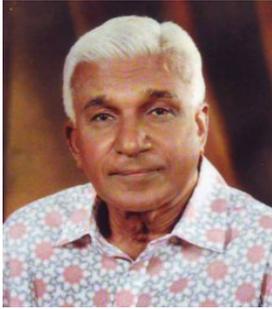


The Old Guard should give way to the New Young



The Tamil community in Sri Lanka is in a dilemma today because of several factors chief among them is the old-fashioned politics among the leadership, particularly of the so-called Tamil National Alliance (TNA) which has sober people and extreme radicals, who refuse to see realities. Understandably the able Northern leaders decided the fate of the Thamilians in the North and East in the past. But they cannot do that anymore because there are emerging young people taking a realistic stance to ameliorate the problems of the people in that part of Lanka. Even in the heartland of the Northern peninsula signs are that educated young women and men are thinking differently. What had happened to the old guard was that they lacked farsightedness and reigning in an assumption that they are a superior lot compared with the people in the Northern Islands, East and the Hill Country based on caste and education they were blessed with. They openly downgraded others and wanted to reign supreme. But to be fair by the late SJV Chelvanayagam, a Christian, was an exception.

This was realised by the young in the East, particularly in the Batticaloa and Amparai districts.

Kindled by the concept that all Tamil-speaking people should unite to face the apparent onslaught by the successive governments in power to dislocate the homogeneity of those living in those areas, a loose conglomeration of unity was enforced.

But that didn't stand good for ever because the leadership sidelined the voice of the eastern brethren. However in the absence of astute and able leaders in the North (they were all assassinated by murderous elements in the guise of a phony 'Nationalism'), inevitably a man from Trincomalee (which is more inclined towards the North than the southern eastern part of Lanka) was chosen unavoidably as the leader primarily because of his seniority and astuteness and proficiency in three languages.

But he too realizing the foolhardiness of most mono-lingual people in the North (no fault of theirs

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because of the injustices meted out to them by hasty governments in power to execute legislations out of fear and suspicion of the parochialism of the people in that region) has just realized the reality around him and has understandably moved towards seeing things from a different perspective. At the same time a few former militants from the North have also realized the futility of outmoded 'Nationalism'

It's not the political leaders alone who were conditioned by 'closed circuit' politics, but most voters themselves in the North were supporting the kind of "Nationalism". This was natural because it was the poor people who suffered in the armed conflict between the Tigers and the country's armed forces.

Emotionally charged people at large inevitably were in a cloud as it were and were clueless as to what is next. We must also remember that the Tamil press for purpose of its own survival could not veer away from mass hysteria and distanced itself from rational and balanced treatment of news. The Sunday edition of a widely circulated newspaper was blatantly supportive of Tamil Nationalism of the North.

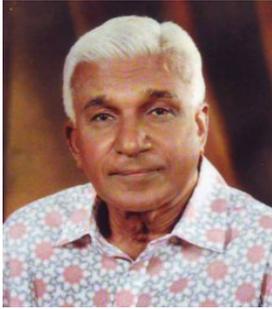
So it was a complex and even paradoxical situation that enveloped the TNA which is composed of ardent extreme nationalists and one or two educated and 'saner think tanks.' Most youngsters who have been subject to military surroundings (of both the State and the Tigers) were numbed so much that they did not want to think afresh.

But with the transformation now taking place, it is likely that the hardened North would follow the rest of the Tamil –speaking people in other parts of the country towards peaceful and smooth transfer to understand the realities in this little island.

But this is one side of the story. There is another side of the story as enunciated and narrated by similar emotionally charged 'extremist nationalists' of the South, who are a thin minority of the nearly 21 million people.

Already this country is on the right path in infrastructure and road and other developments. But there are some basic things to be observed and put into practice.

Pedestrian again



Here are some more idealistic, (if you would prefer to dub them as such), suggestions for better harmonious living in this blessed country:

1. Discourage the activities of those ruthless people masquerading as genuine Sinhala Buddhist clergymen involving themselves in political, anti-social activities. This applies to all priests and 'kurukkal' and 'mowlavis' in every denomination. Some of these politicized monks garbed in so-called sacred robes behave in a shameful manner, both in parliament and outside. The whole world witnesses all this. If this is Buddhism, then outsiders have the right to find fault with everything happening in this island. Mere bashing of the West or any other part of the world will be meaningless unless the house is put in order. Denying of accusations and covering up cannot hold good for ever.

2. Buddhism is one of the noblest religions in the world, or if you would like to call it, one of the profound and practical philosophies in the world.

In Lanka, there are millions of genuine and good and kind Buddhists, mainly comprising the Sinhalas and a few Thamilians and Burgers. Compassion and Metta are a few of the foundations admired by most of the South East Asian countries including our blessed Lanka. But also in this country, some extreme and misguided men posing as 'Sinhala Buddhists' unashamedly take into their hands the assumed power without any understanding of the world, or even understanding the Pancha Sila and the eight-fold precepts, on the premise that they belong to the majority.

3. The Buddha would have cried and wept if he had seen this ugly scenes in this Buddhist land where the vast majority of Sinhalas and other communities live in harmony. I see thousands and thousands of genuine Buddhists also visiting Hindu temples without any persuasion from outside. Many Hindus visit Buddhist temples on certain occasions.

4. In a fast changing world, we cannot live in splendid isolation and harp on the past, without understanding the realities of the present. The future belongs to the younger generation who think differently. I say this out of experience, though it is a limited one. I have taught in some international schools in Colombo and noticed that young students from various communities without any labels affixed on them. Even in state schools and private schools, most students have an international outlook.

5. The government should take bold steps to dissociate themselves from those who want to stick to ultra-nationalism concepts, from whatever communities they come from, because most people would want a dynamic world, rather than live in the primitive past.

6. I sincerely request some of the Sinhala intellectuals whom I respect for their contributions to Sinhala culture and knowledge to please not upset the apple cart with their extreme patriotic feelings and domineering, so-called Sinhala Buddhist culture.

7. I must also add that the U-turn of the ITAK leader, going back to unattainable dreams has disappointed many. And that includes me as well. Most Thamilians in the North, who have suffered for no fault of theirs, because of the killings of innocent people by the armed forces, the Indian Jawans, the Tigers and assorted militants, of course cannot remove immediately the scars and the anger against oppressiveness. And they need psychological appeasement and comfort. But the ITAK and TNA are exploiting the people while they live in comfort. This is deplorable. Unknowingly or not, such leaders from the North will be the cause of future unnecessary deaths.

8. In the name of politics, so-called unenlightened politicians in the north, south, east and west are committing innumerable crimes, and are shockingly not arrested. Law and order has become meaningless in this anarchical situation. Impartiality is essential to punish or prevent such social crimes leading to death, corruption and all the evils in a decadent society.

9. The educational set-up in this country needs a thorough revision. Consultation with wise and experienced educationists should be sought, instead of leaving everything to the politicians who have many other activities to look into, than the future of children in the 21st century.

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10. While South East Asia and even the Maldives have improved tremendously as nations with an international outlook like Japan and China in Asia, little Sri Lanka wants to go back to the glorious golden era of the monarchy of previous centuries. We cannot stand alone in this global world. We need assistance from the West as well as from other parts of the world, to even exist as a free nation.

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