

# HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON BUILDING NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN SRI LANKA

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Some commentators aligned to Western aided NGOs hurried to express an opinion that presidential election results in 2019 reflected a polarization between communities in Sri Lanka and the idea of polarization is not a genuine view of grassroots level in the country, but a view of very tiny group of people who went against Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa and characteristics that associated with mud sliding during the election. It needs broadly review and accept that the country needs a genuine reconciliation between three communities despite communal based politics. Ten principles of government and the national policy clearly indicate that the aim of new government is to fulfil the people's wishes and implement a people centric development process. This means national unity and security are prime place of new government despite voting disposition of people.

Building national integration in Sri Lanka has been a significant issue since independence in 1948. The behavioural pattern of Donoughmore reforms in 1928 and the State Council formation system which were dominated by the British reformists, clearly indicated that exertions disguisedly attempted to make communal divisions for the advantages of the British rulers. A similar strategy used in India encouraging communalism between Hindus and Muslims as the communal divisions believed to be easier for the British rulers to control the country. National integration has not achieved so far in Sri Lanka, and political crisis and reconciliation issues remain evident in the country, that are motivated by the lack of views on broader issues and bias against the Sinhala Buddhist community in the process. It appeared that the unnecessary influences of outsiders made to the reconciliation process in the country also complicated the process.

What is the meaning of national integration? Shona Khurana (2010) defines "National Integration is the awareness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country. This means that though we belong to castes, religions, regions and speak different

languages we recognized the fact that we are all one nation. This kind of integration is very important in the building of a strong and prosperous nation." The building national integration in India where has a more circuitous environment has been a quite difficult task. We see day to day in international news reports that many communal conflicts occur in India based on a variety of reasons. Sri Lanka has a less complex environment than in India and limited diversity with tiny differences among communities. After 2009, there has been no report of major communal conflicts except politically motivated commotions such as in Beruwala and Kandy. However, the politics in Sri Lanka show that building national integration has become a hard and complex task as the strategies of political parties, which are aimed at short-term gains from communal issues and these specific political parties or political fronts are visibly contrary to national integration.

The political leadership is a primarily essential condition for national integration. Historically, national integration had been established by the leadership of Kings and religious institutions of the country such as Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim institutions, which strongly supported to national integration. Before Western invasions, Sri Lanka was consisting of only three communities and there were no serious barriers to maintain and promote national integration. Anthropological fact is that Sinhala and Tamil people have biologically same origin and may have mixed with different communities or races later, they became Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim resulting they speak two different languages or devote different religions. According to historical information of Sri Lanka, Kings gave the leadership for national integration and never discriminated citizens of the country based on religions or regions or speaking different languages.

It is believed that King Parakramabahu the great was a Sinhala person, who was a believer of Hinduism. During the time of king, Dhatusena, there was an Assyrian Sect Christian Church in Anuradhapura and King Kashyapa and

Mugalan had a close association with the Christian Church. Kings in the Kandyan Kingdom allowed Muslim religion and Kings in Kotte allowed Catholics. Kings in history gave leadership for national integration within a multicultural system. The history gives luminous evidence that Buddhism and Hinduism worked together and the best example for the unity reflected that in each Buddhist temple had a Hindu devoting place.

National integration was disguisedly challenged by the Donoughmore Reform Commission in 1928, which established the State Council with so-called democratic features. The representatives to the State Council were elected based on the criterion that disguisedly promoting communal differences and it was called that democracy was introduced to the country by them, was a capitalism founded method, which gave wider impression that reforms were against discrimination while promoting wider discrimination in the society. Should it analyse more critically the elections to the State Council was motivated by creating divisions within the Sinhala community and they were actuated on Castes and provincial differences. The representation to the State Council was also founded on the popular election system which was sowing seeds for promoting

communalism in the country and the power of voting was given to rich disregarding poor and ignored national integration, which had been existed under the leadership of kings. As Shona Khurana (2010) explained the British had encouraged communalism because of division between Hindus and Muslims made it easier for them to control the country and "it is a result of narrow mindedness, prejudice and lack of knowledge of other religions." The British rulers promoted communalism in Sri Lanka to divide people as Sinhala and Tamil destroying national integration, however the strategy was not supported to divide the Sinhala community as expected.

Why did the British rulers wanted to promote communalism disregarding the moral responsibility in governing a colony where needed to maintain the law and order, and the unity among the nationals? The ruling policy of the British administrators at that time in colonies was not democratic when the power was in hand, they used such power to conquer colonial uprisings and despite this fact, many Western countries now advocate and attempt to point figure to Sri Lanka for the weakness in the reconciliation process. The best example for this was Swiss Embassy drama after election of Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa to presidential position. If the colonial rule honestly

Cartoon By SHANIKA SOMATILAKE

