



A LESSON FROM INDIA'S SECULARISM

India, our great neighbour, makes proud of her boast that she is a 'secular state'; even the BJP claimed it was. Mani Shanker Iyer, India's Minister for Petroleum, compared the socio political ideologies of India with that of Sri Lanka and stated, "Secularism and our nationhood are inseparable. Secularism is the bedrock of our nationhood". Added Iyer: "A secular India alone is an India that can survive. Indians need only to look across the Palk Straits and Adams bridge to understand what happens to a multi-religious nation if it loses its secularism to mean-minded majoritarianism". Of India's population of a billion people, almost 85% are Hindus. They are a people who have been ruled by the British for 200 years, experienced 700 years of Muslim rule. Don't forget Buddhist Emperors Ashok from the 3rd Century up to Harshavardana in the 7th Century also ruled them. Yet this country of 85% Hindus has a Muslim President, a Roman Catholic as the chairperson of the ruling Congress, a Sikh as Prime Minister. Is this not something to be proud about?

The architects of secularism in India were Jawarharal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi. Decades after their passing away, Hindu nationalism reared its head in recent times with the RSS, the Vishva Hindu Parishad, Sang Parivar and the BJP. The BJP eventually realized that their narrow nationalism was not going to work and it soon evolved into a relatively secular party. They realized that India cannot only be a Hindustan or a 'Hindu India' in the present world.

It is a tragedy that Sri Lanka took a different path. All hell has broken loose after that. A little country that could have grown into a beautiful and prosperous nation got torn apart with Tamil insurgency and Buddhist-Christian conflict. I remember a time when Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Burghers, Malays and even British who inhabited this land were proud to be associated with it and call it home; we even had an Englishman who was a member of our Parliament (referred to

fondly as Singleton Salmon). We had Freeman, a Brit representing Anuradhapura in the State Council! Those were the days when we were one Ceylonese family; but all that is behind us now. That had been the path of all-inclusiveness or secularism.

Populist politicians, greedy for power took over. They went about fanning ethnic and religious nationalism. Populism represents the practice of saying and doing things that might look well for the many in the short run but bad for them in the long perspective. The focus is on short-term results devoid of their long-term consequences; on pleasing the electorate for the moment. Populist politicians are not worried about the

long run, which they leave to others to tackle. They typically wear a permanent smile on their face and promise all things to all men and women. They breed on the ignorance of the general populace and they are encouraged by cheap media.

Yet this country of 85% Hindus has a Muslim President, a Roman Catholic as the chairperson of the ruling Congress, a Sikh as Prime Minister. Is this not something to be proud about?

'Majoritarianism' is the central manifestation of populist politics. It is true that majority decision-making is the working rule of a democracy. Majoritarianism is something more than that practicality. It is the crude assertion of this rule to the extent of assuming that the minority interest need not matter in the face of perceived majority needs. Majoritarianism found expression in policies and practices such as the the Sinhala Only policy, the law making Buddhism the state religion, the avoidance of making Tamil language compulsory in the education curriculum for all students, the rejection of the idea of power devolution to the Tamil people within their traditional region of habitation etc. In economic policy, the distribution of free or subsidised rice to the



people and the nationalisation of commercial enterprises are the more prominent examples. India despite 85 per cent being Hindu has not made the Hindu religion a state religion. Of what earthly use is a state religion anyway? Have we done any better for Buddhism after giving it this constitutional status? Was it not a hoodwinking of the people-a populism?
No democracy will work in the face of a recalcitrant minority. It is only when the majority develops the good sense to be all-inclusive and to make every group feel that they are part of the nation as every

other group is, that a country can survive and be prosperous. That did not happen in Sri Lanka although the nation's founders like DS Senanayake, Ponnambalam Ramanathan etc tried to give a start that way. Some European Union countries have developed forms of what is called consensual decision-making practices in order to give power to the minority voice. In actual practice the world over, the proclivity these days is for consensus decision-making. On the other hand, the crude majoritarianism that reigned and reigns in Lanka has given rise to minority militarism. In today's context of sophisticated technology like remote-control bombs, multi-rockets, suicide attackers and speedy communication even a minority can invest itself with enormous power to unleash lethal assaults and undermine the regime of the majority.

ත්‍රිස්ඵේන් ගුණිනාභි කවිත්ස්ලන්ත බෞද්ධ විහාරයේ වාර්ෂික කඩින පිංකම



ත්‍රිස්ඵේන් ගුණිනාභි කවිත්ස්ලන්ත බෞද්ධ විහාරයේ වාර්ෂික කඩින පිංකම විහාරාධිපති ස්වාමින්වහන්සේ ප්‍රමුඛ ස්වාමින් වහන්සේලා පහලොස් නමකගේ සහ දසක දසිකාවන් විශාල පිරිසකගේ සහභාගිත්වයෙන් නොවැරදීමට මස 4.5 දේදින තුළ සිදුකරන ලදී.

මේනක ජාතිගත



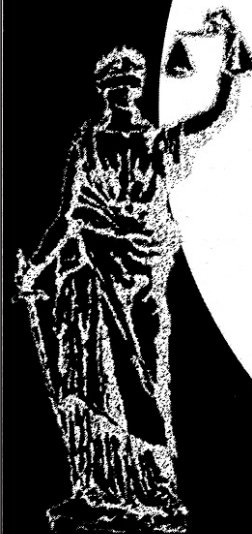
Shyamon Jayasinghe

LAKSHMAN WELIVITIYA

Barrister & Solicitor

Migration Agent
 [0533071]

- Immigration Law
- Conveyancing & Property Law
- Criminal Law
- Wills & Power of Attorney
- Family Law
- Other general legal matters



4766-768, Springvale Road,
 Mulgrave, Victoria 3170
 Tel: (03) 9574 8492
 Fax (03) 9574 8492
 Mob: 0431 685 479
 lwelivitiya@yahoo.com.au

20 years of reliable and honest experience in the legal profession