overrun military camps nor capture their more sophisticated weapons. While the JVP did control parts of Kegalle, Elpitiya, Deniyaya and Kataragama uncontested, the Army replenished its meagre stocks of weapons.

Wijeweera had focussed solely on a single decisive blow against the Government. There was no provision to conduct even a short term guerrilla operation, or an attempt to lead a peasant uprising. And during the first 72 hours his strategy appeared to be working. What dramatically altered the balance of forces against the JVP was the immediate and sustained influx of military equipment that flowed in from overseas to enable the armed forces to turn the tide in their favour.

Within four days of the JVP attack, Air Ceylon's Trident took off from Singapore carrying a consignment of small arms provided by Britain from its base there. The following day the UK agreed to supply six Bell-47G Jet Ranger helicopters armed with 7.62mm machine guns. On 12<sup>th</sup> April on board a US Air Force Lockheed C-141 Starlifter, Washington shipped out critical spare parts for the RCyAF helicopters which were flying twelve hour days. And at Colombo's request New Delhi on the 14<sup>th</sup> sent six Indian Air Force Aérospatiale SA 315B Lama utility helicopters with crews to Katunayake Air Force Base, along with troops to guard them as well as arms, ammunition and grenades. They would remain in-country for three months.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> Air Ceylon flew in nine tons of military equipment which the Soviet Union made available from supplies in Cairo. While on the 22<sup>nd</sup> a Soviet Air Force Antonov AN-22 transporter arrived with two Kamov Ka-26 rescue helicopters and five Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-15 jet fighters and one MiG-17 high-subsonic fighter. The Soviet aircraft were accompanied by 200 trainers and ground crew.

China, Australia, Pakistan and Yugoslavia would also send arms and equipment. Colombo's Non Aligned foreign policy which enabled it to source and receive military weapons and equipment from countries across the globe had succeeded. However the disparate array of equipment would pose a logistics dilemma for the military.

The sudden influx of arms and ammunition rapidly altered the balance of power against the JVP. For example the Army took Yugoslav artillery into Kegalle to flush out the rebels. And around 16,500 JVP members were captured, arrested or surrendered. The remaining combatants withdrew into jungle sanctuaries in the Kegalle, Elpitiya, Deniyaya and Kataragama areas.

Meanwhile there were reports that the JVP were endeavouring to bring weapons in by sea. But the Royal Ceylon Navy's frigate and Thorneycroft boats could not secure the island's territory nor prevent supplies reaching the rebels. This compelled Colombo to rely on the Indian Navy which sent three of its Hunt-class escort destroyers, INS Ganga, INS Gomathi and INS Godawari to patrol Ceylon's maritime perimeter. In Sri Lanka Navy: Enhanced Role and New Challenges Professor Gamini Keerawella and Lieutenant Commander S. Hemachandre explain that "Sri Lanka's dependency on the Indian Navy during the Insurgency to patrol its sea frontier in order to prevent arms supply to the Insurgents, was total."

At Anuradhapura the JVP had established a base camp as well as six sub camps in the surrounding jungle where weapons, explosives and food had been stored. JVP operations in the Rajangana and Tambuttegama areas were controlled from this base camp. A platoon of 1CLI armed with 82mm mortars was sent to Anuradhapura in May and participated in Operation Otthappuwa, under 1CLI 2iC Major Jayawardena to take control of this area. By the end of May the insurrection was completely crushed.

Some counter insurgency operations however continued into the following year. A-Company 1CLI established a forward base in Horowapatana as late as November 1972 from where they carried out combing out operations until April 1973 while 1CLI's D-Company closed its Kegalle operations only in December 1974.

## **Outcomes**

The international media reported that summary executions had taken place. Writing from Colombo in the *Nouvel Observateur* on 23<sup>rd</sup> May, Rene Dumont said "from the Victoria Bridge on 13<sup>th</sup> April I saw corpses floating down the (Kelani) River which flows through the north of the capital watched by hundreds of motionless people. The Police who had killed them let them float downstream to terrorise the population." The *New York Times* in its 15<sup>th</sup> April edition said that "many were found to have been shot in the back."

Lieutenant Colonel Cyril Ranatunga commanding troops in Kegalle was emphatic. "We have learned too many lessons from Vietnam and Malaysia. We must destroy them completely." While another officer was quoted alongside him in the *International Herald Tribune* of 20<sup>th</sup> April as saying "Once we are convinced prisoners are insurgents we take them to a cemetery and dispose of them." And the *Washington Post* on 9<sup>th</sup> May quoted a major who said that "we have never had the opportunity to fight a real war in this country. All these years we have been firing at dummies, now we are being put to use."

One of these public executions became a celebrated case, the brutal murder of Premawathi Manamperi of Kataragama. She had been crowned festival queen at the previous year's Sinhala New Year celebration. Two soldiers, Lieutenant Wijeysooria and Sergeant Ratnayaka would be convicted, but both claimed their orders were: "Take no prisoners; bump them off, liquidate them." (Jayasumana Obeyesekere *Revolutionary Movements in Ceylon in Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia* edited by Kathleen Gough and Hari P. Sharma)

Janice Jiggins notes in *Caste and Family in the Politics of the Sinhalese 1947-1976* that "Many in the armed services took the view that the fighting was an expression of anti-Govigama resentment and in certain areas went into low caste villages and arrested all the youth, regardless of participation."

In the aftermath of the insurgency the armed forces expanded. The Air Force which had 1,400 personnel in 1971 grew to 3,100 by 1976. New units were raised: a Special Police Reserve Force, a Volunteer RCyAF and a new Field Security Detachment targeting subversion. The latter was placed



under Lieutenant Colonel Anurudha Ratwatte 2(V) SR, the Security Liaison Officer to the Prime Minister. While a new Volunteer Army unit the National Service Regiment, targeting recruits over 35 years provided according to Fred Halliday “a damning sign that the whole of the country’s youth was in opposition to (the Government).”

The JVP uprising broke the back of the left parties which were trapped politically by the insurrection which they could only denounce at the cost of their long term influence. The SLFP too was isolated from its electorate due to the harsh measures adopted; curfew, censorship, trial without jury, postponement of elections, suspension of habeas corpus and other civil rights. Their Government suffered a devastating defeat at the next elections in 1977.

The uprising questioned the efficacy of a parliamentary system that could not accommodate a generation of educated youth, nor keep politicians aware of their needs and strengths. The decades-old mass national parties seemed to have no place for them. And the JVP charge that the leaders in parliament were of a different class and therefore they themselves of a different sub culture, seemed valid.

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