



By Shyamon Jayasinghe

Melbourne Writer

The first wave of Sinhala ethnic nationalism emerged in the Bandaranaike era during the mid-fifties and rather gradually morphed into a 26 year-old civil war that was brought to an end only a few years ago.

We are used to thinking and saying that the Tamil minority was the target of that first wave of Sinhala Buddhist-led nationalism. That is not correct. I recall that the appeal of lay leaders (LH Mettananda, FR Jayasuriya etc.) monks, and political demagogues on stage at the time were to seek a renaissance of Sinhala culture and Sinhala pride that had been lost under colonial rule and the post-colonial kalu-sudda rule.

The problem about that wave, however, was that in the Sinhala world of the day the Tamils did not exist; it wasn't a case of antagonism towards the Tamil people. Hence, Tamils were not the target - at least to begin with. What happened to the Tamil community initially had been collateral damage.

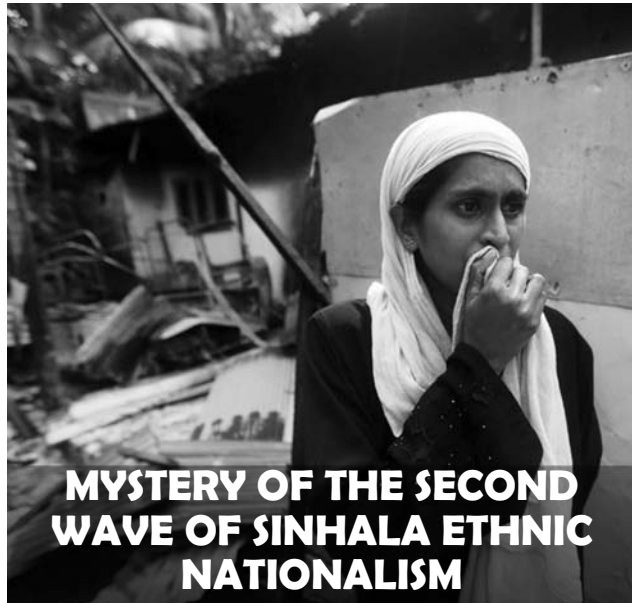
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the other hand, Tamil nationalist politicians exploited the threatening situation and the conflict transformed into a long Sinhala-Tamil imbroglio thereafter. The discourse that ensued was defined by a counting game on both sides: "They ask far too much considering their numbers; "How much we have given them!" and so on that fruitless discourse went.

Sri Lankan people palpably experienced the damage that came out of that first wave. Thousands of lives were lost and property destroyed. The clock of progress was halted. A huge part of the budget went to keeping defense when that money could have been siphoned off to improve, infrastructure, education, health and the general well-being of the population.

Given such a collective traumatic experience, this second wave against Muslims doesn't seem to pull off with the broad masses. It has the general appearance of being artificially constructed and carried out with the help of a few organized mobs. Some curious questions arise: from where did this emanate and how is this second wave of lunacy funded? In terms of the national interest a high-level commission of enquiry is justified. The fact that President Mahinda Rajapakse and the Defense Ministry went silent over this development for such a long time until it catapulted to Aluthgama-Beruwela is itself a mystery.

Even after Aluthgama-Beruwela where four persons were killed, hundreds of property destroyed, and parents fleeing for safety with kids in their arms, the machinery of the law has to date not been applied. An enquiry should have been held in the first place to determine the culprits. The main offender, Galaboda Aththe



Gnanasara, should have been arrested after his speech; yet he is roaming free and showing open disregard for the law. An unsacred sacred cow he is. The lukewarm government response sounds strange against a governance background where charges are cocked up against anyone who dares to cross the path (example General Sarath Fonseka). It all doesn't stack up considering the recent Weliveriya incident when residents gathered to protest

against a government-favored industrialist who was contaminating underground water resources that belonged to the village. Capriciousness and not consistency is the mark of authoritarian rule.

Just take a look at the transcript of the Aluthgama Gnanasara speech and you will get the message:

"What we have here is a Sinhala Police and Sinhala Army. From today onwards, if any Marakkalaya (pejorative for Muslims) or any other pariah touched a Sinhalese, let alone saffron robe, that is the end of all of them..."

"Some of our Sakkili Ministers call us, racists. Yes, we are racists. This is not a single incident, but it is a sequence of events. Now, a monk who helped a woman has been taken to Court. That is the Walaththa law of this country, introduced by Suddas. It breads Kalu Suddhas.

"Recently, a kid who came to a clothing shop at Aluthgama had their sexual organs squeezed. Yako! (devil), when that happened, police failed to take legal action, fearing that it would incite racism.

