

TOWARDS A LASTING SOLUTION  
TO THE PRESENT NATIONAL CRISIS<sup>+</sup>

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This paper is meant to be a preliminary guideline to build on the suggested Sarvodaya approach to find a solution to the present national crisis faced by us in our country.

What occurred during the last week of July, cannot be dismissed simply as an outburst of communal hatred, leading to violence, political opportunism, looting and other crimes. It has to be studied in depth and analysed with a view to take immediate remedial action as well as to find the long term solutions. The Sarvodaya analysis of the causes that led to this unfortunate situation and the approach towards a possible removal of such causes are given below, with an Action Programme under the following headings:

- i. The Symptoms of General Degeneration of National Life that emerged from the incidents.
- ii. The Damaging Repercussions to National Life and International Relations.
- iii. The Causes that led to the Degeneration of National Life and International Relations.
- iv. A path that can lead to the Weal and the Welfare of the Nation; and,
- v. An Action Programme.

1. THE SYMPTOMS OF GENERAL DEGENERATION OF NATIONAL LIFE

When we objectively reflect on the incidents that took place during that 'dark week', we observe certain definite symptoms of degeneration of our national life, some of which are,

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<sup>+</sup>) Reprinted from DANA, International Journal of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, Vol. IX (1983), No. 9, p. 19-27. For an editorial note see p. 69 f.

i. The existence of a powerful group in our society who are impervious to the moral imperatives embedded in our culture and civilization. They are totally indifferent to the value systems which enabled the spiritual conscience to differentiate Good from Evil, Right from Wrong and Justice from Injustice.

ii. The prevalence of a significant number of "groupings" who have scant respect for Law and Order or Human Life and Property.

iii. The impotence on the part of religious and community leaders who are the custodians of value systems in this country at a time of national crisis of this nature.

iv. The obvious weakening of the moral strength of the Police and the Armed Services to act promptly and justly in the maintenance of Law and Order.

v. The apparent fear and hesitation on the part of the vast law-abiding majority, resulting in their obvious indifference to those criminal acts perpetrated by small gangs of lawless elements on innocent members of the national community and the failure of this same majority to express its moral indignation predicated on its inherent goodness.

vi. The apparent failure of certain important sections of the political spectrum to provide effective and immediate leadership to extricate the nation from plunging into what it experienced - a morass of death and destruction - in spite of the fact that in the present context of society, the political leadership enjoys more power and prestige than even the guardians of the nation's morals and the keepers of the Law.

## 2. THE DAMAGING REPERCUSSIONS TO NATIONAL LIFE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

i. Loss of large numbers of lives - our nation's greatest resource.

ii. Subjection of a still greater number of people (not necessarily only Tamils), to humiliation, insult and physical injury.

iii. Loss of homes and belongings of thousands of families, not only of Tamils but also of other communities.

iv. Inestimable damage done to private and public property.

v. Loss of jobs to thousands of Sinhala as well as Tamil people.

vi. Direct, as well as indirect losses to national economy which was recovering at a fast rate, due to destruction done to factories, link industries and services.

vii. Aggravation of the dis-harmony that already existed between sections of Sinhala and Tamil communities, thus rendering irreparable harm to their psychological integration and setting back the day when a united nation and a truly united people can call itself Sri Lanka.

viii. Bringing about a threat to the freedom and security of the Sinhalese living in India and other countries due to propaganda of distorted versions of

the incidents that occurred.

ix. Providing a great boost and added impetus to the propaganda machine, already disseminating adverse propaganda against the Government, especially the Sinhala people, and even the Buddhists through organised untruth (making use of this calamity and thus causing irreparable damage to the image of our nation abroad as a peace-loving and cultured people).

x. Exposing children of school-going age and teenagers to highly destructive experiences and adversely affecting their character.

xi. Giving an opportunity to power-hungry political forces within the country, as well as outside, to utilise the gullibility of our people and institutions to bring to fruition their sinister objectives.

xii. Viewed in its entirety, it is nothing less than the degrading of the social consciousness of the whole society into a state of uncertainty.

