

Vol. 43 No. (198)
March/April 2020
(belated issue May/June)

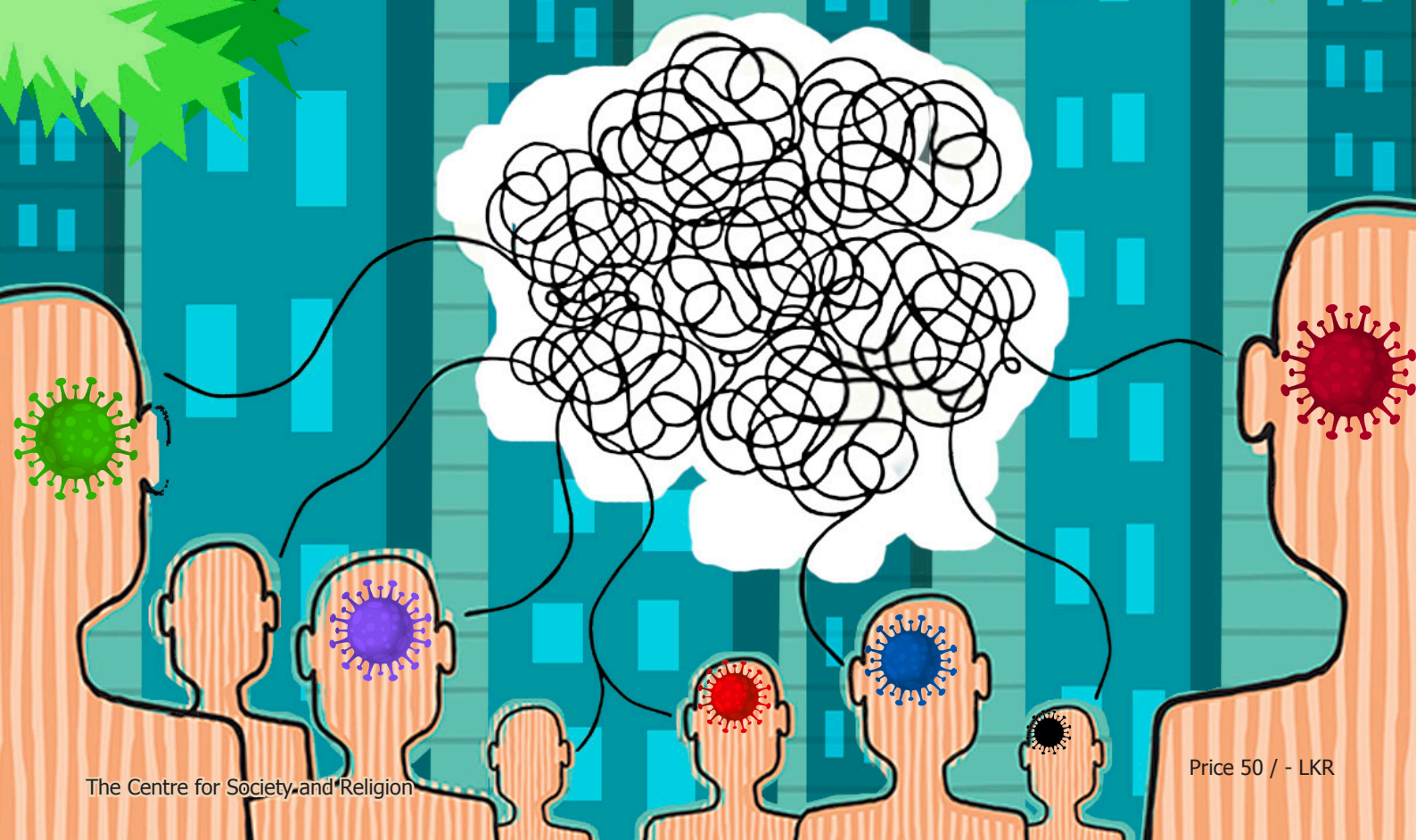
Registered as a Newspaper
in the Sri Lanka Press Council

ISSN 1391 - 0612

Social JUSTICE

if delayed then denied

PEOPLE BUILDING
DREAMING FUTURE



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It's of paramount importance to envision a future and imagine what land and whom we want to be as individuals and also as a nation. If we can see it in our mind, then we can hold it in our hand! We have confronted even though battered by the Covid 19 virus in pandemic proportions as a nation and we must build our resilience further - a part of people building process, which we believe firmly.

Election times are generally infested with promises for the well-being of everyone and for the betterment of the country in all aspects. People too look towards such changes though they have in the back of their mind that most of these promises will remain sloganized for a period. A repeat telecast of the same 'old story' is scheduled to be heard as Sri Lankans draw closer to the general election soon.

Democracy inherits an inbuilt system for checks and balances. If these become powerless, then there is likelihood that the system is bound to slide towards an authoritarian regime which could follow a complete fading of an 'opposition' which is an unfortunate omen for democracy. Hence, as citizens people should be more vigilant that their voice is made to be heard, participate and help revitalize democratic institutions and their processes which is fundamental to development and progress of a nation.

People building, would therefore involve empowering them through knowledge as knowledge is defined as part of power brokering agent in current socio political discourse. When they are empowered with knowledge, collective efforts might be a catalyst for transformation of structures that are unjust and dysfunctional. The road may not be that easy, but it is important to remain in solidarity for the struggle if people are to make a real difference. The citizens have the power to accept or reject their political representatives at elections. Well informed citizens must therefore exercise their sacred duty towards their fellow citizens with their political option, that power finally is the patrimony of the people. That political representation is a mandate provided by the people for a group of people to get their work done for a specific period of time. This is sovereignty by all definition, political leadership is subject to this and people building is not by choice they make but by mandate they receive.



Social Justice

Tri annual Journal published by
The Centre for Society and Religion
Vol. 43 No. (198)
March/April 2020
(belated issue May/June)

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The views expressed in the volume,
Social Justice by its panel of
contributors need not necessarily be
interpreted as a reflection
of its editorial policy.

Editorial

Call to People building forces us to raise some difficult questions in grounded ways...

“ At the most
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political exercise that
rests on two
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constituents: the people
and their leaders

This belated issue of Social Justice is devoted to the twin-ideas of *people building and dreaming future* at a time when practically the whole world is engulfed with the Covid 19 virus at a pandemic level. While our thoughts are with the families of the diseased and the infected, we wish the governments across the globe to speedily work alongside their health specialists to find a medical solution to counter the virus. Awakening people to be safe is also a call to resilience building which is part of the process of people building that we discuss in this volume.

As a conceptual term in political-science, the term people building refers to the idea of building a collective identity that is often linked to statehood. It references the people within a particular geo-political location, and the construction of a collective identity that is shaped by ideas of belonging or non-belonging or inclusions and exclusions within the nation state. Generally speaking, “the people” invoked in many political documents from constitutions to popular culture act as a concept that marks the boundaries of a political community that has taken on its agency within its political identity. On the other hand, “dreaming future” is the affective element upon which any people and their institutions can be built. Our present political actions and interventions are premised upon the future that we imagine, the future that we dream of, when we act politically. For example, the recent presidential election was a clear expression of the kind of futures imagined by the different ethno-religious communities

in the country. The fairly visible divide of the votes for the two major candidates (although not as clear-cut or polarized as the Sinhala-Buddhist commentators tend to emphasize) along ethno-religious lines indicate that politics, are now “dreamt” of, by people along their ethnic and religious identity.

At the most fundamental level, people-building is a political exercise that rests on two complementing constituents: the people and their leaders. As political activists are quite well aware this queer duo--the people and their leaders--share an uncomfortable, but reciprocal system of power, whose exact contours are always precarious and shifting as the political aspirations and the political literacy and/or hegemony of each party changes. What this means, then, is that the exercise of people-building cannot be thought outside the relationship between what we generally call “the people” and the agents we imagine to be engaged in that process of building. Abstract as this sounds, a clear understanding of how the act of people-building relies extensively on building certain types of political bonds and relations that can be both horizontal and vertical are key to understanding the nature of the task we set for ourselves when we speak of people-building/building people. For, people, a collective that is nevertheless singular, cannot be “built” like a ‘building’: it is the work of any agent of change to understand the political dynamics that shape the act of people-building, and what kind of political association, affect, and bonding are required to be built if we are to engage in people-building at all.

Roger M. Smith has linked the idea of people-building to “political peoplehood”: “Political communities are created via asymmetrical interactions between actual and would-be leaders of political communities and the potential

constituents for whom they compete. The interactions are asymmetrical because it is actual and would-be leaders who most directly articulate and seek to institutionalize conceptions of political peoplehood” (Smith 75). In his discussion of building such peoplehood, Smith argues that the claims of peoplehood emerge at moments when the leadership of one political group is challenged by another. At such moments, competing claims, stories, histories etc. are mobilized in order for a political community to be constituted as a particular “people.” The paradox, here, of course is that in

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such times of political crisis, where there is a radical decision open to the various communities that make-up a larger entity that reaches for “peoplehood,” the precarity of both the leaders of the community and the bond within the community come to the fore. On the one hand, competing groups of leaders will appeal to the constituencies that they imagine will support them, and on the other, the various communities that make up a “people” must contend with their own inner schisms, differences, and conflicts. In practice, this means

that the meaning of people-building cannot be reduced to a romantic act of “educating the people to become good citizens” because, when collective political action is smeared by the power-politics of contending parties, difficult questions and nebulous compromises are demanded by both people and their leaders. Invoking the idea of “people-building” in this edition of the Social Justice magazine forces us to raise these difficult questions in grounded ways.

On the other hand, the idea of the people also invokes opposition to existing structures of power. Particularly left invocations of the people are usually embedded within a call to oppose existing regimes, and therefore perceive “the people” to be necessary antagonists of the state. But what we have witnessed in Sri Lanka is the gradual shrinking of the ability to “dream” of an alternative future. Dreams of the future are now mired within the propagandistic thrust of political programmes that offer highly ethnicized versions of what Sri Lanka’s future would be. For example, the exclusionary practices of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism has redefined “Sinhala Buddhists” as the key constituents of Sri Lankan “peoplehood” relegating other ethno-religious minorities to a state of oblivion. Their political dreams for the future are chauvinistic, even xenophobic and strongly aligned with the neoliberal ethos of Sinhala Buddhist leaders. It is sometimes erroneously assumed that Sri Lankans have become depoliticized. In fact, as the recent presidential election has shown, Sri Lankans are as political as ever, closely attuned to what they perceive are their needs as a people: the overwhelming majoritarian vote received by Gotabhaya Rajapakse and the Tamil people’s support of Sajith Premadasa shows the over politicization of ethno-religious identities. But such politicization

has not led to an expansion in their ability to dream 'a dream' larger than what mediatized propagandists offer to them. Meanwhile the National People Alliance (NPA), a political experiment that bargained to establish a firm third force also clearly failed in this attempt: its message of hope and peace, cast at the wrong time by people with the wrong kinds of histories, failed to appeal to a people whose electoral choices were based on fear. When fear clutches us, dreaming itself becomes a luxury that many fear.

This issue's contributors engage with various positive practices of people-building:

Derrek Rehan Fernando's article invokes, among other political movements, the work of Michael Rodrigo, an enduring figure for political activists who wish to define the "people" as constituting the poor, the marginalized, and the deprived.

