



SRI LANKA- NO TURNING BACK NOW

Dear readers, please cast your eyes on the following piece that appeared in The Island of 24th September- two days after the Provincial Council election results. Let me use my column this time to comment on it as there are obviously many among the Sinhalese, Tamil, and Burgher communities that voice such opinions. Some of the Island writer's comments are very pertinent while some others reflect the voice of an ignorant Westernized class. Disregard the name of the writer.

"Sri Lanka - No Turning Back now!
September 23, 2013, 7:45 pm

I think there are some home truths to be faced now after the last elections. Those of us who grew up in the 60's and 70's, who ramble on nostalgically about the values and standards we knew and even the parties we had ... people it is all over ! There have been some irrevocable changes in Sri Lankan society and it has crept up on us when we were busy trying to survive the war. Over the last 30 odd years our perception of a politician (Dudley Senanayake) has now changed to Rajapaksa. Our concept of gratification or a bribe to use slightly harsher terminology has changed from a bottle of whiskey to a minimum payment of a hundred thousand rupees.

Denzil Kobbekaduwa was our idea of an officer and a gentleman now we have another Rajapaksa or a Fonseka to choose from. Even our parties that used to reach a crescendo with loud and raucous Baila music ended with the exodus of the Burgher community and now Amaradeva and Thabla music hold sway!

Our perception of race and creed, when it only mattered if he was a 'good chap' and his surname had nothing to do with it, has gone forever. Some ruling party politicians may use the election results to wind up the Sinhala people into thinking that the Tamils and of course the Muslims need to be 'controlled'. You watch the spin doctors over the next few weeks and months telling the people how the ungrateful populace of Jaffna is and it has voted for a separate state. Don't worry they will somehow involve the Muslims in the devils equation as well.

The people who grew up during the war will respond with Sinhala solidarity and vote for Rajapaksa and Fonseka. Those will be the only alternatives available to the Sinhala and the UNP will HAVE to degenerate into thinking and behaving like the mainstream parties of thugs and rascals if it wishes to ever command a majority again. Forget about dream-

ing of having a society with old ... or is it outdated, moral standards and values.

The 'new' people of Sri Lanka will always check if a person is from their own ethnic background and judgments will ALWAYS be based on that. Money will always call the shots as simple existence and making end meet is not possible for the 'honest' ... or is it outdated, wage earner. It is time for those who still live in nostalgia to either leave the country or live with an 'expatriate mentality' and not get involved in the running of the country.

Enjoy the scenery, travel to your favorite places for as long as they are accessible and you can afford to and leave the governance to those who the people seem to have chosen. After all, the country belongs to the people and the people deserve the rulers they have chosen!

R. A. Ratwatte"

The negatively connotated reference to Amaradeva and the thabla is most unfortunate. In the first place it is untrue. The spirit of Amaradeva lives on from the time of Dudley Senanayake, who to the Island writer is the icon of the 'decent' era in Lanka. Amaradeva and his music have stood for good Buddhist (and, therefore, humanistic) values.

Amaradeva has never been racist or narrow in his perspective. His is a stirring soul for sanity and goodness. Besides, he never let himself be used by Rajapakse or any other politician before. He has never been the kind of artist that compromised on self-dignity like the artist who came out with the theory that Rajapakse is in the direct line of descent from the Buddha or the artist who sang the 'anthem' for the raucous, beefy-looking extremist Buddhist monk rabble. In my days in Lanka, I used to wake up to the radio sound of Amaradeva singing a Buddhist gatha. While concepts like rebirth defy logic and evidence the colossal thing about Buddhism is its supreme enthronement of the humanistic perspective on life. Unlike in Christianity, for instance, humanism in Buddhism doesn't come out as a list of

exhortations but as emanating from the depths of philosophical justification.

The reference to the theablabrably reflects a mind that is unexposed to the power and worth of Indian ragadhari music-something part of both the Sinhala and Tamil traditions. The Western musician has sought after Ravi Shankar and there is a growing interest today over the potential of musical fusion.

I agree with the writer with many of his other observations on the Lankan society of today as reflected in election behavior. Of course, our voters never had the benefit of whisky ever. Arrack was good enough. That had been given as an election bribe even in the good old days of the Dudley era that the writer laments about.

As a Public Servant I worked through the Dudley era and right up to the

Bandaranaike's and Premadasa. The transformation of our society has been enormous over this period. Yet, despite this change our society did not tolerate lying, deceit and revenge on the part of political leaders. Since JR and his constitution the slide has come. It is a worthless exercise to try and evaluate social values on a comparative basis. On the other hand, one has to admit that certain values are hard core necessities and are integral to decent living as human beings whichever country one may inhabit. The need for the keeping of one's word as a matter of honor and the general requirement of integrity is foremost among them.

The avoidance of revenge and violence is another. Freedom of thought and expression is another. Transparency is perhaps on the border but yet invaluable to the functioning of a modern society.

The fact is that in the era that Sri Lankans live today these values are going, going...gone! In this aspect much of what the writer states is perfectly correct. Lying, deceit, corruption, non-transparency among political leaders and open revenge is there for all to see. Even given an allowance for government manipulation and intimidation at the elections it is obvious that our society -at large-particularly where it matters in the rural areas have endorsed these kinds of behavior or at least acquiesced in them.

I suspect there is a comforting explanatory dynamic in all the 'social degradation' highlighted by the writer and spelled out above:

In the hierarchy of human needs, basic needs like food, security, jobs etc. take precedence over issues like justice, transparency and fairness. Abraham Maslow (1943) illustrated this motivational theory very articulately. Maslow is essentially right and relevant today in Sri Lanka. If the application of this theory is righthere would be some hope that the situation would change with growing economic prosperity. That is still only a theoretical possibility.

There is, however, an unforgiveable part in this whole business: It is the responsibility of rulers to ensure that society is properly directed when under their charge and that they exhibit themselves as role models of public behavior. This isn't happening today. The ruling elite violates the constitution, openly lies, inflicts vengeance on dissenters without any attempt to even cover it up, encourages opposition leaders to accept inducements, engages in violence and indulges in all sorts of subterfuges to cheat the people. In other words, Lankan rulers have constructed a style of governance that is manipulative of the needs- deficiency of the people. It is in the interest of the leadership that the needs-deficiency is kept going. In this way, ordinary people are in a vote-trap.



Shyamon Jayasinghe

The singular exception to public acquiescence of what is going on, came from the North. The Tamil population overwhelmingly rejected the government somewhat like a tsunami. The ordinary Tamil remained fearless and steadfast amidst organized intimidation. Maslow can explain this behavior as a response to a feeling of growing insecurity among Tamils and a collective apprehension of a threat to their identity as a people. The government has built them infrastructure but many Tamil persons perceive that this was done for the commissions and not as a genuine commitment to reconciliation. A serious warning in the horizon! Take it or leave it- this development is going to boomerang seriously on our society as a whole. If the government thinks that setting up army camps all over is going to crush a big idea it is going against historical experience.

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