### 3. THE CAUSES THAT LED TO THE DEGENERATION OF NATIONAL LIFE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

#### 1. Destruction of the Indigenous Value System

In the past there was a language that gave nourishment as far as human values were concerned, to both Sinhala and Tamil languages. That was Sanskrit. At the same time, in simplified form, the Pali language was the fountain-head from which the Buddhist value system came into the Sinhala speaking people. During the Colonial Era, these indigenous languages were discouraged and even shoved aside as 'dead languages', while Greek, Latin and English replaced them creating a new 'elite' subservient to the Western style of life. A vast majority of people who thus had no access to the Western value system were left high and dry with neither their own old value system nor the new 'elite value system', which we called at that time, the 'Public School Spirit'. After the Colonial Era, instead of reverting to get nourishment from the Oriental languages, the same process continued even in free Sri Lanka. The Sinhala books like *Loveda Sangarawa*, *Subhashitaya* and *Lokopakaraya* which taught in verse-form, an excellent human value system were deliberately removed from the formal educational system. Similarly in the Tamil language, classics like *Tirukkural* *Manimekalai* and *Silappadikaram* were pushed aside from the main stream of character building.

Formal education laid more emphasis on Science and Mathematics and imported games which encouraged more un-healthy competition than constructive co-operation emphasised by the spiritual values of our people. What I mean is not to under-estimate the value of Science and Mathematics and games from outside, but what I am trying to emphasise is that in the formal educational system there should have been a proper balance between spiritual nourishment

from indigenous values as well as sciences that were necessary for material well-being. In the same manner that the content of education and subject matter were changed, the learning environment as well as the teacher-pupil relations too took more or less the value system that prevailed in a factory, promoting a producer-consumer relationship with more commercial values than human values.

In the traditional value system, Buddhists and Hindus participated together without any inhibition in the religious rites and customs performed at Buddhist Viharas and Hindu Kovils. But the Muslim community to a lesser extent and the Christian community to a larger extent differed from this Buddhist-Hindu indigenous value system. This in no way implies that there is any inherent defect in the Muslim and Christian moral codes and doctrines. However, Western Christianity which has unfortunately become meshed with imperialistic commercial interests and lost its pristine purity had by then become contrary in its aims not only to the Hindu-Buddhistic value-system but also to the fundamental precepts of its great Founder, Lord Jesus Christ. Killing of animals which was prohibited in Sri Lankan society, became a respectable and officially promoted commercial activity. Distilling of intoxicants and promotion of its use which was deprecated by every religion became big business. Under the guise of protecting the minority racial and religious communities, the social foundation based on the Five Precepts was destroyed in spite of the fact that the majority of the people among the Buddhists and Hindus despised the five evils.

I strongly believe that the sad inhuman incidents we saw during that tragic week were the direct result of the destruction of our indigenous value system.

## 2. Loss of Fear and Shame to break State and Moral Law

There was an inherent sense of fear and shame on the part of families, villagers, city-folk and people of the country as a whole to break the State of Moral laws of the country. This fear and shame were based on the fact that the people knew that if they broke a law, they would be punished by the state and if they broke a moral code, the community would despise them. During the last few decades, especially after the nation achieved independence, people saw how some could, with impunity, break the law and yet escaped punishment using wealth, power and office and also move about freely with the privileged in society, without any shame, even though the common people despised them secretly. The common people had a feeling of what is right or wrong. Yet, they could not express it openly through fear of reprisal and the only way they could express themselves was through the exercise of the secret ballot which they demonstrated at various general elections.

This supercession of State and Moral Law - where Might made Right - by a powerful few is the second cause for the present state of apathy on the part of the vast majority.

### 3. Bankruptcy of Mind of the National Leadership

Throughout history, at times of national crisis, whatever the cause would have been, it was the spiritual and social leaders who were the custodians of the value-system that gave both moral and social direction to our people. The triangle of the Maha Sangha, the King and the People was in perfect balance. The Maha Sangha represented Moral Power, the King represented State Power and the Community represented the People's Power. Unfortunately after Independence, political parties and political leaders who were power-crazy, became the sole custodians of everything including spiritual, moral and cultural life of the people. This resulted in the majority community of the Sinhala Buddhists as well as the overwhelming proportion of Tamil Hindus losing their value-oriented community leaders and their place being taken by some rabble-rousers and opportunists, rather than Statesmen and leaders of universal vision. Most of these political leaders got deceived by their own self-image created by a votary of people who sang praise for them, rather than faithfully and intelligently guiding and helping them in the administration of the country at different levels.