Ismail Mesut Sezgin and Fatih Isik explore in their joint contribution, the *Hizmet* movement's forte in modes of value education in Turkey and transnationally, that challenge the current neoliberal ethos of a broken, disengaged personhood and proposes a holistic educational and a learning practice that can create a person attuned to the self and the world.

Rasika Peiris' article argues for a "pluri-nationalism" that will strengthen marginalized persons and include them in a definition of "peoplehood" that is inclusive and achieved through dialogue across the religious and the ethnic divide.

Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi's piece states the political history of the current political juncture and situates it within the theme suggested in this issue of Social Justice. Dreams and hopes could drive any political reimagining in the post Covid 19 era.

Peoplehood, which is, by definition, an imagined political community will

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a political experiment that bargained to establish a firm third force also clearly failed in this attempt: its message of hope and peace, cast at the wrong time by people with the wrong kinds of histories, failed to appeal to a people whose electoral choices were based on fear.

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be only as versatile as its capacity to not only imagine its present, but also dream of its future.

End Note:

Smith, Roger. "Citizenship and the Politics of People-Building." *Citizenship Studies*. (2005)5.1: 73 -96.

A Special Tribute (*I choose to 'steal' a part of the 'editorial space' (which in this volume is not my space), but I offer no apologies for this paragraph to any because these two people I mention below deserve to be grateful to.*

I am indeed thankful to our colleague Dr. Prabha Manuratne, the head of the Department of English, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka for this editorial and for being part

of the editorial team. I greatly appreciate her accompaniment, advice, and intellectually dissenting voice, friendship and accommodating our demanding workload as an editor, and for bearing with my own incessant deadline reminders.

Secondly, my University colleague, Wijith Rohan, a senior lecturer of the Department of Western Classical Culture and Christian Studies of the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka who really introduced me with this highly demanding and time consuming project; I wish to thank him too for his earnest research contributions to the academia and his critical input at every possible juncture of conversations not just with us but more importantly in national politics.

We have been enriched by their dedication, intellectual honesty and ardent engagement with issues of justice and for common good. We will miss them as part of the editorial team, but sure to meet them in other platforms across the national debates with political and social dissent as well as in theological discussions of local and global significance.

We wish both of them in their endeavors as teachers and as social activists, and hope they continue *building people* and never stop *dreaming of a better future* !

There is special 'thank you' to both of them by the Fr. Rohan Silva OMI Executive Director of the CSR at the at of the end of the his message. In this volume.

Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi (editor-in- chief) on behalf of the editorial board.

WHAT THEY SAY ON THE SOCIAL JUSTICE

AUG/ SEPT 2019

The August/September 2019 edition of Social Justice dedicated to the topic of Alliances indicated that notion of alliance is known to us since early humanity which seemed to have contributed to the formation of societies. Authors have closely analyzed the issue from civil and political perspectives, providing valuable perspectives on how civil and political alliances played a role in the formation of Sri Lanka's political history. The thinking within surfs and exposes the issues of alliance formation as well as factions. The reader is taken through that Alliance is a necessity and has the potential to eliminate exclusion, extremism and develop public good and able to deliver justice. I enjoyed reading it and learned immensely. Thank you editors and contributors for covering such an important and a contemporary subject of global significance.

Muhsin Canbolat, holds a PhD (Australian Catholic University). He researched at depth on the impact of Fethullah Gülen's (A Turkish scholar) philosophy of education, particularly in the Australian context. He served as Religion and Values teacher in Sirius College, Melbourne, engages in multiple community development programs, home and away, has visited Sri Lanka, and lives in Melbourne, Australia.



I have been eagerly going through the past several volumes of the Social Justice. Congratulations to Dr. Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi, the Editorial Team and the Centre for Society and Religion (CSR) for continuing to publish brilliant volumes of this magazine. The content has been deep, rich with thought provoking and informative articles and analysis. The thematic pattern deployed in the past volumes such as Religious Radicalisation, Navigation, Civility, more recently on Alliances, have focused on the essence of relevant important social concerns,

edging on the academic and political implications on current realities. Sri Lanka right now is grappling with a transition of a political context with new doubts on the freedom of expression and populism on the rise nationally and globally. It is heartening to see such politically pertinent and timely articles on justice, rights and peace published prudently. Wishing the team insightful reading and courage with this incisive attempt on themes not so popular with many.

Deekshya Illangasinghe, secured the prestigious Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) Routledge/Roundtable Studentship award and obtained her MA (Human Rights, 2012) at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London. She currently is the executive director of the 'South Asians for Human Rights' based in Colombo, also lives in Colombo, Sri Lanka.



I thoroughly welcome the recent issue of the journal, Social Justice. The theme of alliances and movements was pertinent. The issue bravely and critically examined the frictions and factions within the political alliances in Sri Lanka, whilst lauding the potential of constructive movements capable of challenging injustice. Writing from a country (the UK) which has experienced its own fractures within political parties and systems, I recognise the need for prophetic voices in every context. May Social Justice continue to be a prophetic voice, drawing on the insights of activists and thinkers from within all of Sri Lanka's communities and religions.

Elizabeth Harris, currently an honorary Senior Research Fellow, Edward Cadbury Centre for the Public Understanding of Religion, University of Birmingham, UK. She lived in Sri Lanka between 1986-1993, studied Buddhism at the Postgraduate Institute for Pali and Buddhist Studies, Colombo, obtained her PhD (1993). A specialist in Buddhist Studies,

extensively written on the encounters of Buddhist institutions and Buddhism with the British during their colonial period in Sri Lanka, she lives in Birmingham, UK.



This beautifully presented journal should be noticed by the worldwide theological community. The theme of its previous volume, Alliances: Frictions and Factions in the Publisher's comment and the editorial hint at new alliances being formed in view of the November 2019 presidential elections. The material is a critical reading directed towards the elections.

Duchrow's article is of special interest as it gives practical examples of alliances in the European context. Kofi Annan's Movement for Responsible Capitalism, started in 2005 could have been referenced in his article. Bopage's discussion could be replicated in many other countries, with a less bloody history. In the UK, the factions of the left are now busy with realignment. The description of the 'minutely splintered left' to me is the problem of co-habitation of the left with a society built on capital. Arundhati Roy outlines this sharply in her book 'Capitalism'. Subverting the evil effects of capital into positive alternatives is a possibility. Images and symbols that run throughout the volume help us to locate the content. The cartoon by Liyanage is ambiguous, as to whose arm is holding the swag? I liked the final prose poem by Gunawardana.

David H. Clark, a retired Anglican Industrial Chaplain, pastor, counsellor, artist, wood sculptor, active Inter-Faith interlocutor, editor and a reader. He briefly visited Colombo in 2015 for the book launch of *Faithing the Native Soil* as its editor, published by the editor-in-chief of this magazine, lives in Leicester, UK.

People Building:

Contributions of the Hizmet Movement

Ismail Mesut Sezgin and Fatih Isik

Fethullah Gülen is an important and unique Islamic scholar from Turkey. He is well known for his emphasis on holistic education and learning. Gülen's ideas and practices have been a source of inspiration for many people across the faith traditions. His central concern in investment in schooling for the value education has been integral to develop a rounded person. This article focuses on the key emphasis on self-development as part of his notion of service (*Hizmet* in Turkish) and its vitality for the processes of people building towards sustainable communities.

Gülen is a significant figure to be studied. First, he is a Turkish scholar from a different geographical and cultural background. Turkey has been a meeting point of the East and the West in the intellectual sphere. It is hard to find a model of education and people building processes from that geographical environment and the literature available. Secondly, he is a respected imam and a

preacher. He was educated in the traditional *madrasa*-style schooling system. He is an orthodox Muslim and well exposed to the tradition of Sufism commonly seen in his part of the world. Thirdly, Gülen has been open to plurality and was willing to engage in dialogue with other beliefs, sects and persuasions. He opens a dialogue between the secular and the religious during a time such a dialogue is usually avoided. Fourthly, his ideas are more practical than theoretical. He has been a source of inspiration for launching an educational project all over the world for over the last three decades. These schools are called 'Hizmet schools', and they provide an institutional approach to applying Sufism on a global scale in the twenty-first century.¹ This paper both substantiates how a theory can be institutionalised and assesses how it can be developed in practice even cross culturally. We believe that some models could be experimented trans-nationally as value education is fundamental formula for all processes and avenues for 'people building and dreaming future'.

Holistic Education

Gülen believes that human nature is positive and human potential should be unlocked through education and self-development in order to attain “true humanity”. Gülen advocates for education as it is the most important tool for the individual to learn about himself, the universe and the purpose of everything. This does not mean that every person who is educated will turn out to be good, but it does mean that a rounded education might be a useful tool in the pursuit of happiness while seeing the viability of both the spiritual and material world.

Gülen defines education as a “perfecting process through which we earn in the spiritual, intellectual and physical dimensions of our being, the rank appointed for us as the perfect pattern of creation.”² He puts forward an integrated tripartite division of human and education approach composed of *ta’lim*, *terbiyah* and *ta’dib*.³ Education should appeal to one’s body, mind and



Some models of learning could be experimented trans-nationally as value education is a fundamental formula for all processes and avenues for people building and dreaming future. With us, without us perhaps despite us, the world will continue to change, real dreamers and builders are those who seize the opportunity here and now.



soul, provide opportunities for students to think, feel and act. Education aims to foster students' physical, mental, emotional, moral and spiritual development. It also should be able to reconcile tradition and modernity, religion and science. Gülen believes that only such a comprehensive education which satisfies all aspects of the human condition can help to develop the whole individual, which later will result in the cultivation of a *golden generation*, "representatives of the understanding of science, faith, morality, and art who are the master builders of those coming after us".⁴ This is basic to people building and dreaming future for any society.

For Gülen, education includes moral and spiritual development. A teacher needs to have mastery of knowledge as well as consistently exemplifying high morals and virtues. Gülen, however, asserts that the latter is more difficult than the former. He is of the view that "education is different from teaching. Most people can teach but only a very few can educate".⁵ Anyone who has some knowledge can be successful in teaching, but Gülen thinks that being a teacher is more than merely the conveying of knowledge. It requires some effort to cultivate students morally and prepare them for life. Cultivation of the self is the prerequisite for cultivating others.⁶ He contended that "those who want to reform the world must first reform themselves."⁷ It is therefore essential that teachers should reach optimum emotional purity and moral excellence before they can help their students to build their own moral character. Otherwise, it turns into a case of "the blind leading the blind".⁸ Gülen suggests that there are some universal values that everyone can agree on in order to be able to live together, such as love, respect and tolerance. Teachers should be teaching these values and virtues implicitly by means of *temsil* (role-modelling), posing an example for students, because for Gülen, deeds speak louder than words in moral instruction.

For Gülen, as a person thinks and learns more, he or she loves more. Consciousness of the other brings feelings for the other. Love initiates one to act for the other, which transforms into selfless action for the other. This creates a virtuous circle with all the components supporting each other. Virtues and good morals develop within this virtuous cycle. From raw potential with all the Names of God (*Esma-i hüsnâ*) in one's *ahseni takvim*,⁹ a perfect nature can be cultivated and realised through such a process. In each cycle, knowledge becomes more profound, feelings become deeper and behaviour grows more sophisticated. This is how a person creates a second nature. This is also called the formation of the 'culture of the heart' (*vicdan kültürü*).¹⁰ That is what Gülen meant by the integration of mind, heart and body.¹¹ Any good knowledge which is rooted into a person's nature at this level comes from the conscience. In action, it is authentic and sincere. This also forms the basis for Gülen's understanding of *temsil*. Values and virtues when represented at this level speak louder than an impressive lecture, and attract the attention of others.