"I ask the police, did the Sinhalese and Buddhists ever attack the minorities. It is not because we are not capable of doing that. Therefore, we are telling you, this is the time for us to organize. If we fail to do that, the next generation would curse us..."

The reference to the 'Sinhala police and Sinhala army is a confirmation of LTTE rhetoric. The pejorative reference to Muslims is meant to incite hate in the audience. This reflects a total lack of respect for others and a mental readiness to humiliate others. The monk has also vowed to take the law into his hands and punish the Muslims. He is on top of the law. And why the reference to sexual organs? After all this, Galaboda Aththe Gnanasara claims to be a Buddha Putra and he dons the sacred robe. Little wonder that Ven Kirama Wimalajothi, the head of the BBS, publicly distanced himself from this kind of barbaric BBS

violence.

The BBS seemed to have mushroomed from nowhere and all of a sudden, in the year that passed. It seems to be well resourced as the Aluthgama tragedy unveiled. It appears to be getting external backing from armed sources. Gun fire and rifle attacks killed the four persons. Vasudeva Nanayakkara, Minister in charge of Ethnic Harmony-whatever that may mean to the government- issued a statement pointing out that the mob was brought from outside. All this amounts to an orchestrated attack with external support. There is a lot of talk that President Mahinda Rajapakse and his brother, the Defense Secretary are backing the BBS. Even a partial apologist for the government-Dayan Jayatileka- in an article in Groundwork states with caution that "the President may or may not be involved." What is on record, however, is that Gotabhaya Rajapakse had graced the Galle AGM Meeting of the BBS. Why haven't the President and Defense Secretary bothered to clear their names amidst the rumour? One doesn't need a Hercules Poirot to answer this.

President Mahinda Rajapakse at first put the blame on the always available anonymous enemy of the nation, namely 'external forces.' What has jogged up the President now is his meeting with Ambassadors of Arab countries who had spelled out possible repercussions from Muslim countries if this state of affairs is allowed to go on. Housemaids may have to pack their bags; petrol supplies may be in danger, and so on. Tamils were easier prey- weren't they?

There is another thing that the President could do and that is to rein in his Minister Patali Champika Ranawaka (PCR) who has been sympathetic to the BBS. At a meeting

of the JHU in Paris, PCR warned the audience that Lanka's Muslim population is growing like mice or rabbits and instilled a chilling fear that the noble Sinhala Buddhist civilization will be wiped out in time. He presented statistics to fool the audience not reminding them that the Sinhalese population also had grown over the years at the same pace. I have already pointed out in another peace how PCR uttered a litany of other lies before that cheering Paris Sinhala-Buddhist audience. This is a Minister of Government! PCR is the Secretary General of the JHU who are in parliament "to save the nation."

Falsehoods come like water to the extremist ethnic nationalists; they thrive on distortion. I saw another video of a BBS meeting at Kurunegala where a man called Chamila Liyanage, an alleged lecturer at Hyderabad University, made an emotional speech punctuating every line devotedly with, "Aney Hamuduruwane!" and showing what a great race the Sinhala are and pointing out that the Northern Provincial Council Chief Minister, Vigesweran, is the 21st century Elara. Liyanage didn't perhaps know that King Elara who had ruled for over forty years in Lanka had been very popular and, even according to the Mahawamsa earned a reputation for justice and impartial administration. This image is a far cry from being an enemy of the Sinhala.



Making Sense
Shyamon Jayasinghe

Professor KM De Silva, reputed contemporary Sri Lanka historian in his book, The History of Sri Lanka, says that, "Aryan settlement and colonization preceded the arrival of Dravidian settlers by a few centuries...and Sri Lanka was a multi-ethnic society (a conception which emphasizes harmony and a spirit of live and let live) rather than a plural society (in which tension between ethnic or other distinctive groups is a main feature)." [page 13]. Professor KM emphasizes that the early relations of the Sinhalese and Dravidians (Tamils) had been friendly and tolerant. "The Dravidian attempts at establishing control over the Anuradhapura appear to have been motivated partly at least by the prospect of domination over its external trade." [page 12] Muslims came much later but they have enjoyed royal patronage, stayed a considerable time and got established contributing very much to the economy and even to Sinhalese art. Remember Rock Samy and Mohideen Beig?

In the light of KM De Silva's historical scholarship the JHU and other Sinhala ethnic-nationalists should rethink Sri Lankan history. They will then realize to their surprise that the real Sinhala Urumaya was defined by amicable relations with minority groups. We have to pick up on that tradition and ripen it if we are to survive-let alone to grow and develop. We simply have to learn to live side by side with others who are only superficially different. The alternative is none other than self-destruction. That is the Hobson's Choice for Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists. Taken in the right spirit that can be a delightful choice that would enrich our nation.

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