Therefore, the third cause that contributed to the recent national tragedy was the bankruptcy of mind within the spectrum of what sometimes passes as national, political leadership.

### 4. The General Weakening of the Value-system and Social Leadership

The interference with Law and Order by party hacks corroded the very fibre of the Law-enforcement Machinery itself.

This, I believe, is the fourth and a vital cause that led to the breakdown of Law and Order.

### 5. Fifthly, the degeneration of the Value-system, ineffectiveness of Law and Righteousness in the face of divided political leadership

brought about a situation where the general public lost all their moorings in participating actively in the maintenance of Law and Order in the country and contributing more effectively to social progress.

Because of the above causes, the conclusion is inescapable that political leadership alone, however astute it may be, in the context of the present disturbed state of society, is insufficient and therefore is unable to provide that vital guidance to our Nation. An all-round re-thinking, taking into consideration its moral value system and a complete re-orientation of the imperatives of our present situation are therefore absolutely necessary if we

are not to lose our social and spiritual mooring altogether.

#### 6. Upholding a wrong style of life

We as a nation were interested in promoting an economic system in which only the economic factors were emphasized. The spiritual, moral and cultural factors were completely forgotten in our pursuit of returns and a materialistic way of life. Sometime the open economic system led to the creation of endless economic and social wants, resulting in a value system where we attempted to follow a Western affluent style of life. Even in the mass-media and advertisement this style of life was emphasized and portrayed. Unconsciously, the majority of the have-nots were made to yearn for such values, and it is quite possible that in the looting and such activities, where luxurious items were taken away by some poor people that this unconscious motive was present to a certain extent. A more restrained open economic system with emphasis on indigenous values, would have enabled us to control this type of activities which are the results of the mass-media and advertisements.

Even terrorism, i.e., the use of violence in a society in an organised way for the inordinate destruction of State or Private property, robbing of banks and private individuals and killing them in cold blood merely because a person holds a different political opinion, appear to be values directly influenced by what many of us see in T.V. films. This breaking down in the totality of the value system has taken place both in the North and the South.

#### 4. THE PATH THAT CAN LEAD TO THE WEAL OF THE NATION

i. Re-establishment of a value system. The leadership for this has to be given by all religious leaders, especially led by the Maha Sangha. The State should take immediate steps to implement the Buddhist Commission Report and the Sasana Commission Report and take every step to help the Maha Sangha to strengthen itself to perform their spiritual, moral and cultural role as Community leaders.

ii. Buddhist and Hindu leaders should immediately start a dialogue so that their age-old Buddhist-Hindu cultural links could be re-established. If Buddhist and Hindus who constitute 91 % of the national community can re-build their spiritual, moral and cultural ties, it will become the determining factor to consolidate national unity.

iii. The affirmation of the Truths and Noble Principles enshrined in every great faith most definitely, the most ancient of these the Hindu and Buddhist religions, must be proclaimed by the leaders of all religions of our peoples. Thus and only thus, will the masses of our land, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian

or Muslim, see the unity underlying their most sacred beliefs, common to all.

iv. Based on the above formula, all religious leaders obtaining the cooperation of other social leaders of the country should go to the people and persuade them to revert to respecting the Five Abstentions common in all faiths, abstention from Killing, Stealing, Sexual Misconduct, Lying and Intoxication.

v. It is important that both the spiritual leaders and the academic community re-assess the party and power political systems of this country which in a way is the common factor underlying this moral and social crisis and hence try to place before the nation an alternative democratic form of People's Power. This attempt has to be made compassionately and scientifically by Teachers, Administrators, Politicians and all people of good-will. Perhaps, one very significant step towards a form of non-party democracy can be the elevation of the office of the President above party affiliations. It is conceivable that a form of Presidency - Chief Executiveship - predicated on the obtaining of national consensus could be created, incorporating the UNP, SLFP, TULF and other party membership into the process of government for at least a period sufficiently long to heal the wounds and bind the nation once again. If in achieving this objective there are constitutional or other difficulties, it is up to all the leaders to evolve a democratic form of Government above party politics in the interest of the nation under the common leadership of His Excellency.