Hizmet Schools and People Building

Gülen is not only an idealist who argues for the necessity of cultivation of an ideal generation but also a realist whose ideas have been inspirational in the establishment of hundreds of Hizmet schools throughout the world. Thomas Michel thought that it is the concern for human formation that makes these schools different from others around the world.¹² Similarly, for Çelik, the moral ethos represented by the teachers distinguishes the schools of the movement.¹³

Hizmet inspired people to first established schools in and around Turkey and after 1990 they attempted the same in post-soviet Turkic states such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and

Azerbaijan. Over the years, Hizmet schools were established around the globe and now it is estimated that there are more than 1000 schools operating in over 150 countries.¹⁴ It would be accurate to say that the Hizmet movement ideally forms around these schools. Looking more closely, it can be seen that the teachers who are involved in these activities, the teaching assistants (*belletmen*), and the business people who are providing funding support and other benefits to these schools are the main arteries of the movement. Hizmet movement had been active across the globe with the same community objectives and aspirations.

These schools aim to address the problem of ignorance through scientific secular education and to empower students as moral agents by enabling them to use their human potential as educated minds. The details about how the schools are managed and their educational policies are beyond the scope of this paper, however, we would like to point out some broad issues in relation to the Gülen schools.

First, these schools are not necessarily teaching anything unique nor are they reforming educational philosophy. What these schools do provide, however, is an ethos of success through highly motivated, dedicated and successful teachers who also perceive themselves as role models for their students. It is virtue modelling through practice that has been the high point of education and learning. Gülen believes that there is a greater need for these schools than for mosques and thus encourages Muslim business community to fund high-quality schools. The immense importance which the schools place on involving parents in the education process is also a key reason for the success of the schools. Parents have become part of this new learning alongside their children in schools, they are open to the world and changes that take place with rapid development in

technology and social media.

Secondly, the secular nature of these schools made it possible for the Hizmet movement to establish schools around the world as inclusive as possible without being perceived as 'just Muslim' or Islamist by the host countries. Another important aspect that the movement desired was to highlight the financing of the schools. These schools are mostly private education institutions which require students to pay for their education. This seems in contradiction with the idea of charity. However, when one looks a little closer, it becomes clear that Gülen prefers to have sustainable charity rather than to have to sustain a charity to run the venture, because a good vision will run dry without the right sustainability. In other words, it is private entrepreneurs with magnanimity who invest initially to establish the school and enable the education to commence, and then the school attempts to recover from the parents, as any private education institution does, to sustain the organisation. A certain proportion of the students in these schools are awarded bursaries to be educated based on their performance, academic success or potential. The model is that, once a school is established, it is no longer dependent on the movement for continued financial support but is able to manage its own finances and be self-reliant. Through efficient management, the school is able to generate some funds to support those children who may have potential but are not able to afford the fees. The income which is generated enables the institution to become a self-sustaining charity which also provides children from poorer backgrounds with a better opportunity to become educated and successful.

Thirdly, one of the difficulties of writing about these schools is their heterogeneity. In other words, the diversity amongst the schools needs to be taken into consideration. Although they

have been inspired from the same ideal, they usually act flexibly to meet the local needs and requirements. For instance, they adopt the curriculum and the system endorsed by the local or national authority in which they operate. Nonetheless, there are certain characteristics that these schools invariably share: academic focus on science, altruistic teachers, caring teacher-student relationship, and maintenance of altruist dynamism.¹⁵

A rounded education is an objective enwrapped in value and virtue formation and is at the base of the Hizmet model. It is value and virtue learning alongside maths, sciences, art and culture that make people resilient and wholesome. It certainly would be people building from primary to secondary and then by tertiary level that we might have a mature person to take new challenges of the academia and in community possibly dreaming a shared future.

Humanity as Basis

There are many definitions of and references to the 'ideal human' or 'universal human' in Gülen's writings.¹⁶ They clearly suggest that Gülen has developed a concept of an ideal human in his teachings towards virtue formation. The development of moral character is not merely a concept of self-betterment, instead it is more about reaching (or at least trying to reach) an ideal moral agency.

On the other hand, it seems that Gülen is talking about the ideal human in three different ways.¹⁷ These three different levels of description are mainly organised in the context of the term's definition and explanation. In his lead articles for *Sızıntı* magazine and various other written documents, he uses a very rich universal description which can be a good interpretation of the term 'vicegerent'. However, when he is giving

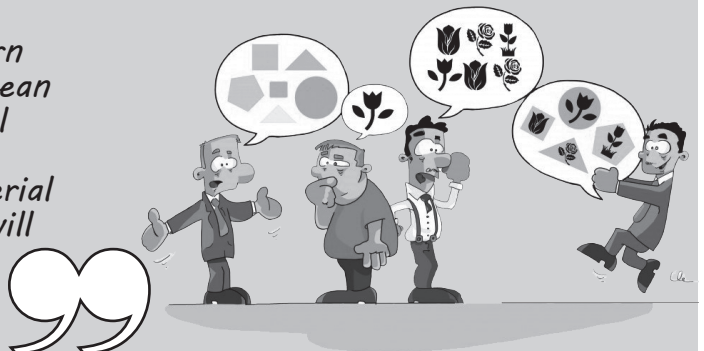
a sermon in a mosque, he addresses the issue more specifically, portraying the ideal human as a good Muslim in his context. Furthermore, when he talks about the 'golden generation'¹⁸, he is describing a more specific group, people who are identified as individuals of service (Hizmet).¹⁹

These different interpretations of the ideal human do not necessarily exclude each other but explain the issue at various levels. The first is mainly about the philosophical answer to the question and it defines an ideal human as a special creation in the universe. It focuses on the potential of human beings as well as the role that is expected from them in this world. The second level of interpretation mainly defines the roles and responsibilities of this ideal human in today's context. However, these definitions can be understood as a modern interpretation of what a good Muslim should be. This level is not about the ontological definition of humanity but the practical responsibilities of human beings. Gülen's emphasis on the moral psychology of human beings also points out the ontological meaning of responsibility.²⁰ In other words, responsibility is about being human or possessing human faculties. On the third level, Gülen defines the ways to achieve that ideal humanity in a contemporary context. 'Person of service' is a definition that explains the qualities of people who want to achieve a better moral character today by solving contemporary issues.²¹ On such a basis, 'people building' is possibility for each society whether Islamic or otherwise.

Irreplaceable Responsibility

Gülen differentiates human beings based on their potential, what they are humanly capable of achieving. According to him, humans have a unique capacity and role²² as well as a responsibility related to their difference

This does not mean that every person who is educated will turn out to be good, but it does mean that education is a useful tool for pursuit of happiness with an inner aspiration for the spiritual and the material in a modern context. A learned person will not destroy but build oneself, dream and share it with others who dare to dream - change then is obvious



from other creatures.²³

According to this reading, humans are unique and gifted by God with responsibilities over the rest of creation as the vicegerents of God in the world.²⁴ These responsibilities include understanding the universe, being a reflection of God in “taking care of the other elements of creation” and beautifying them,²⁵ being truthful towards God, peaceful and helpful towards other humans, respectful and compassionate towards other created things such as plants and animals as part of the viceregency role.²⁶

In order to transform the potential humanity which is included in human nature into practical humanity, a person needs to achieve this consciously. This requires an improved conscience (*vicdan*), which can be achieved by learning, increasing one’s knowledge and increasing one’s love and care. According to Gülen, if not developed positively, *vicdan* can turn into a pit of selfishness caused by ignorance, arrogance and pride.²⁷

In general, he believes that each moral agent has a responsibility to become aware of what is expected from him or her and to develop their character accordingly. In order to do this, moral agents must fulfil their responsibilities to God, society and the environment.²⁸

An Islamic Model

When it comes to listening to his sermons or reading books that are derived from his sermons, it can be concluded that Gülen appears to define the ideal human in a narrower context and at a more practical level. Accordingly, it can be argued that to identify the definition of an ideal person is more like a definition of a good Muslim. Moral agency discussions still originate from the creation of human beings as vicegerents on earth, but the responsibilities defined by Gülen are

more practical due to his audience.

The question he poses is: what is the best way of fulfilling the responsibility of viceregency? The answer provided by Gülen is a depiction of a good Muslim. In this context, it means a person who fulfils his/her responsibilities to God and tries to be a better person each and every day. As vicegerents, people should try to make the world better either by solving existing problems of humanity (or more practically their local communities) or by supporting existing good work and causes.

Gülen would claim that the prophets were the ideal humans in general and that Prophet Muhammad, particularly was the embodiment of the idealist human person.²⁹ The principle of him being an ideal human complement is the idea of following his image, words, wisdom and style as a perfect example to achieve the purpose of creation. However, it can be said that following the footsteps of the Prophet is a journey that everybody aspires to take, but does not necessarily reach the destination: a state of ideal humanity. Thus, the journey towards character perfection is the main aim in itself, rather than reaching an ideal human state.³⁰

In short, Gülen’s idea of an ideal Muslim person could be summarised as “the best of people are those that bring most benefit to the rest of mankind”.³¹ Another hadith which Gülen quotes frequently is “a good Muslim is the person who is harmless to others with his/her hand and tongue”.³² In general, Gülen would argue that Muslims should try to equip themselves with the best moral characteristics and would find that these good manners such as generosity, truthfulness, kindness and compassion are universally acceptable.³³

Service to Humanity

At the third level, Gülen talks to

a more specific group, the people who have been inspired by his ideas. In this context, Gülen claims that each person has to define the troubling problems and then approach them in a positive style, seeking possible resolution. The Hizmet movement responds to “ignorance, poverty and discrimination” as the biggest problems of humanity as postulated by Said Nursi.³⁴ This means seeking solutions for these problems or contributing towards supporting those who are trying to resolve these problems. To be more specific, Gülen suggests opening schools, prioritising educational issues and working for their solution. He expects his audience to be an integral part of educational activities as students, teachers, organisers or financial contributors.

At this level, Gülen expects the moral agent who wants to undertake these responsibilities to be “a person of service”. His article defining a person of service is very idealistic:

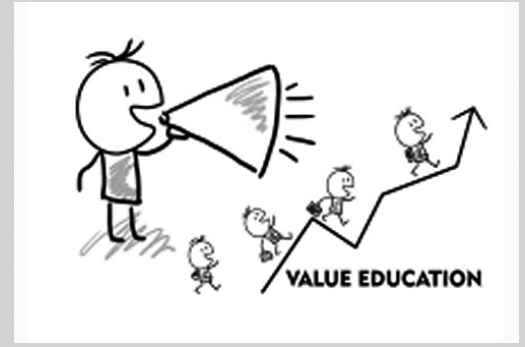
A person of service [...] [should] give his heart [for his cause.] When he has attained his object, he must be so mature that he will attribute everything to its Rightful Owner [God] and be respectful and thankful to Him. [...] He holds everyone in high regard and esteem. He is so balanced and faithful to God [...] he will not turn into idols those whom he praises for their services. He knows himself first of all to be responsible and answerable for work left undone. He has to be considerate and fair-minded [...] He is extraordinarily resolved and hopeful [...] He is moderate and tolerant [...] So rational and sagacious [...] So zealous, persevering and confident [...] so sincere and humble that he will never bring to mind all that he has accomplished. At this level, Gülen is not talking about the ideal human who uses all human potential or is a good Muslim, in fact his descriptions at this level define how to achieve the level of ideal humanity by being a person of service. Gülen provides



In each cycle, knowledge becomes more profound, feelings become deeper and behaviour grows more sophisticated. This is how a person creates a second nature and also called the formation of the ‘culture of the heart’ because it is said that cultivation of the self is the prerequisite for cultivating others



“A rounded education and learning are enwrapped in value and virtue formation at the base of the Hizmet model. Value and virtue learning alongside maths, sciences, art and culture that make people resilient and wholesome – being Islamic also demands that a Muslim loyal to Islam has the possibility to dream a world of difference and its beauty”



detailed descriptions of the methodology to become this “service” person. Service and social responsibility is deeply Qur’anic but Gülen’s forte is that he excavates the depth of charity (*Zakat*) and service (*Al Khadamat*) in Islam.

Conclusion

Hizmet movement has been both welcomed and suspected by policy makers and Turkish bureaucratic elites. It has been under very strict scrutiny and auditing since the 1970s. Such pressure against Hizmet movement and Gülen has recently taken shape of a political dehumanisation and people related to Hizmet movement are being purged from state organisations and bureaucracy. Gülen suggests a model of education balancing spirituality, virtues, identity development and plurality. He develops a theory of moral education hinged upon an ontological imperative of responsibility. His perspective leads to a holistic approach to education, welcoming plurality and critical engagement. It leads to a pedagogy, which is essentially dialogic and communitarian, centred on a distinct view of role modelling, certainly ‘dreaming future’. Although Gülen has a very well-defined human development interpretation from the Islamic sources like *insani kamil* and person of *Hizmet*. It should be noted that this is not followed as a curriculum in any of the Hizmet schools. In fact, Hizmet schools are following the existing curriculum in the respective countries with a specific emphasis on scientific education and secular values that can apply to everyone, ethics, and behavioural development if any. Although the general vision of engaging ignorance with education is well practiced, this raises the question as to whether Gülen’s views of human development theories can be implemented. Nevertheless, they are still valuable contributions from an Islamic point of view to moral behaviour

development or human development theories.

Endnotes

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A New Conscientization for People Building



Rehan Derrick Fernando

Preamble:

The whole world is going through an ideological conflict even in the midst the Covid 19 pandemic. World seems halted yet what we come across is a culture-bound, age-dominated, sex-discriminated, male-dominated, pro-capitalist, non-revolutionary, anti communist, and over-theoretical world system. In other words, a superfluous world system has been created in the political, social, economic, religious, and cultural spheres. What Sri Lanka is today, on the one hand, is impacted by the above streams of the system; on the other hand, it is the socio-political instability of the country that does not support a better conscientization process anymore. However, there can be specific resolutions, mobilized through determination and hard work if the citizens of the country make a genuine effort. I attempt in this article to analyze how a people building could be a possibility in Sri

Lanka through practical efforts even though ideological platforms and theories might be useful.

Dominated World Systems:

Considering the events of the history of the world and its system in all continents, there is a dominated world-system due to colonization, which now is sieged by neo-colonial structures and exploitation, which also have paralyzed the local economies and other socio cultural and religious significance to those societies. Such mismanaged paradigms and models have also destroyed human and cultural relationships in the very communities they campaign to 'develop', but contrarily they undergo difficulties with modern techniques of development too fast and perhaps bypass the life style of the ordinary people. Ultimately, what is left as a formula is nothing but a world system that is created by a few rich elite groups who are even above governments, enforcing on smaller countries

with limited resources to comply. This unilateral domination in my opinion, is a destructive, unethical, and devastating paradigm. The unethical distribution of land, multifaceted companies and investments, world population growth, forceful economic structures, exploitation of trade union structures, multinational corporations, global cultural dominations, cultural myths, racism, classism, sexism, dissimilarities, one understands how world system has failed to introduce a better paradigm for the daily living of the people. Ordinary people suffer immensely with such measures brought upon them, destroys their own innovative thinking. Poverty is made ordinary, with oppressive decisions they subsumed and people building becomes a challenging work program and a crucial life line for survival. It is obvious how the structural failures as noted earlier in the world system have dramatically fallen into a category of the

destruction of this planet, especially in the context of ecological crisis. Global warming and the reports on the possible depletion of the ozone layer, and the other ecological imbalances that the planet earth experiences with immense destructive forms now proven beyond a reasonable doubt, are due to negative approaches and misuse of technology. The current pandemic is symbolic of such mismanagement of resources. It seems that any new world-system came to the scene as an alternative to change the previous system, but ended harming even the key rich cultural-religiosity and socio-political framework of those specific societies. It has also damaged the quality of life which is reserved for the whole planet. Words of Pope Francis in his remarkable encyclical *Laudato Si* would appropriately explain the idea mentioned above; "Although change is part of the working of complex systems, the speed with which human activity has developed contrasts with the naturally slow pace of biological evolution. Moreover, the goals of this rapid and constant changes are not necessarily geared to the common good or integral and sustainable human development. Change is something desirable, yet it becomes a source of anxiety when it causes harm to the world and the quality of life of much of humanity."

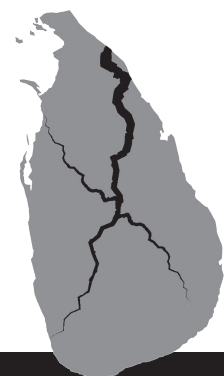
There have been many socio-political theories that appeared in

the system of the world; such as Anarchism, Absolutism, Communism, Conservatism, Environmentalism, Fascism, Liberalism, Nationalism, Socialism, Social Capitalism, Social Democracy, Marxism, Capitalism, and Pancasilaism, to name a few. However, one wonders whether any of these theories did attempt people building in societies where they were operational. May be they did develop ideas, but instead, some of these ideologies and theories dented rather than enhance communities one against the other. Considering the Euro-Western colonial regimes, it is evident how the native people of the regions in Asia, Africa, and Latino world suffered most, their land and even their right to live was denied. In the Asian context, Western-educated and elites produced by the same system have introduced certain socio-political theories such as Social Capitalism, Capitalism, Marxism, and Communism in Asia that have harmed the ordinary lives of the people especially those of the rural sector. These measures obviously blocked the accessibility and opportunity for the local production routes and their subsistence economies. In other words, those socio-political theories were dysfunctional, and they subverted the socio-political spirit of Asia. Asia as a region had deployed ancient and traditional techniques for food production, construction, business, management that led its

communities to sustain their livelihood. However, different alliances of elites and their socio-political theories have already damaged and displaced those traditional methodologies, which were the primary sources of people building capacity of Asia. The major crises such as poverty, forced landlessness, unemployment, elimination of handcrafts, and artificial fertilizing system in Asia are due to Westernized modern capitalism spearheaded by those elites and business tycoons. Such disfigured assumptions, in my opinion, are myths created by the Euro-western power and its thinking, but not liberative forms for a developing society. Asia, therefore, goes through negative structural changes, which give way to constant socio-political stability. The downside effects of Asia also are the results of this ongoing crisis. Among them, discrimination and political divisions (ethnic divisions) are fundamental issues in Asia, which paralyze peoples' development in Asia. Western capitalism has already made certain political divisions in Korea and Vietnam. Considering all Asian countries and their internal socio-political struggles, in the latter part of the war in 2009, Sri Lanka was almost at the edge of experiencing the same South-North division. Asia, particularly as a continent still lingers with a victim mentality of those Western methodologies, which also misled the Asian ways and means.

“The moral decadence in the political, economic, religious, social, and cultural set up in Sri Lanka does not support to opt for an authentic people building base and work for the common good for its citizens.”

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“ His experiment to experience what the ordinary people go through was his paradigm for a people-building attempt in Sri Lanka. ”

Sri Lanka, a Victim of the World System

Sri Lanka has also become a part of the above-mentioned socio-political, ideological conflicts, and economic rule of the elitist systems. It is undeniable and quite evident when we analyze the results of the presidential election of 2019, Sri Lankans failed to realize the harmful effects of party politics and opt for an alternative political ideology in the country. Most citizens in Sri Lanka unanimously opted for yet a corrupt party and its policies and Sri Lankans have been engaged this gamble of party-politics in changing and selecting the two major parties time and again, on opportunistic routes, not necessarily for the good of the country. Even though a significant movement (National Peoples' Power/NPP [movement is different from an alliance]) for the first time in the political history of Sri Lanka even though formed with series of consultations with the peoples' beliefs, ideas, aims, objectives, yet the ordinary people abandoned especially the ideological imperatives of the NPP at the recent voting. It indicates that the majority of Sri Lanka is still interested in party-politics, and the upcoming general election could display further evidence of what kind people building might be viable for this island nation. There are new fears of possible

militarization and illegal colonization within the country, excessive foreign aids and investments for mega projects, abuse of power, nationalism and racism, electing unsuitable politicians for governance, religious fundamentalism to name a few.

The moral decadence in the political, economic, religious, social, and cultural set up in Sri Lanka does not support to opt for an authentic people building base and work for the common good for its citizens. Mere economic development, education, and enhanced foreign policies, would not gear a towards a people building agenda for the country. People yearn motivation as such have been previously abandoned because of political bickering of the bad party system Sri Lanka has hatched over the years. Sri Lanka over the last few decades have had periods of governance with successive corrupt regimes heeding to the objectives of manipulative groups of political neo-elites. As a result, the majority of the country suffered immensely without even having access to opportunities to build themselves and even dreaming future had become permanently illusory. In other words, dreaming for a better future and people building, when being unethically designed by a group of ill-informed and undesirable people who are involved in corrupt politics, de facto is a complete

abuse of power and mismanagement of democratic institutions in the context of Sri Lanka.

The last Presidential election campaign in November 2019 was full of awakening programs for a people building and dreaming future goals. The methodology deployed and the fundamental aims of National Peoples' Power (NPP) were to enhance the power of the ordinary people and was a credible response to Sri Lanka's crisis in democracy and religious fundamentalism in the socio-political arena. NPP aimed to regain and regenerate a better democracy process from the perspectives of ordinary people, which seemed like a new approach to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The initial efforts were promoted and backed by intellectuals, civil society groups, organizations, and the ordinary people. However, it failed at an unexpected hour since many other civil society groups, business people and elites who geared sub-cultural agendas for mere victory at the presidential election in 2019. It shows how Sri Lanka once again opted for an ideological crisis and became a part of the failure created by the internal dynamics of party politics. It is because of these sub-cultures; the ordinary people, farmers, fishers, laborers in rural villages will continue to suffer and struggle for basic subsistence. Dreaming for a self-sufficient society espousing a

national agenda with a focus on people building, offering better employment opportunities and expand productivity are yet challenges before the country. Such a situation demands a radical change or a paradigm shift in thinking and practice. Therefore, I would suggest certain shifts in thinking, planning and implementation processes to be tangible, concrete and doable towards a process of people building as such is not like building a structure with brick and mortar.

A New Conscientization

I wish to present two paradigms in history as possible ways to a people building process in Sri Lanka. One is a methodology followed by the Chinese during their crisis in the 1940s - Mao Modle and the second is what was adopted by Michael Rodrigo, an Oblate priest who worked towards an equitable society, promoting social justice and a praxis oriented people building with his unique option to live among them - A Rodrigo-experiment!