vi. The academic community should also take steps immediately to prepare a factual document giving the full and impartial facts on the rights the majority as well as the minority communities of this country enjoy in theory and practice and make it known to people within the country as well as outside to counteract the insidious and incorrect propaganda that has been carried out for the last two decades by separatists and their allies.

vii. A group of Tamil leaders should rise above communal politics and fearlessly oppose separatism as well as terrorism and stand shoulder to shoulder with the Sinhala leaders, thus allaying the fears that the Sinhalese have with the Tamil community as a whole as supporting separatism and terrorism. Surely these Tamil leaders will agree that it is more noble to face martyrdom for the cause of One Nation - Indivisible, than to become unwitting instruments for what could only lead to a holocaust. This joint leadership should be able to rally round them both Sinhala and Tamil people, giving protection to both peoples, preventing communal violence and fostering true brotherhood based on equality.

viii. Now that separatism is prohibited according to the constitution, the Sinhala people should exercise goodwill and friendship towards the Tamil people and give them protection within their communities while the State also should take all measures to ensure their safety through the machinery of State Power. It is necessary that a Sinhala community more or less equivalent to the pre-1956 population that lived in Jaffna should be invited by the Tamil community to put down its roots there and live in harmony with them and be

protected by them.

ix. Discrimination to Sinhala as well as Tamils by way of Language, Education, Administration, Welfare or Development should be removed by a group of Sinhala and Tamil Administrators working together in harmony and placing true facts before both communities.

x. It is essential that in all districts language Institutions should be established to enable Sinhala and Tamil speaking people to study together each other's language as well as English and even go so far as to institute a nationally recognised system of merit for any person who achieved proficiency in other's language and culture.

xi. Sinhala and Tamil leaders, perhaps utilising the Gramodaya Mandala already established throughout the country, should invite to their respective areas for permanent settlement, a number of families with particular vocational skills that can contribute to the social and economic development of their respective communities. This process can lay a very concrete foundation for national integration from the grass-roots up.

xii. Agricultural Farms, Small Industrial Centres and other such occupational training institutions which are already existing should recruit both Sinhala and Tamil speaking youth under the guidance of special cadres who are especially trained in communal integration. New institutions of that nature could also be established if necessary, on the basis of proportional representation.

xiii. The schooling system should be re-appraised, allowing plenty of scope for the educational institutions also to play a national integration role so that the best of each community is known to the little minds before they grow up and are affected by the prejudices of their surroundings. Parents and the mass-media will have to play a very powerful role in this process.

xiv. Very intensive ideological re-orientation programmes should be carried out within the law enforcement machinery so that their public image as Guardians of the Constitution, Law and Order can be re-established and their public image restored to its proper pedestal of pride.

xv. Sri Lankans living abroad should form Sinhala-Tamil Unity Clubs to eliminate suspicion and dissension, heal the wounds of the past and recreate the image of our country abroad. The Government through its Foreign Office and Chanceries throughout the Capitals of the world, must play a positive part in bringing out this vital role.

xvi. A group of economists and Social Scientists should re-appraise the existing economic systems and processes and formulate an approach that is in keeping with our value system, cultural norms, satisfaction of basic human needs, encouragement of indigenous talents, and appropriate technologies, narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor, leading to more economic and social justice and upholding national self sufficiency and self respect.

## 5. PROPOSED SARVODAYA ACTION PROGRAMME

Sarvodaya is convinced, given goodwill of the national community, sincere effort can make the difficult tasks immediately realisable, and even the impossible achieved after a while. So, let us take to the task.

A philosopher once said that it takes a wise man to avoid a catastrophe. Neither you dear friends, nor we had this wisdom to avoid this national tragedy. But that same Philosopher stated that it takes a very great man to MAKE USE OF a catastrophe. So dear friends, faced with this great tragedy, let us one and all arise to demonstrate our true greatness as a Nation and a people that has survived twenty five centuries and will survive many more.