Amidst Global disagreements towards the economic policies and financial arrangements of modern Chinese society today, also despite the Covid 19 pandemic at the time of writing, there is something to be learned from China. I wish to explain the original paradigm shift within the Chinese society and how they managed to handle their crisis in building the rural sector and the

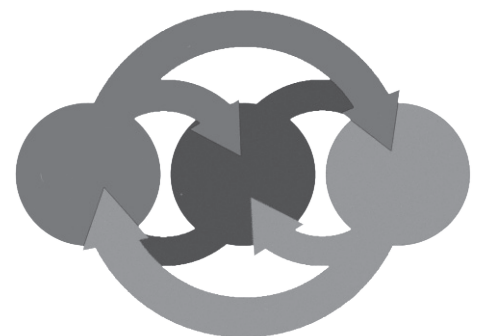
masses. Historically, like many Asian countries, China was a feudal society, and subject to massive exploitation by local warlords and landlords. The poor peasants and workers were dominated continuously by the elites and dominant land owning elite class. Subsequently the 1949 revolution, China was boycotted by the capitalist powers and regimes basically as a rouge state. As a result, China went through a quarter-century of isolation from the international community. However, China under leadership of Mao Zedong processed and went through a long period of travail in implementing its own socialist program. The fundamental process of the whole program was to change the mentality of ordinary people and be effective by a new system. 'Serve the people' was the primary moto and public exhortation until they became self-sufficient with their new agenda. A hard process of self-criticism and self-revolutionizing were in place combined with hard work, temperance, honesty, self-purification, and service while there might have been excess burden on people, even abuses in running a new system. However, China experienced a new form of revolution through a difficult path, but certain significant models were in place for a useful process of people building agenda even though while being heavily criticized by other countries and models.

The second paradigm I

wish to present here is more of another village-level process. In the 1980s, as the Sri Lankan government liberalized its economic policy which then attacked its traditional subsistence economy and peoples' own levels of productivity to be self-sufficient at least in some important aspects. Immediate and robust introduction of such liberal economic policies warped in a cumulative objectives paralyzed Sri Lanka's long standing agrarian and rural based economy. Ordinary civilians suffered and their life-style was put in danger. In such a social, political and economic downturn, Michael Rodrigo opted to physically move to the Monaragala district of the Southern Province, in the rural setting of Uva-Wellassa, seeking an alternative way of an economic and social life. His experiment to experience what the ordinary people go through was his paradigm for a people building attempt in Sri Lanka. At the hands of elites and their petty-minded and unreasonable projects, peasants and poor workers in Uva-Wellassa became mere objects of the then government in power. It was determined to find its so called quick fixture-alternative in the paradigm of the multinational corporations and companies alongisde the advice of the financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). Rodrigo worked with ordinary people to experience a national-development program at the village level

“ This world system disables the people as such is focused on cumulative desire to have more. Asia and many other continents have become a victim of it. As Rodrigo proposes, that a point of departure from selfishness (*tanha*) to selflessness towards people building.

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“those socio-political theories were dysfunctional, and they subverted the socio-political spirit of Asia. Asia as a region had deployed ancient and traditional techniques for food production, construction, business, management that led its communities to sustain their livelihood.”

introducing a natural fertilizing system, self-contained and self-reliant living conditions, equal education program, Buddhist-Christian dialogue, herbal medicine (Ayurveda treatments), awareness programs, health-care, housing projects for the poor and so on. All of these aspects were significant components for a people-building process for Rodrigo and he was focused and the model was challenging both to the religious institutions he represented as well as the secular bodies who had embraced the liberal economic policies of the government. The awareness program (conscientization) which Rodrigo initiated at the village level, was a critical reflection alongside people with whom he lived and worked for a righteous society and for them to live honourably. His primary intention was to opt for a socio-political change and then move toward an equitable society even though some of his contemporaries attached a religious flavour to his reading. Unfortunately, the government and governance commencing from the 1980s up until today have continued with the same liberal economic agenda as the best form of development model for Sri Lanka. However the island nation as a society Sri Lanka is now a debt ridden economy struggling to survive amid the challenges of a low to middle income earning country. Rodrigo was assassinated during the second uprising of Janatha Vimukthi

Peramuna (JVP/ a local Marxist Leninist Party) and its ruthless counter-insurgency protocols in the late 1980s, which was the actual termination and deliberate elimination of any people building action he experimented in the rural sector. His processes of conscientization too came to an end as 'a life witness' but those who have been influenced by it carry what he taught and lived. It was also a counter paradigm introduced by the right-wing approach of the then government that confronted the uprising of the JVP that brought destruction to the then society. Among such atrocities many thousands of lives perished with the vicious counter insurgency measures. During this dark era, many young people, intellectuals, and activists were killed and some disappeared. Those adverse events were results of counter violence by the central government on the violence of JVP. The remnant of the misleading paradigms of the late 1980s are even evident to this day, the social damage it caused apart from the economic down fall lingers on.

A closer study of both paradigm shifts grants us a possibility for new conscientization process, which has to be reformulated especially at the village level in Sri Lanka. Country needs a new way of the self-critical method and a self-evaluating process, whereby people building models are initiated as such need not be the same model. The civil

society groups, faith groups and other interest groups in the country need to seriously opt for such models to building people, it's hard work, difficult route but a possible to attempt as such can be the only alternative to restore a culture of honesty and against all odds with corrupt institutions and behavior.

Conclusion

The world system today promotes warfare and misleading development programs, which, for me, is an ideological conflict. This world system disables the people as such is focused on cumulative desire to have more. Asia and many other continents have become a victim of it. As Rodrigo proposes, that a point of departure from selfishness (*tanha*) to selflessness towards people building. As Paulo Freire suggests, it must be a new awakening of critical consciousness through the investigation of generative themes. In my opinion, it is not merely a political agenda that should but should incorporate social, cultural, economic religious aspirations of people. By new conscientization I suggest a people-oriented society. It should not be a part of elitist agenda to promote short term planning for political gains but a building people agenda that eventually builds the economy.

CHALLENGES TO PEOPLE BUILDING IN A MAJORITARIAN DEMOCRACY:

A CASE STUDY OF SRI LANKA

Sr. Rasika Pieris

Introduction

Sri Lanka is said to be in transition that is recovering from the brutal ethno-national war between the Sri Lankan state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE). The war was brought to an end in 2009 without a political solution to the ethnic conflict between the Tamils and Sinhalese at the cost of thousands of lives. Dealing with the past has not addressed the root cause of the conflict. Alongside ethno-nationalism religion seems to be the most available avenue for those who seek power.

The Sri Lankan state became the sole architect of the war and post-war discourse that was founded on valorization of victory while denying the crimes perpetrated. National representation of war

depended on selective memory. Thus the state discourse was between 'exclusion' and 'inclusion', 'Us' vs 'Them'. The national discourse romanticizes the sacrifice made by the soldiers for the nation, people and the religion.

Electoral transition both in 2010 and 2015 demanded that those who came to power work on transitional justice mechanism in order to deal with the past and envisage a bright future for the country. The transitional justice mechanism was portrayed by the Sinhala-Buddhists as a mechanism that jeopardizes the sovereignty of Sri Lanka thus endangering the sacrifices made by the soldiers for the country, people and religion. Dichotomized discourse, patriots vs traitors, constructed after the war, continue to nurture the racial cleavage between communities.

Dealing with the past is essential in order not to repeat the historical mistakes and errors made while acknowledging the crimes thus assuring the victims that it would never be repeated by eradicating the culture of impunity via retributive and restorative and transformative justice. Dealing with the past not only focuses on the past but also constructs the future via institutional reforms, constitutions, fundamental to people building.

Dreaming a reconciled Sri Lanka lies on reconstructing the nation-state building project after a decade of May 2009, respecting the rich culture of the island being pluralistic in terms of ethnicity and religion while deconstructing the polarised political discourses historically constructed othering numerically less as essentially a threat. Hence, the article will on one side critically

analyse the majoritarian democracy in Sri Lanka as it strongly affects in dreaming a reconciled Sri Lanka and on the other, the power of people including the power of the powerless and the silenced despite their ethnicity, religion, gender and all the other social status in the existing oppressive structures and systems.

Problematic Majoritarian Democracy

Describing the evolution of democracy in Sri Lanka, Alfred Stepan says "... Sri Lanka took, first from liberal to majoritarian democracy, and then all the way to competitive authoritarianism,"¹ a quote that remains suitable to the state where Sri Lanka is heading towards now especially after the 2019 presidential election the voters expressing their fear of 'majority' becoming a 'minority'. Continue to investing on polarizing and exclusionary policies in exclusive nation-state building in post-2009 would further lead Sri Lanka sliding into competitive-authoritarian ethnocracy,² being coupled with religion is quite problematic in Sri Lanka.

Though the democratic social structures constructed were supposed to assist people living as equal citizens, they rather produced the adverse, creating hierarchy as a result of which the division among the communities was deepened. Social structures continue to construct 'the other', who belong to fringe category in terms of ethnicity, class, caste, sex and religion. Hence, reconciliation and a dream for a democratic – peace and

reconciliation of all, and for all – Sri Lanka still remains strange.

According to Uyangoda, institutions of parliamentary democracy is characterized by "a comparatively long institutional history of modern democracy, high level of electoral participation, penetration of the political party system into all corners of the society, and the regular and peaceful change of regimes by means of elections."³ However, he further speaks about the twin counter-state insurgencies while highlighting the ethnic war that lasted for three decades that ended without a political solution indicates that Sri Lanka's democracy has had some serious limitations in addressing the substantial social and ethnic grievances.

According to Arthur Lewis the word democracy has two meanings; (1) all who are affected by a decision should have the chance to participate in making that decision, either directly or through chosen representatives and (2) the will of the majority shall prevail.⁴ In countries where civil society is strong, the majoritarian democracy functions well yet in multi-ethnic, pluralistic societies – countries like India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka – with the state playing a dominant role, majoritarian democracy may not be democratic at all. Further commenting majoritarian democracy in Sri Lanka, he says;

1. destroyed a rich discourse on federal Sri Lanka whose history goes back to 1920s.
2. eroded the secular state in the

country and communalized all institutions of the government and the education systems.

3. finally, these trends deepened the distrust of the marginalized minorities, especially the Tamils, who have gradually been driven to the wall.⁵

Counter-majoritarianism that challenges the religion-politics nexus in Sri Lanka while being sensitive to the inherently pluralistic communities in Sri Lanka is paradigm shift, given the experience before election people being lured by political parties to vote for, that is to be looked forward to in the future in order to preserve the democratic tradition that Sri Lanka has in South Asia.

Majority with a Minority Complex⁶

'A majority with a minority complex' could be said of Sinhalese who constitute a majority in Sri Lanka but given the geopolitical context in South Asia they are a minority group that fear its regional survival. It is to be noted that majority with minority is a major factor for the rise of right wing populism.

The Sinhala Buddhist nationalist movement in post-colonial Sri Lanka, led by Buddhist monks and some lay Buddhist intellectuals were of the view that political independence of 1948 was an incomplete one, since it did not result in the restoration of the Sinhala-Buddhist state. Hence, during the period of 1952-1953,



Duplicating a model that is alien to Sri Lanka may not meet the expectations of the 'other' and top down approach does not work either for Sri Lanka. This is true not just for power sharing mechanisms but also for development, social cohesion, reconciliation as well as much talked subject of ecological concerns. We can learn from other models but finally people must feel that they are home-grown.