Sarvodaya has already been working for 25 years looking at human beings and society in their totality. It has organised institutions directly influencing over two and a half million living in nearly 6000 communities in Sri Lanka alone and in many more countries of the world who share its ideals and emulate its philosophy. About a 1000 of our Sarvodaya communities are comprised of our Tamil brethren and are located in the North, the East and the Plantations, while the rest (about 5000) are Sinhala. Already among the people a significant psychological integration has occurred and they have accepted a sustainable way of life, based on a value system and embarked upon community awakening programmes at the grass-root level of society. That is why even in the lunacy that prevailed all around us from the 24th of July and despite every kind of difficulty, the Sarvodaya workers joined hands with others and did their share to prevent escalation of violence, bringing relief to the afflicted and rehabilitating the homeless, leading to possible reconciliation.

While continuing to assist the Government in relief and rehabilitation work now we must also get into the reconciliation action. The time is past when officialdom, moral leaders, the intelligentsia, the professional and the business community can afford to stand on the sidelines and let the Social Worker do the healing and the unifying of a divided community. If the wounds of the Nation are to be healed, it will require the best from all of us in the form of sincere and selfless service to the cause of National Regeneration. We of the Sarvodaya Movement invite you to search your conscience as to what needs to be done and participate with us in the task, whose achievement has been mapped out by us in detail and with which we are already engaged. With your participation we shall surely succeed.

### Editorial note:

We thank Ahangame Tudor Ariyaratne, President of the Sarvodaya Movement for his kind permission to reprint his analysis of events. We consider it an important document of political opinion in the present crisis in Sri Lanka.

On 1./2.10.1983 a "General Conference on National Peace and Harmony" took place in the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (Colombo). It was initiated and organised by Sarvodaya and attended by more than 500 delegates from all over Sri Lanka. The resolution passed at the conference appears as a document in the journal "Verfassung und Recht in Übersee", Vol. 17 (1984), No. 3.

In line with the resolution a "Peace Walk" from Kataragama to Jaffna, scheduled to take 100 days, was organised by Sarvodaya and the "National Central Council for Peace and Harmony", founded for the purpose. It was called off by order of the President on the evening of the first day. Sarvodaya circulated the following press report giving the official reason for postponing the walk.

Programmes connected with the Peace Walk aimed at National Peace and Harmony commenced on the 4th of December 1983, with an all night Pirith Ceremony at Kirivehera, Kataragama. On the 5th a Dana was offered to the Maha Sangha and on the evening of the same day, Hindu, Islamic and Christian religious observances were held.

Early on the 6th morning, the Peace Lamp was lit and about five thousand persons who commenced the Peace Walk at the auspicious hour of 6.57 in the morning, reached the Tissamaharama Raja Maha Vihara peacefully at about 12 noon, having on the way received the love and hospitality of the masses of people living en route.

On the evening of the same day, His Excellency the President, J.R. Jayawardene, who came to meet the devotees participating in the Peace Walk, addressing the Religious Family Gathering held at the Tissamaharama Raja Maha Vihara, put forth the idea that, 'Since information has been received that the Peace Walkers will be harassed and attempts will be made on Dr. Ariyaratne's life, and since it is the duty of the Government to take preventive measures which at this stage however are likely to interfere with the all-party amity conference, therefore, it is best that the Peace Walk be postponed'.

Hence out of respect for His Excellency the President's idea and also in order to render our co-operation to the all party amity talks, we have decided to postpone our Peace Walk.

However, all other activities connected with the Peace Walk, programmed at village, town, district and national levels, will continue without any change as arranged and Dr. Ariyaratne expects to remain for some time at Tissamaharama Raja Maha Vihara to direct these activities.

Dr. Ariyaratne kindly requests all Sarvodaya workers and all those connected with the Peace Walk to undertake all activities programmed earlier in connection with the Peace Programme, with even greater enthusiasm and determination.

While regretting any inconvenience caused on account of the postponement of the Peace Walk, he expresses his sincere thanks for all the co-operation and participation extended so far towards this effort.

Mrs. Soma Silva. Co-ordinator, National Central Council for Peace and Harmony.