As per several scholars Sri Lanka's national disequilibrium is the result of this twofold factor: a Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and a defensive Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism. Historical enmity culminated in a claim and an ownership of the landmass each in their own terms, the war destroyed most they held as a people - hence people building is a Herculean task, but doable !



this movement made a series of public policy demands based on majoritarian identity such as language, religion, culture and education towards an exclusive nation state building.

For the exclusive nation state building, the rereading of the contested history became a tool and historiography was constructed drawing wisdom from the Chronicles available such as *Dīpavaṃsa*, *Mahāvamsa* and *Cūlavamsa* which are claimed to be 'origin myth'. As in the First Testament of the Bible, the chosen people occupying Canaan created a narrative to prove their claim to be the people of Israel, the Sinhala Buddhists too interpreted historical events to suit their belief that Sri Lanka belongs to them. The strategy used by the nationalists was to reinterpret early Chronicles relating the historical traditions of Sri Lanka to reconstruct history using many elements of 'origin myth'.

The propagandists claim that the Buddha in his infinite wisdom believed that his doctrine would be preserved for another 5000 years on the island Lanka by these immigrants (Sinhalese) and their descendants. It came to be interpreted that survival of Buddhism depends on survival of the Sinhala nation. Further as many Sinhala Buddhists in Sri Lanka claim, Sri Lanka became the chosen land for Theravada Buddhism and the Sinhalese who follow Theravada tradition became the chosen race.

Majoritarian Nationalism and
Defensive Minority Nationalism

Sri Lankan state has always been

an ethnic majoritarian – Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist state – that is communal. Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism is identified by three beliefs; (1) Sinhalese are the only true, original inhabitants of the island; (2) they are entrusted by Buddha to keep the island as a sacred place for his teachings; (3) the ontological scare that they are in fact a minority in the region, given all other ethnic groups have ties in neighbouring countries. Sinhala Buddhist nationalism as a majoritarian nationalism that has been entwined with the constitutional and political existence of the Sri Lankan state. This nationalism continuously reproduces the socio political field along the lines of Sinhala supremacy and the marginalization of minorities. The Sinhala Buddhist nationalism is a major cause of communal tension and it justifies the exclusion of minorities as a threat to both the protection of Buddhism and national security. Speaking about the political culture of the Sinhala majority, Jeyaratnam Wilson claims, "they may in the national interest be prepared for compromises, but they are overwhelmed by Sinhala Buddhist pressure groups, both lay and cleric. Buddhist fronts and societies of various types can be activated and mobilised at short notice to obstruct any Sinhala government preparing to make concessions to the Tamils. More potent are the Buddhist monks who are politically active. These are not accountable to constituencies because they do not, by virtue of their calling, seek secular or political office. Hence, Sinhalese

opinion can be aroused by members of the Buddhist clergy, who condemn governments seeking compromise settlements with the Tamils. More often these clerics are the instruments politicians seeking to embarrass governments in their effort at communal reconciliation." ⁷

Contrary to the interpretations of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists, Tamils perceived that independence would be incomplete until it became meaningful to them. The expectations of the Tamils were, the power relations of the new state need to be re-organised on the basis of ethnic pluralism. In the wake of the discriminatory politics of the post-colonial nation-state building by Sinhala Buddhists, Tamils realized that they have become 'the other' in their homeland. This is how the unitary nation-state building political project capitalised on Sinhala Buddhist sentiments, opened the path to Tamil nationalism in order to defend the rights of Tamils. In the view of Wilson, Sri Lanka's national disequilibrium is the result of these twofold factor: a Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and a defensive Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism. He says, "the Sinhalese Buddhists perceive the island as a unitary entity in which democracy is closely linked with their own politics. They view themselves as a numerocracy, implying majoritarianism." ⁸

Post-war democratic space created via transitional justice mechanism to reform constitution and state institutions accommodating the grievances of the minority communities was a lost chance.

The portrayal of victory of the Lions over Tigers had given another opportunity for the popular Sinhalese to claim that the 'land' belongs to the majority Sinhalese. The cleavage among the communities further deepened in post-war historical era, majority deciding for the minorities in the island. The transitional justice mechanism failed in its approach to being not victim-centric though the demands expressed from the victim community to make it so and the plea fell on deaf ears.

The political condition of the country is that the political leaders of the majority community – Sinhala Buddhists – impose means of coercion on the ethnic minorities – Tamils, Muslims and Burghers. Jayadewa Uyangoda claims "observing how the Tamil and Muslim political parties in Sri Lanka have come to accept the second class and unequal status with great pleasure, I changed realising that my understanding of majoritarianism was an incomplete one. Ethnic majoritarianism is not necessarily coercive. It has a strong element of consent of the minorities or at least their political leaders".⁹

Looking back is a way of dreaming a future. After analysing the historical consciousness of Sinhala Buddhist majority that created the 'ethnic other' through a selective reading of the past, the next attempt here is to look at the importance of moving towards a reconciled country where everyone has a right to live in freedom and self-determination in their own land.

Dreaming Future: A Pluralist and Inclusive Direction

Sri Lanka needs to move forward towards pluri-nationalism that accommodates the political grievances of the other minority communities and nations. Exclusive nation-state building as the history shows results in annihilation of the weaker communities that are portrayed either as threat to the existence of the community that promotes the exclusive political agenda thus eventually constructed as enemies that should be eradicated in order to safeguard the community that perceive itself being pure and superior.

Duplicating a model that is alien to Sri Lanka may not meet the expectations of the 'other' and top down approach does not work either for Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is a majoritarian democracy where if top down approach the majority would decide again for the marginalized rather than marginalized playing a major role deciding the appropriate approach. Bottom up approach could be in micro level and macro level. To cite an example extracted from the research work of my doctoral dissertation is given below ;¹⁰

1) The female headed grassroots movement gathered momentum in the post-2009 period that deconstructed the historically constructed boundaries based on nation-state spatilities. The common ground that brought them beyond the space and nationalistic politics is the experience that they had been through during the war as women oppressed and marginalised. Being

united realising their womanhood that is liberating while not depriving the other of their rights based demands rather acknowledging the cry for their full life. Drawing strength from their womanhood as affected women and taking leadership against the oppressive culture is a new phenomenon thus portraying themselves agents of transformation is a paradigm shift that Sri Lanka witnessed.

Inclusivism against exclusivism, a tool of resistance employed by most of the grassroots movements, be it religion, caste, ethnicity and class, found a new way of dealing with the existing religious, cultural, economic political hegemony exploited by the majoritarian state and its stake holders. Refusing to be merely victims of any form of oppression helps them scale the heights of boundaries in order to work towards a goal that they aspired for their children in the future is remarkable among war widows.

Engaging in dialogue in different spheres is a methodology adopted by most of them which led to movements that became inter-ethnic, inter-religious and inter-caste could be macro level tool employed in order to work for a political solution in order to unite the island Sri Lanka thus ensuring everyone living with dignity and freedom, as the responses of a certain number of war-widows of the research sample, who worked in the inter-religious and inter-ethnic field, suggested that Buddhism and other religions in Sri Lanka should enter into a meaningful dialogue without taking



Though the democratic social structures constructed within the polity were supposed to assist people living as equal citizens, they rather produced the adverse, creating hierarchy as a result of which the division among the communities was deepened. More suspicious and counterproductive social and political behaviour emerged resulting in nationalist politics with identity affirmations as a political priority.

A number of war-widows working in the inter-religious and inter-ethnic fields, suggest that Buddhism and other religions in Sri Lanka should enter into a meaningful dialogue even though the ethnic and other social barriers have separated them for centuries. Their responses were loud and clear that the process of reconciliation, not only should be inter-religious in nature but also inter-ethnic dimension should be taken into consideration.



sides even as they cross the ethnic barriers that have separated them for centuries. They should do this in order to work for a political solution in which all ethnic communities can live with dignity and freedom. As the responses of some widows indicated, in the process of reconciliation, not only should the inter-religious nature of things be highlighted but the inter-ethnic dimension should also be taken into consideration. Thus, religious and secular groups of people who have different opinions should be included in the dialogue.

The war-widows redirected the power of the dominant forces that controlled them: they began to speak, to take decisions by and for themselves. It is a journey from victimhood to agency and transformation, a journey through which they become conscious of their potential and of the dignity of womanhood as they break the boundaries of the “established identity of womanhood/widowhood” amid Sri Lanka’s yearning for justice and peace.

2) Evolving an indigenous model of reconciliation mechanism for Sri Lanka: If micro level mechanism at the grassroots level yields fruits then the affected community demands could be collated especially the significant characteristics could also be duplicated elsewhere systematically with other stake holders. As said, purely importing a model that was practised elsewhere may not yield the results expected

locally taking into consideration the pluralistic nature of Sri Lanka. Culture, religion, space, etc., play a significant role in evolving a model. The cultural practices of the ethnic groups and its age old wisdom cannot be ignored.

This is not a mental exercise as that is done in many parts of the West for given their epistemological approach may not serve to produce the results needed. For Sri Lanka it is more than a mental exercise, it is an integrated approach. The countries that had been through transition from authoritarianism to democracy, there has been the political will and the governments that came to power had committed themselves for a transition to deal with the past. Thus trust among the victims had been established which is not the case in Sri Lanka. The Majoritarian mind-set which remains an obstacle for any peace effort needs to be revisited. The micro level efforts and exercise proposed above would pave the way in deconstructing the majoritarian mind-set.

Collating the characteristics that are prevalent in bringing people together to building people could be framed into a macro model that the country requires though it could be a tedious exercise for Sri Lanka at this hour which demands a radical paradigm shift, a worthy cause if its to building people and dreaming a shared future.

Endnotes:

1. Alfred Stepan, “India, Sri Lanka, and the

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3. Jayadeva Uyangoda, “Sri Lanka: The State of Research on Democracy, Power, Conflict, *Democracy Journal*, vol. 1-2, 2009, 97-98.

4. Lewis Arthur, “Beyond African Dictatorship: The Crisis of the One-Party State,” in *Encounter*, vol.25, no.2 (1965), 3.

5. Mahendra Prasad Singh, Veena Kukreja, *Federalism in South Asia* (London, New York, New Delhi: Routledge, 2014), 228.

6. I borrowed with thanks, the title from S. J. Tambiah. See his *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka*, (The University of Chicago Press, 1992) pp. 102-128 for a full description what he means by this specific title.

7. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Ethnic Strife in Sri Lanka: The Politics of Space, Regional Politics and Policy*, 1993, 3:1, 147. also published online see. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13597569308420862> Nov. 2007

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9. Jayadeva Uyangoda, “Solution from Outside is Sri Lankan Reality,” in *TamilNet*, 13, November 2008: <https://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=79&artid=27465>.

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Re Imagining People Building: a Task Of The Time...



Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi

Preamble:

The severest attack of the Covid 19 virus obviously has crippled every corner of the world at a pandemic level which cannot be ignored even though we write these regular reflective papers. Sri Lanka is no exception, though managed well, but affected its social fabric as we go to the belated press. We believe that building confidence and resilience in the people at the time of crisis is part of the people building process that we discuss in the pages of this magazine.

This volume of Social Justice interestingly appears between two elections (presidential and the undecided general election) and of course with a pandemic which might be endemic to the world and Sri Lanka

too. However, the presidential election was a sharply fought campaign by the three main candidates for the 7th executive presidency, and the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) candidate was elected by the majority of people to be the president of Sri Lanka for the next five years with a popular vote of 6.9 million a voter base of about 52.25% of the total vote-casting, which is second largest since 1994 presidential election.

Such mandate of a 1.3 million majority over the runner-up-candidate in the November 2019 election obviously calls for serious political, economic, development and security reforms in the next phase as the country moves into a period of economic downturn, new social issues, and a political uncertainty. This de facto

is why a strong opposition is a democratic necessity for right checks and balances and for a good practice of state governance and for 'people building and dreaming future' The upcoming general election dates, validity of nominations, reconvening the dissolved legislature are all on the cards amidst an economic assault caused by Covid 19 is real and deeply worrying too.

This discussion aspires to dwell on the premier area of people building processes beyond mere elections as such processes are an important means to involve civic bodies for a plan of action mandated. Injecting energy to individual persons and community where they become aware of their civic rights, enhanced and protected so that the country like Sri Lanka, not

too big and not too small to be able to build a cohesive society, dream and share a future. November 2019 elections and six months old regime seems to have begun well without fanfare and 'with a de-focus' on the presidency but 'with a re-focus' on the 'building future of this nation' seems hopeful in the way it handled Covid 19 virus. The population seems to be enthusiastic and eager to see actual changes, building the ailing economy, their self-confidence and respect as a people especially after the 21/4 terror attacks last year and now this year with the virus. The political shifts are also decided by the people. One of the key factors for the political shift of last year was that people in general held the view that the then incumbent government as being responsible for breach of security in the country. Currently new inquiries are being held but some doubt the right delivery

A Legacy

Sri Lanka's legacy as one of the colonies in South Asia makes some 'colonialist appearances' in subtle ways even though the well-meaning scholars and other religious and political leadership seem to argue that 'we must bypass the colonial legacy'. While some others are of the view that Sri Lanka's colonial past was incomparable to any other South Asian country with equally powerful three Western power blocks having their political and social impact during each of the colonial periods. What Sri Lanka inherited was a hard to accept mixture of blunder plunder, and an asunder of a people and a country. They arrived with their religious rivalries

which they fought 'tooth and nail' in their 'back home battles' while they created new battle grounds with the native culture, religion and the social norms of the population as they settled in the 'new found colonies'. Their leftovers are still with the country's institutions and peoples' thinking in varying manifestations. Those who argue and even campaign that they we must move on from the colonial past, yet stumble with some of the very institutions that they are a part that seemed to have embraced neocolonial aspects and behaviour. Struggling to be native with a kernel half-baked or substantially foreign is what they cannot avoid as such are evident in some leadership content that often appear in public discussions, in the printed and the electronic media.

The colonial legacy works to this day in the administrative districts in the nine province based power locations (now refurbished to suit via the 13th amendment to the constitution but not without grievances from all communities in Sri Lanka). The 'nine province division block' is read by some political critics as 'divided to rule mechanism' which led previous political campaigns for further a cause for separatism based on certain ethnic or religious claims (creation of Pakistan and Southern Sudan as some would argue as unstable governance). Sri Lanka remains one such polity and a legacy of a land mass and a people potentially prone to division and 'building people dreaming future' are dependent on what the people aspire as a future: shared or divided are also factors that will determine coexistence

or perennial discontent among people now in the post Covid 19 era. The legacy haunts even if one says 'we must move on, a dilemma in political arrangements.

Political Options

Multi-party system as opposed to two party system or the third power though in certain political dynamism is an added democratic feature to the electoral battle ground has not been popular in some geo political settings. However, for developing economies with their economic, education and foreign policies to be continuously changing has had their negative effects on the overall future thinking in multi-party systems. In such a political climate 'people building and dreaming future' remains indeed an uphill task especially when each government that usurps power willfully changes the policies adopted by the previous regimes. Building on the sustainable policy decisions is fundamental to 'people building and dreaming better prospects and a shared future'. Even if the policies are designed by a certain political thinking yet the successive regimes must be amenable at least to assess them objectively and amend if necessary but never should replace uncritically and being politically motivated. Multi-party political arrangement even though displays a representative politics caliber in certain democracy, yet because of social divisions caused by political rivalry in the long run seems unhealthy for social cohesion and coexistence.

Sri Lanka's political options are limited by its debt dominated economy



WHAT SRI LANKA
INHERITED WAS A HARD
TO ACCEPT MIXTURE OF
PLUNDER, BLUNDER AND
AN ASUNDER OF A PEOPLE
AND A COUNTRY.





THE NOVEMBER 2019 NEW REGIME SEEMS TO HAVE BEGUN WELL WITHOUT FANFARE AND 'WITH A DE-FOCUS' ON THE PRESIDENCY BUT 'WITH A RE-FOCUS' ON 'BUILDING FUTURE', AND PEOPLE CAN BE HOPEFUL IF CONTINUES WITH THE SAME SPIRIT THAT IT HANDLED THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC SO FAR.

led by the party politics induced governments practically introducing reforms and economic road maps not conducive to a country dwelling in between low income earning to middle incoming earning capacity. Dearth of investment attraction with unstable governments with both on going constitutional reforms as well as serious lobbies in the political corridors of the Western polities against Sri Lanka on unsubstantiated so called 'war crimes' have conglomerated for its economic and social progress. Such lobbies have even impacted to include the clichés like the 'the two state solution' abortively negotiated specifically for Israel-Palestine peace deal and then such to be doctored to the Sri Lanka's situation was clear political imbecility. Worse was to have such a clause within the election manifesto of the British Conservative Party of Boris Johnson¹ just before his December 2019 election, indicates how far a sovereign country can be tarnished and politically damaged by the lobby groups. Such unfortunate but carefully crafted political interferences have been attempted on the vulnerable states, Sri Lanka has been victimized on that front and undeclared sanctions are operational. Attempts to disrupt its growth and stability is also active via groups and some International Non Governmental Organisations (INGOs) according to some political analysts.

Right Democracy

To say its right democracy then there could also be wrong democracy! Such moral judgement is communicated

because of the way how democracy is operational in a given context. Democracies are created by the people for their present and for future and such practice is never without failures. Imagining which is a sophisticated from of dreaming in this context is important as that is how all early development of thought and ideas made the mega story of the human origins of social organisations. Heart of democracy is about identifying people power, ascertaining it as sovereign is fundamental to people building and of course dreaming future. Greatest democracies of the world were never built on a few experiments over a few weeks or months, but on a strong political will mandated by the peoples' aspirations, equity and equality as citizens. Democracy is proven to be the best form of exercise of freedom and social mobility fundamental to any reasoning being. Humans so far have created the most functional institutions to be imaginative as well as in practical terms to articulate knowledge, leisure and think future. Democracy also creates self-governance, but when mandated, becomes a (government) of the people, by the people, for the people as Abraham Lincoln reminds in his famous Gettysburg speech.² However, in an active democracy, people and civil society groups bring energy, zest and aspirations of a future into the present and the active present into the future. This is why 'People building is so interconnected to dreaming a future'. Their connectivity while creates a pathway to a disciplined active present

with development of every attempted aspect should also be able to monitor their limitations as a project pointing to the future. Every move in the present effectively results here and now while their long term routes find their natural course into the future.

People building is also a project that includes a holistic view of life and adopting a reciprocal way of life fundamentally affecting the present socio political structures, economic roadmap, trade and marketing, religious cultural framework and the wellbeing of all those who contribute to it. Democratic institutions are the best suited avenue for such a process to be executed. It is in that sense right democracy is a feasible for dreaming future too, not just people building but also help building future in the present.

Build on the Dreaming

Presidential election campaign in Sri Lanka was full of such dreaming, and now that the general election is around the corner with similar ambitious tasks have become obvious. But deliberating on what has been imagined into concrete action is the challenge before the new set of political and civil leaders into the third decade of the third millennium of the CE. These are high expectations, on a president, a prime minister or a parliament as miracle makers is natural but impractical venture because they are fallible and gullible too. Hence, the challenge falls back on the civil society groups and other institutions to 'people building and dreaming

future' fundamental to good living. To grow as a people dreaming to building themselves and their country is an aspiration worth dreaming for.

Politicians, city planners, economists, scholars, artists and other skilled men and women cannot alone involve in people building even though they can creatively imagine for a future they dream. Their dreaming must correspond with those of the ordinary people so that what they mean by people building becomes an active reality in the very involvement of people.

Technology, environment and social relations are of utmost importance now and unequivocally linked to Information technology (IT) for any society to function decently and with a future in mind is indispensable. What is being so much spoken as the 'social capital' is the 'people building capability' with their skills and innovatively entrepreneurial capacity that is required to invest into the future. There is a political future for the region as it deems to develop the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) even if one were to be critical about it. Current BRI is a new form of the 'old silk road' from the Han dynasty of old China' to the 'old Persia and Europe'³ is a revival of a route that is not just Chinese, because it must be owned by the push of globalization strategy which now is a reality. Sri Lanka was part of that 'old route' but via the Mediterranean destinations which led the Persian and North African travelers to sight this island-nation, and so shall it be in the future with an active port in the Southern tip of Sri Lanka. An unavoidable trade and connectivity phenomenon, one is either part of it or else bound to be economically doomed.

The future of Indo Pacific connectivity with which people encounter intense diversity must be enhanced to build themselves with competence that they earlier never desired or needed.

The current 'new cold war between Washington and Beijing must be re-examined. 'People Building is Dreaming Future', because building people is about linking and connecting people to make them grow in different ways into the future, especially the young people. When people are connected they attempt what diplomats with bilateral, trilateral, multi-lateral agreements manipulated by governments and states cannot even have any control over. People make these connections because they desire and dream new avenues to negotiate, live, have fun and meaning in their daily lives.

Concluding Paragraph

All modern city planners, rural developers and designers, economists and strategists, artists and environmentalists, teachers and tutors also political leadership today more than ever have a responsibility to be part of 'people building' as human beings always curiously look for what is new. Hence, it is arguably 'a precious capital' which must be duly recognized, skills harnessed, capacity built, relationships enhanced, productivity increased, cultural capital developed with right connectivity and each of the 'identity significance' is affirmed. People should be assured that the nations and their leadership will not take routes like the siege in Hong Kong over six months, the Syrian crisis over five years where they are just made to be at the beck and call of the powerful nations engaged in proxy battles.

Countries across the world, with their political leadership are driven by a certain populism which can also impede the notion of 'people building and dreaming future' as such can undermine the reality of people-based human development. Populist parties and social movements are often led by charismatic or dominant figures who present themselves as the 'voice of the people'. According to the

varying approaches, populism is often combined with other ideologies, such as liberal or the neo liberal economic agenda, socialist policies, nationalism of the majority and the minority also tooling with similar agenda or the dominant religious narrative. Hence, populists can be found at different political camps and zones along the left or the right of the political divide and there is both the right-wing populism as well as the left-wing populism. These bring severe challenges and can even mar the processes of 'People building and dreaming future'. However, the courageous among the people and their institutions big and small are the catalysts of this venture in politics or beyond politics. If people imagined change and they worked practically towards it and effected change, then they are shakers and agents of change, because to imagine or to dream is to change, and to change is to initiate people building here and now especially in the post Covid 19 period.

Endnotes

1. Johnson (now PM of UK) and his British advisors had to rectify the flawed argument and shamelessly aping of a peace deal of one country (Israel Palestine) and uncritically applying on another (Sri Lanka). I am of the view that Johnson must apologise for this breach of Commonwealth protocol. I suggest that such be pressured upon him at the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting/ CHOGM) in Kigali, Rwanda, June 2020 (this meeting is obviously cancelled or alternatives are being suggested due to the Corona restrictions).

2. It was delivered during the American Civil War at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, November, 1863. There is controversy over which text he read as they found four speeches after a few months. He was assassinated in April 1865.

3. The Silk Road was a network of trade routes connecting China and the Far East with the Middle East and Europe. Established when the Han Dynasty in China officially opened trade with the West in 130 BCE. It remained in use until 1453 CE until the Ottoman Empire boycotted trade with China and terminated travel. It was nearly 600 years of international trade, the routes had a lasting impact on commerce, culture and history that resonates even today. Both the Venetian explorer Marco Polo and the Mongol emperor Kublai Khan seemed to have used this route for their sojourns. See: <https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-middle-east/silk-road> accessed on 4 Jan. 2020 (this route is now considered as Beijing's dominance since Covid 19 crisis, however there is no other marine route that could reach the farthest to the West.)

From Page 02 >>>

Publisher says: **NO NATION HAS BEEN BUILT ...**

In the pursuit of our common future shouldn't the citizens urge the leaders to take the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as a point of departure? The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also today known as the Global Goals. They are a universal call to action to end poverty, to protect the planet and to ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The SDGs, officially known as "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" are a set of 17 aspirational 'Global Goals' with 169 targets and 244 indicators between them to be achieved by April 2030. (1)

The commitment of the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) is reflected in having a separate ministry on Sustainable Development, appointing a Parliament Select Committee on SDGs, and establishing cluster committees on SDGs etc. is a positive and a hopeful sign that this island nation Sri Lanka is ready and willing to engage with the global actors of financial, trade and economic significance. The GOSL anticipates achieving the SDGs by 2030 collaborating towards the provision of basic needs of the people, progressive alleviation of poverty, elimination of all forms of discrimination and inequalities, and establishing a society based on social justice and human security.



Hence, a credible people building processes can be in place to dream a shared future for all Sri Lankans.

No nation has been built overnight, and people building is a step by step process with a simple discipline like how people drive on the road and how people deal with their garbage. If such are within the general framework of the routine life of the people, then one could notice that they as a people who have begun to build themselves. When talking about 'people building', there is no outside agent or institution that can 'people build' rather it's the people themselves who could build themselves. No nation can dream when divided with factionalism and bigotry. They are negative vibes that kill innovation and creativity that are the basic ingredients for people building and dreaming future. All great civilisations, cultures are a byproduct to what people have contributed to the wellbeing all and the whole. Such alone can and will build people, because when people are built, all they encounter will grow and flourish and that is what is called wholesome human development. I am reminded a quote in literature that I accessed recently, "A nation can be mighty, when the citizens put away their political differences, work together for a common vision, a common goal and common good."2

Endnotes:

1. Satharasinghe, A., Statistics of Sustainable Development Goals Indicators in Sri Lanka 2017, (SDGs News Bulletin 26 June 2017), www.statistics.gov.lk, accessed on 20 Jan 2020.

2. Akita, L. G., Pearls of Wisdom: Great Mind, CreateSpace Independent Publishing, South Carolina, 2015, p. 18.

One more Word... The Board of Directors (BoD) of the Centre for Society and Religion (CSR) would like to thank Fr. Ashok Stephen OMI, the former Director of CSR for the thoughtful and timely initiative to recommence the publication of Social Justice. The magazine has always been discourse-oriented, and a platform for dissemination of insights into the social, economic, political and religious issues in the country and across the continents; inviting activists, social movements, political and cultural critics, theologians and other intellectuals to dialogue and debate on current affairs and their implications on their communities. We wish to continue the same now with the challenging reality of the 'new normal' as the people begin to live with the virus but not defeated by it.

The Board is ever grateful to the editorial team, comprising competent academics like, Prabha Manuratne, Wijith Rohan and Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi for their invaluable contribution towards this scholarly venture. We would solicit their continuous support in the future too. The Board also extends its appreciation and welcome Fr. Jeevantha Peiris, Joe William and Crystal Baines for their willingness to be on the editorial team.



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Sr. Rasika Pieris, a Catholic nun of the Sisters of the Holy Family, Colombo province. The Radboud University, Nijmegen, the Netherlands grants her a PhD (2017) in feminist theology for her research with a focus on war widows in Sri Lanka. She is a board member of the Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue (EISD) and is the assistant coordinator of Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA). Her most recent publications focus on war widows in Sri Lanka, an innovative research model content and engages in advocacy for their rights in collaboration with inter-ethnic and inter-religious communities.

Editorial Team:

Dr. Prabha Manuratne, is the head of the Department of English, University of Kelaniya. Her research focuses on violence and representations of violence in global literature and cinema. She currently teaches Critical Theory and English Literature at the University of Kelaniya. She is an activist and a critic whose work focuses on countering structural violence that shapes the everyday lives of women and men, and pedagogies that transform political education.

Wijith Rohan Fernando, is a Senior Lecturer attached to the Department of Western Classical Culture and Christian Culture, University of Kelaniya and also headed the same department for several years. He has authored sixteen books and several research articles, a critical writer on social concerns that have political implications, contextual theology, and aspects of Christian culture related to art and drama, specifically Passion Plays. His aptitudes

and interest in research and scholarship indeed made him a colleague to be consulted by his peers and is called upon to teach and train adults population by a variety of institutes, groups and organisations across the country.

Crystal Baines, is reading for her PhD in English Literature, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, USA. Her current research focuses on narratives of secularism and secularization in Sri Lankan and Indian literature. Her other research interests include Development Studies, Translation Studies, and Digital Humanities. She is also a visiting lecturer at the Postgraduate Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Peradeniya and Associate Director of Digitization at the American Institute for Lankan Studies.

Fr. Jeevantha Peiris, is a priest of the diocese of Ratnapura, completed his BPh. (Urbaniana 2002), BTh. (Pontificio Regina Apostolorum, Rome 2005) & Clinical Psychology (Universita' Europea di Roma 2008). Currently based in Doloswala, a rural estate in Nivithigala (Ratnapura District), working with the low country estate labourers for their socio-political and economic wellbeing & spiritual transformation. He is a sought after preacher, trainer and an animator who engages his religious insights with the social realities, issues and concerns in the margins.

Dr. Joe William, is a founder - Director and currently Chairman of the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka, and Executive Director, Centre for Communication Training, which promotes Nonviolent Communication skills. An academic instructor at the Oblate Institute of Higher Learning (OHIL). He holds an MA (Peace Studies, 2000) Pg. Dip (Research Methods for Social Sciences, 2007) and a Ph D. (2012) University of Bradford, UK. for his Thesis: *Systemic Conflict Transformation and its Application to the Peace Process in Sri Lanka*.

Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi, a specialist in World religions, teaches History of Religious Thought and Practice and the Origin of religion at the School of Religion and Philosophy, Minhaj University Lahore, Pakistan. He continues to teach at the Universities of Colombo and Kelaniya as their visiting lecturer on Contextual theology (MA), Christianity, Hindu Dharma and Islam for their Undergraduates. Often he is invited to various national and international fora as their resource person. His most recent has been to the Doha Forum, *Reimagining Governance in a Multipolar World* (Dec. 2019) and a research visit to an Islamic Study and a Retreat Centre in Poconos, PA, USA (Feb. 2020).

Guest Poet :

Dr. Dilantha Gunawardana, a molecular biologist by training and is a freelance poet. He moves between science and poetry artistically, is a senior lecturer in the molecular biology at the University of Sri Jayawardenepura. Published his poems in many reputed journals and magazines. Dilantha produced two anthologies of poetry, *Kite Dreams* (2016) and *Driftwood* (2017), both by Sarasavi publishers, (Colombo), and is working on his third poetry collection.

Dreaming Serendipity



There is a beginning to everything.
Now it is the advent of 2020s,
When Sri Lanka is slowly navigating
Tumultuous waters due to
Influences gathering from all corners.
The China and the silk route,
America and naval dominance,
Becoming pals with India,
And letting multiple identities
amalgamate
Into the winds of change blowing
Past Serendib. Can we see it
As serendipity? Perhaps, yes.

Serendipity was coined in
1754, depicting
The fortuitous nature of discovering
The wishful. Still we are in the period
Of advent for a new party,
A bud that will hopefully bloom
In the coming decade. We are in
dream time
Now, the winds of change are blowing,
Wind catches are breathing hard,
Wind turbines are rolling like
ballerinas,
Wind chimes are making music.
The dream is a perfect democracy,
And not a plutocracy where
There are black hole pockets,
And crooks escaping to foreign lands.

The American dream states,
Give everyone a fair go.
Australian dream says Fair Dinkum,
What the Sri Lankan Dream says
Is perhaps that word again -
serendipity.

We are never really far from that,
aren't we?
A strong opposition is our greatest
Dream, to have ministers whose
IQs are bigger than their collective
wealth.
Democracy is, of the people,
For the people, and it remains that.
We are life givers to justice,
When we can exonerate liberty
From the misbehaving.
Liberty means virtue and not vice.

I look at mustached brothers,
Who look like they could fit into
A Super Mario computer game
And Princess Peach is beautiful
democracy.

We are not asking for miracles,
Only to give people from all corners,
Their rightful human rights.
Give muscle to their paychecks,
Make education ubiquitous,
Make poverty a thing of the past,
Make social protection more
Powerful than a contraceptive.

Dreaming is building big,
When it comes to the
alter of democracy.
There should be a scaffold
Made from personal liberties,
Ironing out the "isms", like
Nepotism and cronyism, while
Empowering the ballot
Over the bullet. We have protests
From all corners, but if the political left
Is appeased by the nationalistic right,
Then there will be no manifestos,
Rebellions or pluck that
Drifts into hearts, no longer haunted,

By a visual of being left out.

So let's build the future.
Gokanna will be a port for many,
Mattala will see many more
mechanical birds,
Wilpattu will be a protected area.
We are gifted with lines of salvaging
Beauty and purpose, from
Populations of innocuous maps.
So make the blueprint,
Not one of kerosene lanterns,
But a purpose driven dream,
That will transform hope
Into prosperity.

The crucible of humanity,
Offers tenacity to any form of alloy,
Without losing the strength
Of the elemental. Dreamer's disease
Has no prescription or pill,
Only the immunity of the third eye,
To let our ocular imprints,
Shoot past the zemblanity,
Of disappointment.
Fast forward to April-May 2020,
We are now as blue as a flu,
A crown capable of
Abdicating a precious life.
While the grim reaper
Comes not with a scythe now,
Only the right fist, doing
Rotations of a spiky
Morning Star.

We are all waiting for Godot,
As God helps those who help
themselves;
Like wearing a gauzy face mask,
or Taking a vitamin tablet to boost
immunity,
Or for that matter scrubbing
Your hands with disinfectant.
For the first time in our lives
We are told not to kiss; Poor
Pope Francis looks on from his
balcony,
Unable to go among the gathering
crowds,
His wishfulright cheek finally
Given the gentlest of caresses by
A serendipitous mosquito.

Dilantha Gunawardana